

Informing post-school pathways

Proposes: Assisting young people make informed choices about post-school pathways is an essential educational process for them to identify occupations that are of interest and to which they are suited.

In an era of high aspiration, that assistance is perhaps more important than ever.

Failure to do so can result in circuitous pathways and inappropriate choices.

Societal sentiments, such as the low standing of vocational education can unhelpfully distort that decision-making.

Influences young people and parents' decision-making about post-school pathways.

So, providing informed and impartial advice and improving the status of diverse post-school pathways for young people is important, and it is a global issue.

Stephen Billett (Griffith University)

Informed and impartial advice: a global concern

United Kingdom – concerns about lack of participation (Wolf 2011, 2016)

Germany – ‘war for apprentices’ (Deissinger)

Switzerland – too many young people engaging in degrees with no specific employment outcomes (Stalder 2018)

Korea – strong societal disaffection with manufacturing work (Cho & Apple)

Australia – preference for higher education leading to skill shortages and ‘un-employable’ graduates (Bradley, 2008; UA 2017)

UNESCO virtual conference (2018): some perspectives

“There are very few youth who want to take up Vocational and technical training because they do not want to be viewed as failures (Kenya).”

“... as we all may know TVET is, at best, viewed as a second or non-preferred choice (Ghana)”.

“The overall perception of TVET in Nigeria is generally seen to be poor.” This is characterized by low enrolment of students, apparent lack of interest in the field by students and parents, slim chances of career progression from technical colleges to universities ... “

“In Romania, despite the programmatic drive to reshape the image of initial VET, it has a discrediting societal bias.”

“TVET is still mostly seen as being suited for learners who are "academically challenged" and whose only option is to "work with their hands". (Barbados)

“ To many people, the vocational trades are viewed as "hands dirty" types of skills.”
(Ethiopia)

“In China, the image of TVET is low or poor, compared with the corresponding levels of education ...”,

Improving the image of TVET: Making TVET attractive to youth (UNESCO-UNEVOC) 2018)

Educational focuses on informing post-school pathways

Important education process: need to support informed and impartial decision-making

Dewey (1918) two educational purposes of education for occupations:

- i) to assist young people identify the occupations in which they are interested and to which they are suited; and
- ii) prepare them for those occupations.

Need to avoid them falling into 'uncongenial callings'

Concern for their occupations to become their vocations

Difficult for educators and parents – needing to encourage aspiration and promote informed decision-making (i.e., being impartial, objective & managing expectations).

'The equivalence argument is lost' – whether VET is enacted during school years or as a post-school option, it suffers from negative comparisons in its standing.

Addressing the attractiveness of tertiary education options needs to progress in tandem with efforts to enhance the standing of the occupations they serve.

Enhancing the standing of vocational education and the occupations it serves (QLD study Education Horizons grant)

What factors influence young people's decisions about participation in vocational education and training (VET) to prepare for future careers?

How can the status of VET be enhanced to increase uptake by young people?

Three phases

Phase 1 - interviews and focus groups to secure parents, school and VET students, and teachers' perceptions/suggestions in metropolitan and regional communities.

– 111 students (school & VET), 26 school teachers, 20 parents, 12 VET teachers.

Phase 2 – a survey of informant populations to verify and extend Phase 1 findings.
School age students – 162, School teachers – 143, Parents – 230

Phases 3/4 – workshops and engagement in Queensland communities to appraise finding from Phases 1 and 2 and specific interventions.

Phase 1 findings (interviews/focus groups)

School students report post-school pathways shaped by familiars (i.e. parents, teachers and peers) and indirect suggestions (e.g. electronic and broadcast media).

These source of influence differ in: i) being authoritative; ii) level of influence and iii) engagement.

For school students decided on their occupations, the differences were their schools and year-level.

Undecided students drawn to universities' breadth of options and pathways, and social and institutional attractiveness. VET's specific occupational focuses are barriers for undecided.

Students who are undecided, yet do not have university entrance, are compromised as VET course are mainly occupational specific.

Phase 2: Key findings

Key influences on young people's decision-making about post-school: i) parents, ii) school teachers, iii) peers and iv) school guidance officers.

Yet advice based on personal experiences and preferences.

Differences in rankings of i) desired outcomes, ii) qualities of work and iii) what constitutes effective messages about post-school between students and adults (i.e. parents and teachers)

Teachers and parents may under-estimate the influence of teachers and over-estimate the role of guidance officers on decision-making.

Implications for what messages might be sent (e.g. parental advice, SET process).

Key findings: Effective means of informing post-school pathway

Ranking of the effectiveness of the following ways to inform young people about post-school pathway

Means of presenting message	School students	School teachers	Parents
Schools providing more personalised career information about VET jobs	1	3	2
Exposure to a range of work situations while still at school, to help with career decisions	2	1	1
Exposure to different institutes and education facilities (e.g. visits to TAFE institutes)	3	4	5
Online materials that are easy to access	4	5	4
Promoting role models who have successful careers after completing VET qualifications	5	2	3
Wide advertising (e.g. TV, radio, social media)	6	6	6
Simple, easy to understand printed materials (e.g. brochures, guide books)	7	7	7

The first three students preferred means probably fall into the ambit of what schools can do

Phase 3/4 findings (workshops) - Verification and elaboration

Parents: Have a narrow view of VET; are not very knowledgeable about VET.

Most adults state high quality respected VET jobs exist, but prefer promote university entrance.

Guidance officers: Misunderstandings about roles/expectations of guidance officers - Students have limited access to career advice as role is about student welfare.

Students: do not use printed materials; students may say they want personalised materials - but when you are teaching 200+ students that is very difficult.

Schools: Engagement with parents, local employers is really difficult and unproductive, seeking to find ways of engaging local community

Teachers: being more conscious of how they refer to post-school destinations and pathways.

The findings suggest positioning vocational education and training as a viable and worthwhile post-school option through:

- i) a public education process – (e.g. give VET a ‘fair go’) – promoted by government;
- ii) actions by schools to promote, inform and advise impartially about diverse post-school pathways;
- iii) VET institutions offering attractive environments, easier engagements and broadly-based programs; and
- iv) concerted effort and leadership by government and industry sectors to promote the occupations VET serves.

(please see additional documents)

Specifically for schools – what can ‘time-jealous’ school teachers and administrators do?

Three points from above:

1. Exposure to tertiary institutes and education facilities (e.g. visits to TAFE institutes)
2. Exposure to a range of work situations while still at school, to help with career decisions
3. Schools providing more personalised career information about VET jobs

One consideration: augmenting the SET process

Information and guidance provided prior to the SET meeting for parents and students

Some framing or structuring of how that information and guidance is directed.

Opportunities to draw on students’ (and parents) work experiences to discuss occupations to which they have been exposed.

Framing of decision-making to account for key factors to be considered (e.g. checklist).

So what?

Effective, informed and impartial advice and sources of information are helpful to assist young people's decision-making about post-school pathways.

This is important for meeting the needs of young people and assist them realise their educational and social potential.

Educational provision to ameliorate for the different kinds and level of engagement, knowledge of and influence that school-age students are exposed.

The advice provided and options for young people who are undecided need to be available across compulsory and tertiary education.

School-based activities may be able to assist in this process through elaborating the SET process through preparatory experiences for students and parent (teachers!!!) and framing of those meetings.