

Why look at career advice?

This document highlights the importance of career advice when it comes to senior secondary pathways and it's correlation to productivity and output.

What are the essential skills, knowledge and capabilities students should expect to leave senior secondary schooling with to help them succeed in their post-school lives?

Students should expect to leave secondary school as strong, independent, contributing members to society.

How can we help students make better decisions about learning pathways within school?

Year13 has worked extensively to understand how youth make decisions about further education and employment. We have found that there are 3 distinct phases in their decision-making process which impact the learning pathways they eventually choose to pursue. These phases need to be understood to ensure that we are maximising the chances of students making good decisions:

1. **Understanding** – Our research shows that students will only consider pathways which they have at least a base understanding of. As such, it is crucial in the first step of the decision-making process that students are provided an opportunity to learn about diverse pathways.
2. **Consideration** – In the second phase, students weigh up the options that they had an understanding of in step one and align them to their own intrinsic values and interests. They also begin to gather more information on each of their options - highlighting the necessity for easy-to-access information in an engaging format, and the need for formal opportunities in which students can begin to understand their skills, interests and intrinsic motivations.
3. **Process of Attainment** – In the final phase, students consider how difficult it is to pursue particular pathways. They can perceive difficulty in numerous forms, which include:
 - a. The quality of communication from pathway providers

Many youths are in a state of fear/anxiety about leaving school. If they are unsure of their role in the application process or have an enquiry into a provider or opportunity go unanswered, this anxiety can spike and cause

them to resort to a 'safe' option such as their parents' or friends' preferences.

This issue becomes apparent when comparing the strong communication and resources of Higher Education providers with that of employment and VET pathway providers (where there is often a lack of consistency and quality).

b. The impact of influencers

A student may find it difficult to pursue a pathway that does not align with the preferences or ideas of their parents, school, friends and/or any other person or entity that has an influence over them.

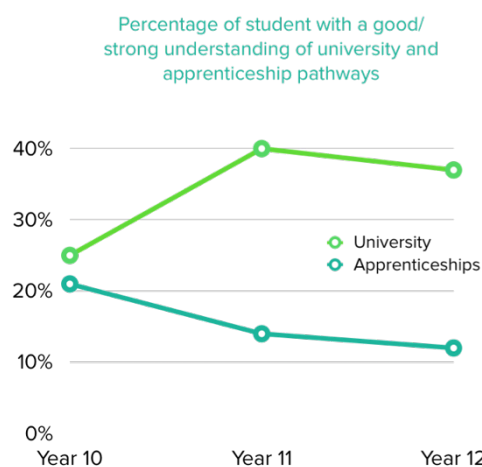
c. How difficult the pathway is to complete

E.g. whether the course or job appears to require a high skill level or serious sacrifice to complete.

Ensuring a student has an understanding of how a learning pathway can be accessed is possibly the most crucial step in the entire decision-making process.

How do we change negative perceptions of certain pathways?

The diagram below illuminates how senior students more frequently have a stronger understanding of university pathways than apprenticeship pathways. Both experience a concerning decline in understanding during Year 12 (most likely due to the focus on the ATAR), however, it is the significant gap between the two pathways that needs to be addressed in order to level the playing field for VET consideration.



In order to change the negative perceptions of certain pathways, the knowledge and understanding of those pathways must be increased. A larger focus on post-school success therefore becomes vital; in which career advice and life outside the school system is emphasized.

How can we support young people to make better decisions about their post-school pathways?

Giving high-quality career advice which is personalised to the individual, up-to-date and accurate would go a long way towards solving this issue.

Currently, the recommended student to advisor ratio is 450 students to 1 career advisor. To our knowledge, this is almost never upheld – with most schools seeing ratios of 1000 students or more per FTE advisor. The large number of career advisors across the country is illustrative of the significant amount of resources committed to career advice by each State government, however the productivity and optimisation of these resources could be drastically improved.

The question now posed is therefore *how do we improve productivity and performance?*

Option 1 would be to invest in improving the student to advisor ratio by increasing the number of career advisors within the country. The overabundance of post-school opportunities and the ever-changing nature of these pathways means that the training of these new career advisors would be paramount.

Option 2 - which Year13 believes to be the more logical option - would be to invest in technology which supports and assists career advisors; ultimately allowing them to do their job more effectively.

Career advice – particularly through career advisors in high schools – has the potential to play a critical role in the success of post-school pathways. Due to the logistical complexities of the role, it is being largely underutilised.

Career advisors need a tool which can do, at a minimum, the following three things:

- 1) Simplify administrative tasks and maximise the quality of face-to-face conversations.

In order to increase both productivity and quality of work, career advisors need to spend more time with students, and less time handling paperwork and other administrative tasks. By automating and digitising as many of these tasks as possible, additional hours can be spent problem-solving with students.

Furthermore, by having access to a student's digital profile, career advisors can access information about the student prior to having a career conversation with them. This reduces the amount of time that needs to be spent understanding the student's problems, and increases the time spent solving it.

2) Increase connectivity within the industry

One trait consistently shared by high-calibre career advisors is that they have a strong connection with the educators, employers and opportunities in the area. When a student comes to a strong advisor with a question or alternative pathway, they can usually reach out to someone that has answers or relevant information.

This is a cause for major problems when the advisor leaves the school, as the valuable connections usually leave with them. Schools need to have relationships and a system of maintaining these relationships to ensure students don't miss out due to lack of knowledge and bias. With a centralised online platform, experienced career advisors could more easily hand over their contacts and knowledge to their successors.

3) Maintain consistency, structure and guidelines in giving career advice

The variance in the quality of advice given by career advisors is a major issue which greatly damages the branding and subsequent trust of career advisors as a resource. What is needed is an easy to follow process of giving career advice and dealing with students.

Like many other industries, career advisors should have an element of compliance that they need to satisfy in order to ensure consistency between high schools, and consistency between other advisors. Easy-to-use compliance software would be the way to track and enforce this.

The second part to helping young people make better decisions is by ensuring that they are engaged in the conversation. Year13's research shows that many youths want to explore their options, however are lacking the time and structure to do so effectively.

This is also a conversation around the way high schools are structured – specifically the way schools are measured and subsequently funded. A student's transition out of high school seems to sit in a grey area between the State and Federal Government; with schools being a State issue and most post-school pathways and initiatives being a Federal issue. Subsequently, schools are being measured largely on ATAR success and Year 12 completions, rather than post-schooling success.

With such a large focus on academic success, funding tends to follow suit. As a result, career advice and preparation for life after school is what suffers. Not only does this negatively affect youth, it also results in significant social and economic problems for the Commonwealth. This becomes evident in statistics such as:

1. 580,000 young people aged between 15-29 are categorized as NEET (Not in Employment, further Education or Training) in Australia.
2. There would be an estimated \$11.3B in additional GDP if youth unemployment and underemployment were brought in line with the rest of the population.
3. Welfare spend on Jobseekers is \$11.8B annually. The Australian Government estimates that it will spend around \$191.8 billion in 2019–20 on social security and welfare.
4. 43% of young people are graduating school not knowing what they want to do. It has been estimated that improved productivity growth could add over \$20 billion per year to the Australian economy

While schools are seen as a State responsibility, the transition out of school is clearly an issue for the Commonwealth.

How can we make sure opportunities are available and support is tailored to the needs of all young people?

Students, schools and Government need to use data to guide and support their decisions. It is therefore imperative that the right data and insights are available and easily accessible. This enhances the argument for both an increased level of technology, as well as a platform that can extract appropriate data for various stakeholders.

This can be broken down into 3 key segments:

Students: Students need access to the range of opportunities that are available to them, as well as relevant information about each of those pathways – such as whether the industry is growing/declining, the risk of automation/globalisation, etc. They should also have a digital profile in which they can detail their plans and ideas for post-school.

Schools: Schools need to understand where their students plan on going post-school, and need to be able to identify students that are at risk of disengaging. This will enable school leadership to make decisions concerning investment, planning and strategy based on the requirements of their cohort. Career advisors and schools need tools in order to more effectively help disadvantaged, disabled, and low SES students into further education and employment

Government: The Government also needs to understand the pathways that students plan on pursuing. Their investment, planning and strategic decisions should be influenced by the need to pair the supply of students leaving school with the demands of industry (namely the national skills shortage and other priority areas).

For young people to gain accurate, consistent, and beneficial career advice, there needs to be an element of compliance from career advisors. This is not to add additional red tape to their line of work, but rather to give confidence back to the market (specifically students and parents) that the advice being offered is accurate and trustworthy. The (State and Federal) Government could also then ensure that key priorities, insights and opportunities are being funnelled all the way down to the students who can benefit most from it.

The development of the National Careers Institute and National Skills Commission are promising signs of how the Government can be a beneficial supervisor of the Australian career advice industry. The success of these initiatives, when it comes to youth, will be based on their ability to gain the right amount of quality data and insights in order to make good decisions. This indicated 3 key findings:

- 1) The NCI needs to have segment-specific strategies. I.e. Ensure that the NCI does not group all cohorts together, but rather have a youth (and others) specific strategy for engagement and assistance.
- 2) The NCI needs an effective, standardised, and easy-to-follow method of communicating for career advisors towards students.
- 3) The NCI needs a way to extract data on where students plan on going after school which can be used in a practical manner.