

## Jobs and Skills White Paper Submission

Career Education and Development: A National Transformation Strategy

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## **Executive Summary**

This submission outlines the benefits of embedding career education and guidance in schools and in the post-school environment to build long term capacity in priority industries across the Australian economy and better prepare young people for the future of work.

In doing so, this submission presents a range of opportunities to the Australian Government which will support the future of Australia's labour market and assist in the development of a bigger, better trained and more productive workforce.

In many respects, career education is one of the missing pieces in our national conversation about the future of the labour market. As this submission spells out, career education delivered correctly equips students to understand how to gain the right skills and maintain employment in an increasingly uncertain labour market.

## The submission makes the following recommendation:

- on Inclusion of a stand-alone career education subject in all Australian school curriculums from K-12 including professional career guidance to align with developmental career milestones enacted through legislation. International benchmark conditions for career services in schools should be mandatory and reported to the Government to ensure that career professionals in schools are delivering valued outcomes against the required benchmarks.
- of key representatives from across the lifespan to design and execute a strategic response to the gaps in the skills development of Australian citizens. Australia's national peak career industry body, the Career Industry Council of Australia (CICA), should Chair the Taskforce and be charged with the development of Australia's Lifelong Learning plan which should be adopted as a national success measure of community wellbeing to drive economic and social change.
- oa Australia's Lifelong Learning plan must include quality benchmarks in the terms of reference endorsed by National Cabinet to ensure students have the core skills required for national and global competencies.

- 04 Develop a new approach to immerse students in work integrated learning that closely links students to industry experience. Ensure industry is included in the national taskforce so they understand their obligations in training the next generation workforce so that young people are work ready through paid work experience and/or placement experience at a living wage rate during their studies.
- os Align national education funding to minimum career education standards established by the Lifelong Learning plan to ensure equity for all Australians.
- of Ensure Australia's professional career workforce meets the Career Industry Council of Australia's qualification requirements to register with the Australian Register of Professional Career Development Practitioners so that students and adults are confident that the career professionals servicing their needs have the most up-to-date knowledge of: labour market needs; economic imperatives for the country; social principles of inclusion and diversity; career counselling skills, and skills in the application of vocational assessment tools.
- or Support the development of an Indigenous career profession workforce for Aboriginal students and adults in schools and community to Close the Gap for First Nations people.



### Introduction

The Jobs and Skills Summit and White Paper process present a generational opportunity to address the challenges facing Australia's workforce now and into the future.

As Australia experiences the second-worst skills shortage of the OECD nations and one of the most severe in its history, it's time to turn our eyes to the richest future source of job-fit employment candidates: our schools.

Understandably, there are calls across the economy for more skilled migrants to help plug the ever-widening gap between demand and supply for skilled employees.

Skilled migration has played a leading role in Australia's prosperity and success and will continue to do so, adding to the rich tapestry of our society and our workforce.

However, in the long-term national interest, decision-makers must now recognise that there is much more we can do to ensure that young Australians have the skills, career education and guidance they need to be the industry leaders and workers of the future.

For too long, our education systems have not been supported to embed career education as a subject from primary to secondary school so that students can develop the skills they need to enter the workforce and support the economic development of the nation.

This submission sets out how Australia can harness the potential of career education, learn from international best practice and local examples, and set young Australians up for the future of work.

The Australian Centre for Career Education (ACCE) acknowledges the initiative taken by the Australian Government and looks forward to working with policymakers on these important issues.

## Current challenges and opportunities

## Australia's focus on skills and employment readiness

Australian governments have spent more than 30 years honing a skills-focused response to develop workforce capacity and address priority sector issues, both to support employer needs and ensure young people can transition from school with the skills to pursue study, or work pathways. Apprenticeships and VET training have been key areas of government investment to support students into employment and has complemented university pathways.

Australia's VET funding and enrolment trends have been positively correlated over time with funding in applied learning and this has been linked to increased productivity:

"An increase in productivity levels, economic value and development of community is directly influenced by funding." (Baker, 2019)

For students undertaking VET programs in schools about 80 per cent are employed or working and studying 4-5 years after finishing school (Circellia and Siekmann, 2022). The National Skills Commission reports that both university and VET options provide very good pathways to employment:

University undergraduate outcomes 2021

84.8% undergraduates employed after graduation

91.8% of Apprentices and trainees employed after training

VET outcomes for Apprentices and Trainees 2021

\$65K median salary for graduates employed full-time

\$52k median full-time salary of Apprentices and trainees. Since the introduction of VET in the 1970s, and the formation of the Australian National Training Authority in 1991, Australia has created an interconnected training and qualification framework - the Australian Qualification Framework (AQF). The AQF system is unique in the world and provides opportunities for Australians to continue to acquire skills and knowledge across their life, and move between applied and academic courses, and provider type.

However, despite Australia's skills training options and education framework, there are ongoing fundamental issues preventing the nation from maintaining full employment, growing productivity, boosting job security, lifting participation, and reducing barriers to employment.

## Supporting successful transitions from school

Tertiary drop-out rates impact the rate at which individuals enter their first career and contribute to their lifetime of earning potential. Supporting students while they are still at school to make the right choice is critical to reduce waste in funded places from course swapping or incompletion, and ensure students make sound career-decisions throughout their course to increase completion and transition to work. Despite various sources reporting positive outcomes from education and training, Australia is not performing as expected according to Australian Treasury data:

"Of the government-funded VET students who completed their qualification in 2020, only 60 per cent had improved their employment status after their training.

42 per cent of technician and trade occupations are currently facing a skills shortage compared to 19 per cent for all assessed occupations. Completion rates for trade apprentices declined to 54 per cent for those who commenced in 2017, 5 percentage points lower than completion rates for those commencing in 2013. Skills shortages are projected to continue in technician and trade occupations, as well as other occupations.

Only 69 per cent of students finishing their undergraduate degree in 2021 started full-time employment within six months of completion, compared with 72 per cent pre-COVID." (The Australian Government the Treasury, 2022)

In addition, one fifth of first-year university students drop out of their degrees in Australia each year. Those in bachelor's degrees who remain have completion rates ranging from 40 per cent (+) for a 4-year completion rate to 70 per cent (+) for the 9-year completion.

Information from Canada shows similar findings which substantiates the need for sound career transitioning information and guidance:

"Studies have shown that inadequate career education coupled with weak links between learning and skills requirements in the labour market can result in students switching programs more often and taking additional coursework, diplomas, degrees, and training in order to settle on a career direction and ultimately achieve labour-market attachment (Bruce & Marlin, 2012; Sweet et al., 2010; OECD & ILO, 2011; Bezanson, 2008; De Broucker, 2005)." (CMEC, 2017)

### **Opportunity**

+ By embedding career education and guidance in schools, students will develop an understanding of their values, interests, and strengths, and develop the skills to make informed choices about their subjects and post school options. Certainty of course selection and suitability for the individual student will improve the rate of course completion and increase the speed of transition to work. For those graduates with additional barriers to employment, best practice and effective professional career guidance should be available in-line with international benchmarks as a minimum standard.

## Ensuring young people are work ready and improving the adaptability of our workforce

Australia's youth unemployment and underemployment has remained disproportionately higher than other age groups until recently. Many young people lack both the employment and employability skills to succeed due to low cultural-employment literacy (exposure to the world of work and knowledge of what employers need) and little or no career preparation in school. This problem is greater for young people in low socio-economic areas and rural and remote locations.

Employers continue to require work ready employees but do not expect to invest in making young people job ready. For more than a decade, employers have reported that young people do not have the employment skills required to be work ready, but Australia's youth also lack the employability skills that make them resilient and able to navigate change.

### Employability Future-proof skills

- > Emotional Intelligence
- > Opportunity Awareness
- > Uncertainty Tolerance
- > Resilience
- > Navigation Failure
- > Lifelong Learning
- > Diversity
- > Entrepreneurship

### Employment Non-technical skills

- > Communication
- > Teamwork
- > Problem Solving
- > Organisation
- > Initiative
- > Digital Competence
- > Decision Making
- > Self-Management

While Australia's current unemployment rate is very low, youth will remain susceptible to unemployment over the medium to longer term as they are not work ready. The closure of industry training bodies supported by government, such as the State Gas Board, has resulted in structural changes in industry training and a demarcation between the skills imparted by industry and the education and skills training undertaken by the individual. Canada has already identified that employer willingness to train has declined and will continue to do so, and Australia is experiencing a similar decline that is expected to continue without intervention.

Currently, most courses offered at higher education level struggle with the concept of dual qualifications that offer applied learning alongside knowledge acquisition. It takes higher education students 5-9 years to enter the workforce. Most are employed during their courses part-time in unrelated areas, so they do not accumulate the necessary work experience (or transferable skills) in their field of study. Some students are graduating with two master's degrees and are still unemployable having only theoretical knowledge.

In the 1970s, teacher training included a degree, concurrent diploma, and practicum. Many student teachers were employed before, or upon graduation reducing the time it took them to enter the workforce and receive a salary. This structure also ensured that student teachers were work ready and satisfactorily trained and experienced for their employer.

Work readiness issues, course decision-making, pressures from changing work practices such as contract employment and gig work, economic shocks and disasters, and rapid innovation mean that youth will be among the first and most affected by these ongoing changes as they occur.

- + Equipping young people to understand how to maintain employment in an increasingly uncertain labour market is vital for the individual and national workforce resilience. Well-structured career education delivered throughout a student's schooling can provide students with essential work readiness skills and the understanding of how to develop career resilience. Structured career education enables students to make career decisions and understand and plan the steps needed to successfully transition from school to skills and training, education, and work pathways. These skills are life skills that translate into other domains in their life.
- + Career guidance delivered at school is an essential 1:1 support for students to ensure they are prepared to pursue their pathway and have the knowledge and skills to set career goals and manage their career journey.
- + International career guidance benchmarks should be followed to ensure career guidance at school is available to meet students' needs and to support students into their post-school options and beyond.
- + Students in post school courses need to enter the workforce before, or at graduation, to narrow the time between commencing a degree and gaining critical work experience. Courses with practicums or those offering concurrent degrees (a degree with an advanced diploma practicum linked into the workplace) are effective and reduce the current 5-9 years it currently takes for students to qualify and gain employment. This improves workforce productivity.

## Developing student career decision making

Students internationally and in Australia are increasingly selecting careers from an evernarrowing range of career options (OECD, 2020). Students are most notably influenced by the choices of their friends and often lack knowledge of the roles and industries available to them. For example, students are bypassing accounting and economics to join popular courses such as business. For those with low cultural-employability awareness and experience, their choices are even more constrained.

How students select their first career, and its pathway, has become a national issue. Industries are competing for the same pool of students and cannot and should not be expected to compete for a share of students' minds late in senior secondary school. Students should be fully immersed in understanding the wide array of career choices available in the world of work long before they reach the later stage of schooling and be inducted into labour market information and how to use it.

A 2022 study from Monash University surveyed more than 1,300 female school students in years 10 to 12 and found that while more than 83 per cent wanted to go to university, there was a significant degree of uncertainty about what next:

- one third did not know what career best suited them
- nearly 40 per cent were concerned they would never have a "real" career
- about one third felt "unemployable"
- 34 per cent said they were doing subjects or activities with no sense of purpose
- 26 per cent said they often felt down or worried about selecting a career

They also continued to nominate careers within narrow fields. Half of young women's chosen careers were concentrated in areas such as medicine (16.7 per cent), law and paralegal studies (12.1 per cent), nursing (11.5 per cent), the creative arts (9.9 per cent) and teaching (8.2 per cent). (Walsh, 2022).

The 2018 PISA survey found that 47 per cent of 15-year-old boys and 53 per cent of 15-year-old girls from 41 countries expect to work in one of just 10 jobs by the age of 30. This narrowing of expectations has increased over time and influences were stronger for students with lower school performance, less exposure and understanding of future work opportunities, and confusion about how education and qualifications are related to jobs and careers.





Notably, Germany and Switzerland had a much lower concentration of role concepts, and this was associated with the strength of career guidance, exposure to a range of occupations and the world of work and supporting students to make informed decisions about pursuing high-quality programmes of vocational education and training from a young age.

- + Structured career education commencing in primary school gives students exposure from a young age to a wide range of roles and industries and this information flow should span the breadth of their school journey.

  A structured career education subject will support students across their education with developmentally appropriate career education and matched to developmental knowledge and skills. When provided in conjunction with professional career guidance, students make better informed choices about their subject selections and can link this to future pathway choices.
- + Emerging industries and technology roles can be incorporated into career education curriculums as they arise. With an understanding of the labour market, roles and industries, students can make informed choices about where to forge the first of their careers.
- + Embedding career education early in school also increases student aspirations, motivation, and connection to their learning. There is substantial international research about the benefits of well-structured career education and its positive impact on learning, transitioning outcomes, and productivity.

## Changing outcomes for disadvantaged cohorts

Disadvantaged students, those with disability and learning issues, migrants and refugee students, and First Nations students are most likely to transition poorly to skills, training, education, and work pathways. Australia has still not successfully closed the gap for indigenous students and adults.

Vulnerable students such as those from migrant and refugee backgrounds have inequitable access to the same level of local knowledge about how the education, training and employment systems work in Australia, and what workplaces expect.

Disconnection and lost motivation often accompany their educational experience and students are at risk of transitioning poorly and not being in employment, education, or training. Students with a disability who can enter mainstream employment often miss out on appropriate support and end up working in disability enterprises or are unable to gain employment.

A 2022 study by The Smith Family surveyed more than 1,500 young people and interviewed 38 students aged 17–19 experiencing disadvantage. While most young people surveyed (86 per cent) recalled receiving careers support while at school, only just over half found this support helpful. One in 10 said it was not useful at all. This highlights the endemic issue Australia faces nationally with unsatisfactory levels of professional career support, unqualified career advisors, and inadequate career education in schools.

- + Career education and guidance at school and post school in the community is essential for cohorts that need additional support. Career professionals ensure individuals understand their strengths and gain the decision-making and work readiness skills to successfully transition from school or make life / work transitions across their lifespan. Disadvantaged students may require support over a longer period to close the gap between themselves and their non-disadvantaged peers. For many students, access to a professional career practitioner is a non-threatening trusted guide who offers hope and ongoing support to help them reach critical goals needed to gain employment.
- + Aboriginal students and adults require culturally safe career guidance support from professionally qualified indigenous career counsellors. In 2018, ACCE could only identify four indigenous career counsellors in Victoria and has since redesigned its CICA endorsed career development courses based on traditional Aboriginal learning methodologies. In 2022, six indigenous learners are being trained and two have been employed in ACCE's Jobs Victoria Career Counsellors service. It is imperative that indigenous students and adults have access to culturally safe Aboriginal career professionals in schools and their community.
- + Career services in schools need the appropriate tools, training, and resources to support students with a disability and their parents and carers.

  Too often, expectations are lower for students with a disability, and this is a barrier to mainstream employment before they leave school. ACCE has been working with Ticket to Work at the Brotherhood of St Lawrence to support the development of an inclusive career benchmarking tool to improve transitioning from school and improve early career support so students with a disability can reach their full potential.

## Improving equal opportunities for women and the benefits of a more inclusive workplace

The OECD has identified that by the age of five, children begin to link their work aspirations to roles that are gender-dominated. While children's career aspirations are linked to motivation and persistence at school, and subject choices, their early aspirations can be curtailed by traditional cultural expectations and stereotypes.

In short, children are limiting their horizons and ambitions at an early age, and this only increases throughout their schooling (OECD, 2020). This has a direct impact on the number of girls pursuing career roles in industries that are often female dominated and is having a direct impact on girls not choosing STEM pathways. In Australia, only 8 per cent of the STEM VET qualified workforce and 29 per cent of the STEM university qualified labour force are female. 26 per cent of full-time workers with university STEM qualifications are earning \$104,000 or more compared to 46 per cent of male their male equivalents (Leigh, et al., 2020).

- + With gendered-role selection occurring in early school years, school is the best and most cost-effective system in which to tackle this issue before beliefs are firmly embedded in children's thinking. The implementation of a structured career education program from primary school can impact gender-dominated career choices across a child's educational journey.
- + By having a positive impact on male and female students' career considerations for non-traditional gender occupations and industries, career education can impact gender diversity in the workplace. Levelling diversity in gender dominated industries will drive system changes in employment structures, conditions, wages, and opportunities from the ground up and support government investment in top-down policies and strategies.



## Career development and improving labour productivity growth and incomes

The economic security of citizens is critical for national productivity. Skills, training, and education are key levers that protect individuals, especially in times of change and uncertainty.

"Good quality education has the power to change the life of a person, a community and the future of the planet. It is a fundamental human right of every woman, man and child – no matter who and where they are." (UNESCO 2019).

However, skills, training and education must be accompanied by the knowledge and understanding in how to apply these skills. Education is identified as playing a critical role in future prosperity and Australia's standard of living. Highly educated and skilled workers support innovation, participation and earning potential. This places career education and career guidance across the lifespan at the centre of nation building and productivity.

Importantly, education is a lifelong process. The OECD has identified the importance of career guidance services for adults. Canada has recognised that even its well-developed career education and development framework will need to improve to support adults to be resilient career managers and overcome the challenges of the future. Their report, Strengthening Career Guidance for Mid-Career Adults in Australia, Getting Skills Right (2022), attests to the critical need, and success, of supporting adults by providing access to professional career guidance services in community.

### Career education in Australia

The Australian Government developed the Future Ready, Career Education Strategy in 2019 for education departments and recommended that all jurisdictions should implement career education as part of a student's education. Uptake across jurisdictions has been patchy and inconsistent and linked to the government of the day's policy. Despite successive policy imperatives, there is no national career education subject within the national curriculum and each state has developed or is developing their own limited solutions.

For some states this means that students will have to access online solutions and tools that they must undertake themselves despite substantial evidence that speaking with a career professional results in better outcomes for students. Australia would never recommend that students learn their subjects through Google without a teacher, yet in some jurisdictions, the investment in a career professional is not seen as an investment in the nation's future.

In 2014, The European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN) undertook a significant examination of the effectiveness of career guidance internationally and across all sectors of the community including schools. The research concluded that young people who receive school career guidance are, "More likely to achieve better outcomes in the labour market" (Hooley, 2014). Victoria's 2018 Parliamentary Inquiry into career advice activities in Victorian schools found that students benefited from individual guidance and wanted this one-on-one support. More recently, a 2022 report from The Smith Family, Pathways, Engagement and Transitions, identified students wanted and needed more comprehensive career guidance outside of critical periods (and post school transition). However, minimum standards for career professionals in schools and the level of support provided are nationally below international benchmarks. More often, if a career professional is employed in a school, they are drawn back into the classroom to teach reducing the hours of individual guidance and career support they can provide.

Career education in Australia is not legislated. It is not included as an essential subject in the national curriculum. Like Canada, Australia has different approaches across its states and while this can lend itself to tailored solutions suited to a local market, it can equally lead to inequitable outcomes across the nation. This is particularly relevant for students with disability and migrants and disadvantaged students who are especially in need of this critical educational offering.

Historically, Australia has struggled to develop a comprehensive, national solution to career education and the development of its citizens. Equally, it has not developed a lifelong learning framework to support citizens manage the complexities of the changing labour market and transitions across their lifespan. While other countries are embedding career education as an essential requirement for student success, Australia lags well behind as a nation.

# Solution – Opportunity for national leadership and reform

Career education and career guidance for all Australian citizens is a transformative, nation-building activity. If done right, career education works to achieve many of the government's objectives as set out in the White Paper terms of reference.

Career education is a legacy gift that can only be delivered when there is a focus on social justice and leadership and the government is well placed to make that happen. To provide lifelong learning and manage the workforce challenges ahead, career education and guidance from the early years of schooling until the decline in working life must have the highest-level oversight.

To address these hugely significant economic and social issues and seize the above opportunities, the ACCE makes the following recommendations for inclusion in the Jobs and Skills White Paper and to ultimately be adopted as policy.

### Recommendations

#### **Recommendation 1**

Inclusion of a stand-alone career education subject in all Australian school curriculums from K-12 including professional career guidance to align with developmental career milestones enacted through legislation. International benchmark conditions for career services in schools should be mandatory and reported to the Government to ensure that career professionals in schools are delivering valued outcomes against the required benchmarks.

#### **Recommendation 2**

Implement a National Task Force of key representatives from across the lifespan to design and execute a strategic response to the gaps in the skills development of Australian citizens. Australia's national peak career industry body, the Career Industry Council of Australia (CICA), should Chair the Taskforce and be charged with the development of Australia's Lifelong Learning plan which should be adopted as a national success measure of community wellbeing to drive economic and social change.

### **Recommendation 3**

Australia's Lifelong Learning plan must include quality benchmarks in the terms of reference endorsed by National Cabinet to ensure students have the core skills required for national and global competencies.

#### **Recommendation 4**

Develop a new approach to immerse students in work integrated learning that closely links students to industry experience. Ensure industry is included in the national taskforce so they understand their obligations in training the next generation workforce so that young people are work ready through paid work experience and/or placement experience at a living wage rate during their studies.

### **Recommendation 5**

Align national education funding to minimum career education standards established by the Lifelong Learning plan to ensure equity for all Australians.

#### Recommendation 6

Ensure Australia's professional career workforce meets the Career Industry Council of Australia's qualification requirements to register with the Australian Register of Professional Career Development Practitioners so that students and adults are confident that the career professionals servicing their needs have the most upto-date knowledge of: labour market needs; economic imperatives for the country; social principles of inclusion and diversity; career counselling skills, and skills in the application of vocational assessment tools.

#### Recommendation 7

Support the development of an Indigenous career profession workforce for Aboriginal students and adults in schools and community to Close the Gap for First Nations people.

Australia has a remarkable opportunity to take transformative action for the future of the country and can benefit from a wide range of international experiences and benchmark practices. We look forward to working with the government on program and policy direction to support Lifelong Learning in education and into the world of work for all Australians.

### **Definitions**

## Career development and career education

Career development is the process of managing life, learning and work over the lifespan. It is the development of knowledge and skills through a planned program of learning capabilities, training, and work-related experiences that assist students to make informed course and career decisions. Career development is a process that can be taught and acknowledges that:

- emotions and feelings are a critical part of the decision-making process
- there is a cycle to the decision-making process
- all people have skills and abilities that can be identified as work readiness
- · career interventions happen across the lifespan
- specialist skills are needed to build environments where students, youth and adults can conceptualise a better future for themselves and then take positive steps to make that happen – through hope.

Key pillars of career development include career education (interventions), vocational assessment and careers counselling. High-quality career development can support students to develop their career decision-making and management abilities and increase their work readiness. It helps students to effectively transition to study, skills or work pathways and navigate career options throughout their lives.

## How career education differs from other subjects

While maths teaches students to analyse and solve problems numerically, and English teaches students to develop literacy skills and understand and develop different types of written communication, career education teachers help students to reflect on themselves and consider this in the context of understanding the working world. Career education supports the development of emotional intelligence through self-reflection of one's own strengths, interests, beliefs, capacity, and values. Students develop the skills to acquire information about the labour market, industries and roles and reflect on how they aspire to build a future for themselves as active citizens in the world of work. To achieve this students must develop career problem-solving and decisionmaking skills. It ensures that students know that education has a purpose and that they are at school for a reason – to prepare them for the world of work.

Structured career education supports students to link their learning and what they are learning in their subjects into the future skills, training, and the study pathways they will need to reach their goals – it helps them set goals. This includes learning to understanding how to navigate the labour market and develop decision-making skills for career planning and career maintenance – these skills when learned are applicable and transferrable throughout life to other domain decisions.

Career education provides industry with a mechanism to build workforce capacity, to promote their skill shortages, advocate for their industry, and provide an access point for young people to enter the workforce without prejudice or exclusion.

## About the Australian Centre for Career Education

The Australian Centre for Career Education is the largest provider of career services in Victoria having delivered over 100,000 career services to the community. We are a national not-for-profit thought leader in career development, a national association, and a founding member association of the national peak industry body, The Career Education Council of Australia. ACCE was established in 1975 to support the work experience legislation and train teachers to help students make effective subject and work choices. We are a CICA endorsed training provider of career development professionals across Australia and have 175 industry partners. We work with industry to deliver industry emersion programs to support students to transition to training, education, and work pathways.

We support Victoria's Transforming Career Education in Government Schools plan by delivering the Morrisby Profile vocational assessment tool and follow-up career guidance sessions to over 39,000 year 9 students each year in Government schools and equivalent settings across Victoria. We are the sole provider of the Jobs Victoria Career Counsellors service to the Victorian community and were recognised by the OECD for our quality career service in their 2022 report, Strengthening Career Guidance for Mid-Career Adults in Australia.

www.ceav.vic.edu.au





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ACCE is a not for profit charity that supports career development as a lifelong process. We believe that through the development and delivery of ethical and professional career education and training, careers counselling services and products, individuals can become successful career self-managers.

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