

The House Select Committee on Workforce Australia Employment Services was established to inquire into and report on matters related to Workforce Australia Employment Services.

Dear Committee Members,

The Australian Centre for Career Education (ACCE) is pleased to provide feedback to the inquiry into Workforce Australia Employment Services. ACCE is a national not-for-profit thought leader in career development, a national association, and founding member association of the national peak industry body, The Career Industry Council of Australia (CICA).

ACCE was established by the Victorian Government in 1975 to train teachers in career education to support students to make informed subject choices and successful transitions from school. We are a CICA endorsed training provider of career professionals through our CEAV Institute (RTO 22523) and we have trained career professionals in Victoria, Tasmania, WA, NSW, and Queensland.

ACCE is also the largest provider of career services in Victoria. We deliver the Morrisby Profile vocational assessment to 34,000 year 9 students in government schools and equivalent settings each year followed by a career guidance session. We are the sole provider of the Jobs Victoria Career Counsellors service since July 2021 and have delivered over 26,000 career guidance sessions to the Victorian community helping people to:

- understand transferrable skills and strengths
- identify career goals
- establish career action plans
- explore interests and values and how they relate to different jobs
- explore pathway options
- understand labour market data
- make employment applications
- role play interviews.

Career Counsellors in the service are currently supporting residents with career counselling delivered in the following correctional facilities: Tarrengower Women's prison, Judy Lazarus Transition Centre, and the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre. They are also working at fifteen Workforce Australia (Victorian Employment Service provider) locations with five different employment providers to support jobseekers.

ACCE has reviewed the submission guidance documentation and issues relating to this inquiry and makes the following recommendations to the House Select Committee:

Summary of Recommendations

1. Stop job cycling of jobseeker placement in any job by underpinning the employment ecosystem with career development principles.
2. Address private interests in the system by ensuring government services are included amongst private interests and establish evaluation measures based on quality of outcomes. Engage the Career Industry Council of Australia to support development of these measures.
3. Place based services are necessary for some locations where external support is unlikely to overcome systemic long-term disadvantage and local solutions are more likely to succeed.
4. Ensure employment services are flexible enough to support those with significant barriers to access services.
5. Mutual obligations do not support the development of agency in jobseekers or increase their confidence and skills to gain employment. Replace the Job Plan with career planning supported by qualified career professionals and ensure career professionals who are registered on the Australian Register of Professional Career Development Practitioners are engaged within the employment ecosystem.
6. The Government has a role to play in helping industry define employability skills in addition to core skills so employment services and other providers can ensure jobseekers are work ready.
7. Remove structural penalties and develop policies aligned to career development principles so that low expectancy outcomes are not inherent in the employment ecosystem.
8. The Government should have stewardship of the employment ecosystem and develop a stakeholder engagement program and community of practice that includes industry, CICA, jobseekers, and relevant service providers. New metrics and evaluation must be implemented to assess value and longer-term jobseeker outcomes rather than short term outcomes and cost. This should include the application of evidence-based interventions and vocational assessment tools to support robust reporting.
9. Online services are not suitable for all cohorts and a differentiated service delivery model is most effective for addressing the wide range of jobseeker needs. Career interviews and evidence-based vocational assessment tools should be used to assess jobseeker work readiness requirements and to guide them to the most effective interventions for full employment.
10. Provide additional training in career development to employment service staff using currently available training or customised career development training so that service engagement with jobseekers aligns to the Australian Blueprint for Career Development.

Current challenges and opportunities

The inquiry into Workforce Australia Employment Services is an opportunity for Australia to address the challenges facing jobseekers while supporting workforce capacity and improving Australia's productivity. As Australia experiences skills shortages and low unemployment, there are remaining systemic issues within our employment ecosystem that fail to address the needs of individuals and employers.

It is a national failing to underpin employment outcomes in a punitive system and to establish end point targets that have a short-term focus rather than adopting a lifelong learning approach to improving outcomes for individuals and the nation. Whilst ever a short-term focus is a driving factor in our employment services, the systemic change the inquiry is seeking may never eventuate. This also influences the design of employment services and the type of requisite skills and training of staff within employment providers. While employment provider staff are experienced supporters of unemployed jobseekers and those with significant barriers, Australia does not underpin its approach or these services with career development knowledge. The OECD has identified that career guidance with lifelong learning strategies should be integrated into Employment Service ecosystems to help people to sustain their employability and respond flexibly to change¹.

Critically, the government milestones in employment provider procurement contracts drive behaviour through the value chain. This has resulted in some of the current challenges inherent in the Workforce Australia ecosystem that contribute to the maintenance of ongoing barriers to decent work and sustainable employment for jobseekers.

As Australia reviews its approach to Jobs and Skills, there is an opportunity to take stock of the nation's requirements for individuals, communities, and employers². There has never been a better time to look internationally and internally at best practice and approach the development of our citizens from a lifelong learning perspective. From the commencement of school, to transitioning to retirement, Australia has an opportunity to ensure that each person can reach their best potential and achieve meaningful and sustainable work and a decent wage.

¹ OECD. (2004). *Career guidance and public policy: bridging the gap*. Paris. OECD

² The Australian Government the Treasury. (2022). *Jobs and Skills Summit, Issues paper 17 August 2022*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

Responding to previously unasked elements

The Chair of the inquiry has identified previously unasked elements that should be addressed if policy and funding are to have a positive impact on jobseeker outcomes:

- an extreme ‘work first’ ideology – that is, the belief that securing a jobseeker any job as quickly as possible will result in the best long-term employment outcomes.

The Australian Centre for Career Education has worked with the City of Greater Dandenong, Hume City Council, and Mooney Valley Council pathway programs to improve employment outcomes for disadvantaged jobseekers from 2017 (before becoming the sole provider of the Jobs Victoria Career Counsellors service in 2021). The work involved supporting local programs with career counselling and the effective use of the Employment Readiness Scale™ (ERS) vocational assessment tool to improve the work readiness of jobseekers.³

Many disadvantaged jobseekers entering these programs had been placed in survival jobs by employment services. This was particularly evident amongst migrants/refugees and women. Notably, these cohorts can have low cultural knowledge of the employment landscape and are disadvantaged by limited work experience, and low confidence. Placing them in any job erodes their confidence further and leads to job ‘cycling’, reoccurring long periods of unemployment, and a loss of hope.

Many of Australia’s western peer countries take a career development approach to supporting jobseeker outcomes within their employment ecosystem. This has been shown to improve learning goals and acquisition. It establishes labour market goals by helping individuals to get work that is more aligned to their values, interests, and needs, and increases the likelihood of individuals staying in a job.⁴ A career development approach also improves social equity and inclusion targets and positively impacts on an individual’s living wage and decent work outcomes. If Australia is to have thriving communities, jobseekers must access meaningful and decent work aligned to their goals and needs.

Professional career guidance is fundamental to helping individuals improve their outcomes in both the short and long term. For those who do not have the skills and/or confidence to manage self-directed job search and employment processes, support is essential. It ensures jobseekers receive labour market information and can explore their skills, knowledge, values, and interests to establish and reach goals suited to their needs and circumstances. The process expands an individual’s knowledge and willingness to explore education, training, and occupational options, and establishes future goals for career improvement across the lifespan. It helps jobseekers to overcome barriers to career decision-making and is especially critical for those with barriers to employment who need confidence to develop their sense of agency.

Importantly, career development is founded on considerable career theory research and vocational psychology and is a profession. Australia must ensure that its employment ecosystem

³ CEAV Career Counselling Australia. (2021). *Ready to Work Program, building resilience, adaption to change*. <https://ccca.edu.au/media/1408/ready2work-brochure-april-2021s.pdf>

⁴ Bell, D., Reddin, A., & Hopkins, S. (2023) Career Development as a Lever for Poverty Reduction. [PowerPoint Presentation]. CANNEXUS conference 2023.

is underpinned by career development principles to break the unemployment cycle for struggling jobseekers and to build their hope. Without hope, behaviour change cannot occur.

- the nature and extent of outsourcing within the employment services system.

Outsourced services can be problematic by creating competition rather than collaboration and driving private market interests. When the ecosystem is developed on private market interests, it can drive systemic inequity. With employers increasingly seeking only work ready employees, those with long term unemployment issues may not be the beneficiaries of private job boards, recruitment firms, and labour-hire providers. Competition between service providers for funding and viewing complementary services as competition can drive this inequity.

The Government can address this by ensuring that government employment services are included in the employment ecosystem and by establishing cooperation in the delivery of services. Jobseeker outcomes must be aligned to career development goals and meaningful, sustainable work and a decent wage. While outsourcing may be necessary to meet the compliment of offerings jobseekers need, it is problematic when providers are not trained to deliver career development.

It is in the public interest that the development of citizens is a role of governments if Australia is to develop its workforce capacity. By establishing sound evaluation and measures based on career development principles, governments can evaluate service quality and outcomes based on more than short term goals and costs to ensure services are delivering value and meeting the longer term needs of jobseekers and the nation.

There are many international examples of employment programs and services that operate effectively outside Australia. Measures of success include jobseeker career decision-making, work readiness improvements, and a range of pathway outcomes leading to meaningful and sustainable work, and a decent wage. In Australia, the Jobs Victoria employment ecosystem provides an integrated suite of services including Job Advocates, Career Counsellors, Job Mentors, and Employment Services. The Jobs Victoria Career Counselling service also employs the first qualified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Career Counsellors working with First Nations' communities. The suite of services has been recognised by the OECD as delivering beneficial support for mid-career adults⁵. Through ongoing collaboration between service providers, government agencies and programs, jobseekers are receiving differentiated support to meet their individual needs.

The Government must determine a new measure of effectiveness for services and determine how this is to be measured to ensure that outcomes and metrics are not at the expense of citizens. The Career Industry Council of Australia should be an engaged stakeholder in supporting the Government to develop these measures that are aligned to Australia's Blueprint for Career Development.

⁵ OECD. (2022). *Strengthening Career Guidance for Mid-Career Adults in Australia, Getting Skills Right*. OECD Publishing, Paris. <https://doi.org/10.1787/e08803ce-en>

- the beneficial role of local, place-based solutions in enabling sustainable employment and breaking cycles of poverty and disadvantage, as highlighted in the report of the Select Committee on Intergenerational Welfare Dependence

Local place-based solutions support local industry and individuals, particularly when individuals require local employment and employers require local employees. Regional and remote locations can have specific needs and challenges that benefit from local solutions.

Some local solutions include wrap-around services that can address barriers to employment success and link to skills development and training. This can have a significant beneficial impact on communities where disadvantage and cycles of poverty are systemic and local solutions can drive change that is difficult to implement from outside. It also provides an opportunity for the development of local agency by engaging communities in their own change solutions.

- the nature of mutual obligations and whether the requirements imposed on jobseekers are truly effective in supporting them to prepare for, obtain, and keep employment, especially for longer term jobseekers and those furthest from the labour market.

Mutual obligation exists to monitor investment return for certain types of payments that jobseekers receive and monitor that jobseekers are moving towards employment in return for the income. However, 2021 research from the Australian Council of Social Services indicates that jobseekers feel they have little input to their Job Plan that forms part of this process. Job Plan activities may not necessarily be preparing jobseekers to develop the skills required for work, improving their work readiness, or supporting them to achieve career goals⁶.

Mutual obligation has no impact on the indicators and barriers to employment for jobseekers and has little bearing on ensuring jobseekers have decent, sustainable, or meaningful employment. As such, it serves no purpose and should be removed in favour of career guidance assessments and career planning. By providing individuals with professional career guidance, jobseekers experience positive behaviour change and work towards career outcomes. This process enables mutual obligation to transfer from a funding agreement to developing agency within the jobseeker to reach their own goals and manage their career.

- poverty traps and other disincentives to sustainable employment that may be created or maintained by the broader government system (which may be examined by Government in the Employment White Paper 5 arising from the 2022 Jobs and Skills Summit).

Poverty traps and other disincentives to sustainable employment can result from inequitable access to services, skills, and training options and include factors such as access to the internet, transport, carer duties, and limited daytime hours to study or work. Establishing a one-size fits all framework for those with special needs and barriers can exclude underemployed jobseekers who must hold part-time or survival jobs to make ends meet. It limits the opportunity to provide a targeted and individualised approach to overcoming barriers and establishing realistic and

⁶ Australian Council of Social Services. (n.d.). *Mutual obligation Snapshot – What is a job plan?*
<https://www.acoss.org.au/what-is-a-job-plan>

achievable goals. The government must ensure that employment services are flexible enough to support those with significant barriers to access.

Importantly, ongoing failure to achieve positive employment outcomes has been proven to have a negative impact on jobseekers by reducing agency and self-efficacy to make positive change. When individuals lose hope, they develop fewer strategies to overcome barriers⁷ and many simply give up. Work and decent work is linked to mental health and provides individuals with purpose. It is vital for thriving communities and providing decent employment and reduces the mental health burden on individuals, communities, and governments⁸.

People who are anxious about their careers are at higher risk for mental health issues than their peers. Controlling for demographic variables, roughly one third of all people who do at least 6-months of psychotherapy report that career concerns were a factor in their current mental health status; this is a form of "career burden" which can predict serious mental health issues (Vo et al., 2021). This study found that people with career concerns are more likely to be anxious, depressed, and to engage in maladaptive work and life behaviours; they are also more likely to present with low productivity at work, and fail to manage their work/life balance⁹.

⁷ Snyder, C. R. (2000). *The Handbook of Hope, Theory, Measure, & Applications*. Academic Press.

⁸ Redekopp, D., & Huston, M. (2020). *Strengthening mental health through Effective Career Development – a practitioner’s guide Australia*. CERIC and CEAV.

⁹ David Miller. (2023). *Strategies for Career Counselling*. Career Counsellor, ACCE Jobs Victoria Career Counselling Service.

Inquiry issues and themes

Australia must ensure that best practice policy, evaluation, training, and career development underpins its employment services. Australia has developed the Australian Blueprint for Career Development for the following purpose:

*“The primary aim of the Blueprint is to enable career development practitioners and others (e.g. teachers, parents, **employment service providers**, employers) **who provide some level of support for people’s careers and transitions, to work with a nationally consistent set of career management competencies.**”*

Despite the Blueprint, Australia has not adopted a nationally consistent approach nor operationalised the principles of career development for jobseekers and transitioning workers within its employment services (exceptions are the Jobs Victoria Career Counsellors Service, and Careers NSW).

Secure Employment

While ongoing employment is essential for the survival of individuals, families and communities, many jobseekers are funnelled into unsuitable work. This ‘survival’ work has detrimental consequences for jobseeker confidence and limits their ability to move beyond these roles to better and more suitable pathways and employment opportunities.¹⁰

To effectively support jobseekers into employment, a range of strategies can be used to develop work readiness and help individuals acquire skills and training needed for sustainable and suitable employment. For example, volunteering, part time employment, study/internship or apprentice opportunities are all learning opportunities that can lead to transitions into more meaningful work. These alternatives must be matched to an individual’s needs, circumstances, and available labour market opportunities. The role of the career professional is to support jobseekers develop longer term goals and career plans so they can navigate towards their goals.

Jobseekers need to have their employability skills and core skills mapped to labour market requirements and be supported to understand how they can reasonably fill any skill and training gap towards their goals. They need to learn how to translate their skills into self-promotion strategies for the job market, understand how skill development impacts on their performance in the workplace and their future capacity to manage life’s career transitions.

The Government must play an essential role to ensure industry can define employability skills for Australia so that employment services and other providers can support jobseekers to be work ready.

Very long term unemployed

At any point in time, two to three per cent of any population may be considered permanently unemployable. For other long term unemployed with significant barriers, policy options must ensure that services are able to develop an understanding of a jobseeker’s strength, values, and aspirations in order to help them find opportunities that are suitable. For staff in the employment service

¹⁰ Hiruy, K., Megerssa, W., Abbot, M., Barraket, J., & Hurttton, R. (2019). *Towards an optimal employment strategy for people seeking asylum in Victoria*. Asylum Seeker Resource Centre. https://asrc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/ASRC-Employment-Research-Report_W_FA.pdf

ecosystem, systemic structures and limitations can result in short term views and low outcome expectancy.

ACCE's submission to the Australian Government's consultation on the development of a Disability Employment Strategy ('The Strategy') in 2021 highlighted the importance of supporting those with disability to enter mainstream employment¹¹. For many people with disability, schools, family, and services share this low outcome expectancy. However, suitable adjustments and arrangements such as part time work, can support mainstream employment rather than employment within a disability enterprise. In addition, those who gain employment are often penalised through a reduction in their disability pension, resulting in a disincentive to work and an existence close to the poverty line.

The solution requires structural penalties to be removed, and policies developed aligned to career development principles so that low expectancy outcomes for jobseekers are not inherent anywhere in the employment ecosystem.

Operating structure

Various employment systems and structures exist nationally and internationally. In many advanced western countries, career guidance is essential to a country's employment ecosystem. Examples include Canada, Scotland, Wales, and Finland.

The Canadian Career Development Foundation (CCDF) plays an active role in supporting better socio-economic outcomes for Canadian citizens:

"CCDF works to make career development a public policy priority by promoting collaboration among strategic partners. We work with governments to develop evidence-based policy solutions, strategies/tools to maximize implementation and rigorous evaluation to demonstrate impact..."

"CCDF conducts rigorous research to inform the development of innovative programming and policy. Our work deepens our understanding of the barriers faced by under-represented groups, uncovers strategies to strengthen the impact of education and improve labour market functioning, and builds the evidence-base for career education programming and employment services. CCDF has initiated and has been a part of several key national and international research bodies including the International Centre for Career Development and Public Policy (ICCDPP), the National Stakeholder Advisory Panel of the Labour Market Information Council (LMIC), the Expert Advisory Council for RBC's Future Skills, the Canadian Research Working Group on Evidence-Based Practice in Career Development (CRWG), and OECD Study of Career Development Policies."

A research report by CCDF highlights some similar challenges to Australia but these are not insurmountable. Transforming employment services in Canada has led to positive transformational change¹². In Victoria, Jobs Victoria has been recognised by the OECD for its innovative approach to supporting jobseekers through an integrated suite of employment services. This employment

¹¹ ACCE. (2021). *Submission to the Australian Government's consultation on the development of a Disability Employment Strategy ('The Strategy')*. <https://ceav.vic.edu.au/news-advocacy/our-submissions/>

¹² Canadian Career Development Foundation. (2021). *Evidence for Community Employment Services: A Collaborative Regional Approach Final Report: A Tale of Transformation*. <https://ccdf.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NLWIC-FINAL-REPORT-2021-04-01-CCDF-submitted.pdf>

ecosystem includes Job Advocates to navigate jobseekers to services. Its Job Mentors provide case management support and Career Counsellors support career decisions and career management alongside Victorian Employment Services. The services in the employment ecosystem connect through regional network meetings and there is an opportunity for Workforce Australia to establish similar networks/ communities of practice.

As an example of the evolving Jobs Victoria services, a new Employment Pathways Team is being deployed to support Correction's Victoria. Jobs Victoria Career Counsellors are already engaged in several prisons and provide pre and post re-entry career guidance to residents. It is imperative that residents successfully transition to immediate employment and receive ongoing career guidance to foster longer term goals beyond their first transition role. In doing this, Corrections Victoria aims to reduce recidivism through practical action that increases success and hope and builds safer communities.

As the Jobs Victoria employment ecosystem matures, there are further developing opportunities to engage across departments, education settings and community services for long term benefits and more successful outcomes for jobseekers – decent work and a decent wage.

Research into employment services in Europe has shown that there a range of considerations when designing and operationalising professional career guidance within employment ecosystems. However, underpinning the system with career development principles to meet longer term goals and including professional career guidance delivers positive benefits to jobseekers and labour market productivity¹³.

Government stewardship is vital and should be developed with industry and key stakeholder groups to ensure that operations are based on best-practice and that there is an ongoing community of practice in which stakeholders are engaged. Career development principles should guide employment services and government procurement and investment metrics must support innovation and long-term benefits. Government stewardship and stakeholders must work together to drive value rather than costs through ongoing metrics and evaluation of value and jobseeker outcomes.

The necessity of an interpersonal relationship with jobseekers

Job seekers must be comfortable that their engagement is not punitive or judgemental. Substantial research exists about interpersonal engagement that highlights individuals are uneasy about providing personal details when they feel unsafe to do so. Systems and employment providers must be able to establish a safe, non-judgmental interpersonal relationship with jobseekers if they are to fully engage and share their personal information.¹⁴

Limitations of online servicing

Job seekers have a range of capacities, skills and needs. While online services can act as a central point for information, they can equally be overwhelming and particularly unhelpful for certain

¹³ Sultana, R.G., Watts, A.G. (2006). Career Guidance in Public Employment Services Across Europe *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance*. 6, 29–46. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10775-006-0001-5>

¹⁴ Eagan, G. (2012). *The Skilled Helper. A Problem-Management and Opportunity Development Approach to Helping*. Cengage Learning.

cohorts. For example, those with disability, language barriers, and those who are simply overwhelmed by their current situation or past experiences.

Just as school students access the world's information online, no-one suggests that teachers should be removed from the classroom. Similarly, many jobseekers require additional support to understand and navigate the labour market, employment options, career decision-making and employment processes. Information must be both implicit and explicit if learning and behaviour change is a desired outcome. Without both, the inquiry can expect little change for some jobseekers.

The Government must ensure that employment services are based on a differentiated service delivery model where individuals can get the support they need in a timely and targeted manner. Those who need additional support should have access to a professional career guidance interview to direct them to the most effective support options.

Importantly, career management is a skill that can be learned but is rarely taught. When delivered well by career professionals, jobseekers gain the necessary skills and experience to increase their work readiness and improve their career management capabilities. Australia is well behind its western peers in this regard.

Length of online service support before more intensive support

Jobseekers receiving a career guidance interview can be further supported by an evidence-based vocational career tool to assess the supports and referrals required. Two vocational tools that have been used overseas are PRIME and the Employment Readiness Scale™ (ERS). The later provides jobseekers with a career action plan.

Importantly, vocational assessment tools must be administered by trained professionals to support jobseeker engagement in career activities. While the tools support and track jobseeker change, they also monitor and evaluate a program's effectiveness.

Meeting employers' needs

Employers are increasingly seeking work ready employees despite low unemployment and limited access to staff. ACCE's experience running industry immersion programs for employers that link their role opportunities to school students has revealed that many employers are not selecting entry level students for entry level roles. This trend is expected to continue (and has been identified in other countries such as Canada). Its greatest impact is on the most vulnerable jobseekers (those with disability, youth, migrants and refugees, women, and indigenous jobseekers). When job opportunities shrink, these cohorts with limited experience (youth unemployment is currently 7.9%) face the biggest barriers to work.¹⁵

The closure of government owned industry training bodies such as the gas fitters has resulted in a demarcation between the skills imparted by industry and the education and skills training that must be acquired by the individual. It is expected and assumed that individuals can make successful career decisions and plan their pathway forward. This is made more complicated by employers wanting a

¹⁵ National Skills Commission. (2022) *Improving the employment prospects of young people*. Labour Market Research and Analysis Branch. [PowerPoint slides].
<https://labourmarketinsights.gov.au/media/fxgiyft/presentation-improving-the-employment-prospects-of-young-people-a-resource-for-career-advisors.pdf>

range of employability skills that can change over time and may or may not be provided to individuals. For example, find a course in tertiary education that states the learning outcome is teamwork, problem solving, enterprise skill.

Australia needs to quantify these employer skill requirements if its employment services and programs are going to understand them to meet workforce development needs or find ways to fill the gaps. Australia is not alone in this issue and the Conference Board of Canada in March 2022 identified that of the 35 skill vacancy areas they examined, almost all of the top 20 were soft skills. The report identified that while employers were prepared to train staff in core skills, they expected employees to have the soft skills. It is therefore imperative that the Government ensures there is a thorough understanding of these skills, how to measure them, and know how/who is going to develop them in jobseekers.

Research, evaluation, and adaption

Employment services are often subject to strict performance contract arrangements that make adjustment to services difficult. Managing such engagements at the provider level is often linked to milestone targets that do not enable service enhancement or innovation. Some providers are also impacted by policy decisions at the funder level that drives service and delivery design making change unlikely.

From a government perspective, funding costs are managed and linked to performance, but this does not necessarily deliver value for money. Value for money requires an understanding that changed services or operations can deliver greater benefit than the contracted performance milestones. Allowing for adjustments and improvements requires a change in thinking within procurement and contracting systems. It also requires a mechanism for providers to present a business case for change based on good value sense.

While changing procurement processes and contract policy approaches sounds difficult, it is important to note that there is variation amongst approaches at agency levels. ACCE has managed many career projects funded by different agencies, including the ongoing delivery of over 34,000 vocational assessments and career guidance interviews to year 9 students across Victoria for the Department of Education. This project's contractual arrangement is underpinned by a strong partnership working group that supports issue resolution (such as overcoming COVID lockdowns in schools) and maintaining a solution focused approach. The department embraces reasonable flexibility through problem solving to ensure the project's success which is delivering the best career decisions support for students.¹⁶

Employment service data

Jobs and Skills Australia should provide employment services with local employment and labour market information to support local level efforts to improve outcomes for jobseekers. Equally, employment services should provide the government with information about:

- improvements in work readiness
- their career development interventions
- pathway outcomes (if required to deliver these).

¹⁶ Department of Education. (2019). My Career Insights.
<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/careers/Pages/my-career-insights.aspx>

In Canada, many employment services use the PRIME tool to capture indicators of employability dimensions and changes in employability dimensions due to employment service interventions.¹⁷ Both PRIME and ERS™ monitor change in jobseekers and can support assessment of the effectiveness of service delivery and return on investment. The ERS™ or similar tool was recommended for use in employment services to assess service effectiveness following the Inquiry into sustainable employment for disadvantaged jobseekers (Victoria).¹⁸

The government has an opportunity to establish best practice, evidence-based feedback on Workforce Australia's service performance and capture robust reporting data about the service interventions delivered.

The role of the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations

It is reasonable to assume that employment services sit under the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR). With the department responsible for the development of Jobs and Skills Australia, DEWR is well placed to oversee workforce development. However, the department needs to adopt a lifelong learning approach to workforce capacity and the development of citizens and apply the principles of the Australian Blueprint for Career Development as Career Advice is part of the department's remit.

As an example, Canada's public employment system is within the department of Employment and Social Development Canada, and under the Skills and Employment branch.

Its aims are:

"The Skills and Employment branch provides programs and initiatives that promote skills development, labour market participation and inclusiveness, as well as ensuring labour market efficiency. Specifically, these programs seek to address the employment and skills needs of those facing employment barriers and contribute to lifelong learning and building a skilled inclusive labour force. Other programs that support an efficient labour market include the labour market integration of recent immigrants, the entry of temporary foreign workers, the mobility of workers across Canada and the dissemination of labour market information. This branch is also responsible for programs that provide temporary income support to eligible unemployed workers."¹⁹

If Australia is to improve the lifelong learning of its citizens, and develop its workforce capacity, it should include career development as a principle along with professional career guidance embedded in its employment ecosystem. Career guidance helps labour markets to function and supports education systems to meet their goals. It involves more than providing information and skills to

¹⁷ Canadian Career Development Foundation. (2020). *8 Wicked Problems, One Wicked Solution: How PRIME Transforms Career/Employment Services*. <https://ccdf.ca/news-articles/8-wicked-problems>

¹⁸ Parliament of Victoria. (2020). Inquiry into sustainable employment for disadvantaged jobseekers. Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee. https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/eic-LA/Disadvantaged_Jobseekers/Report/LAEIC_59-01_Sustainable_employment_disadvantaged_jobseekers.pdf

¹⁹ Sourced from Employment and Social Development, Canada. <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/corporate.html>

individuals, rather it ensures jobseekers understand how to use them. It is a fundamental part of lifelong learning and supports the development of career decision-making and career management skills.

The provision of career guidance in employment services is traditionally underdeveloped in Australia. However, it has been incorporated overseas in public employment services. Some of these services have been linked to adult education institutions, but these may not always be capable of offering wide and impartial advice. Web-based services have also been deployed to expand supply but are not able to deliver the tailored help that individuals need. To objectively assist jobseekers, career guidance must be independent of any conflicts of interest that can interfere with sound decision-making and independent of system pressures associated with recipient payments and short-term employment goals.

Qualification requirements for service providers

Career counselling is a professional postgraduate qualification in Australia. It is essential that jobseekers can access support from career professionals. Importantly, career counsellors are not employment agents, job matching services, educational/skill providers, or mental health professionals. Career counsellors are trained in counselling skills²⁰ and work within their scope as vocational experts using evidence-based career tools, providing labour market knowledge, and supporting career decision-making and career management.

The national peak industry body, the Career Industry Council of Australia (CICA) requires career professionals to have completed a CICA endorsed Graduate Certificate in Career Development Practice or equivalent. Career professionals should be capable of listing on the Australian Register of Professional Career Development Practitioners if they elect to do so. Suitably qualified career professionals provide career guidance and should be included as accompanying support within the employment ecosystem as is the case in Victoria.

To increase the capacity of employment provider staff to work within a career development framework, CICA endorsed courses are available to qualify as a career professional. There may be options for recognition of prior learning towards the professional qualification or to undertake a Certificate IV in Career Development Practice that provides foundational knowledge of career development to enhance information and advisor skills.

Canada's use of the PRIME tool includes training in career guidance principles to upskill those in the Canadian employment ecosystem without career qualifications. It is possible to design courses that introduce employment services to career development principles and provide services with the necessary career tools to measure employability indicators and work readiness. Ultimately, the system should engage jobseekers in a career guidance interview. Suitably qualified career counsellors should support jobseekers by embedding them in the services or as mandatory services that accompany employment services.

Staff working in employment services supporting jobseekers should receive additional training in career development. Training is already available to qualify eligible staff as CICA endorsed career professionals who provides career guidance or as career associates who can provide information to

²⁰ Lim, J. Y., Kim, M.A., Kim, S. Y., Kim, E.J., Lee, J.E., & Ko, Y. K. (2010). The effects of a cognitive-behavioral therapy on career attitude maturity, decision making style, and self-esteem of nursing students in Korea. *Nurse Educ Today*. doi: 10.1016/j.nedt.2010.01.014. PMID: 20381932.

jobseekers. Customised career development training can also be delivered to other employment service staff to ensure services align with the Australian Blueprint for Career Development²¹.

Conclusion

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. 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. This places career development across the lifespan at the centre of nation building and productivity. Its principles should underpin Australia's employment system and education systems as is the case in many countries overseas. If our nation is to support struggling jobseekers to their full potential than more needs to be done to ensure that career development services are accessible to all citizens.

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