

**Conditions for Career Practitioners in
Victorian Schools, 2021
Yarra Group and CEAV**

Yarra Careers Group Committee

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Background

Career practitioners in Victorian schools are required to manage programs, design curriculum, and lead a wide range of activities across schools. A key component of career activities in schools is meeting individually with students. Although this is a huge time commitment, it is an important component of the role.

The 2018 Parliamentary report, *Inquiry into career advice activities in Victorian schools*, made numerous recommendations aimed at improving professional career guidance in Victorian schools. In 2018, the Victorian Government responded to the report by committing over \$100 million to redesign career education in schools.

With some of the recommendations implemented and others still to occur, the Yarra Careers Group and CEAV launched a survey to understand how career practitioners in Victorian schools are faring. The findings of the survey revealed that for some career practitioners, conditions are very good. However, the lack of mandated minimum conditions has resulted in many career practitioners employed in Education Support positions working for very low wages. Despite their low pay, they are expected to deliver a quality program to students which often includes work experience and a wide range of other career services. For career practitioners who are recognised as teachers, many are expected to deliver a quality career program on a minimal time allowance, despite their career activities being highly time intensive.

It is imperative that these conditions change if students are to receive effective educational career guidance and career services. It is also essential that career practitioners can perform their role and are remunerated in accordance with their duties and responsibilities.

In response to the research findings the following recommendations are made:

Recommendation 1

That minimum requirements are set by the Victorian Government around the amount of time that schools must allocate to career education. This should be linked to student numbers in secondary schools. Total time allocation in schools for career education should be at least:

- 0.5 FTE for schools with student numbers in Year 10-12 of under 200
- 1.0 FTE for schools with student numbers in Year 10-12 of between 200 and 400
- 1.5 FTE for schools with student numbers in Year 10-12 of between 400 and 600
- 2.0 FTE for schools with student numbers in Year 10-12 of over 600
- Schools with over 400 students in Year 10-12 should have an allocated (min) 0.3 FTE administrative support.

N.B. The Government's aim to start career education earlier in schools will impact the availability of the current career workforce and the minimum estimates provided above. As career services roll-out to primary classes the ratio of career professionals/time allocation to student numbers must be adjusted upwards to accommodate the increasing workload.

Recommendation 2

Due to the management responsibilities that are inherent in all career practitioner roles, Education Support career practitioner roles in Government Schools should be recognised at Level 1 Range 4 as a minimum.

Discussion

1. The Importance of Good Career Advice in Schools

To be told by my new Principal at our first meet and greet, “Our students don’t really need careers!” shocked me. This was an assumption based on demographic... clearly not an informed one!

(Anonymous Career Practitioner – Government School, Melbourne)

Sound career advice in schools can be shown to have a direct bearing on student learning and motivation. In the 2018 OECD PISA study, students were asked if they agreed with the statement “*Trying hard at school will help me get a good job*”. This was then considered in relation to career activities that the students had participated in. Results identified that students who spoke to a career advisor at school were more likely to see the connection between doing well at school and achieving a good career path after school. This was seen to have a stronger impact than doing an internship, attending a job shadowing or worksite visit, or visiting a job fair. Meeting with a career practitioner clearly helped students see the connection between achieving well at school and getting a good career outcome.

In 2020, the OECD released a report into how teenagers approach employment and manage their career in the ‘age of accelerations’.¹ The publication sets out findings from the 2018 PISA datasets and was completed by more than half a million teenagers across more than 79 countries. In addition, 32 countries responded to a questionnaire about their participation in career development activities and preparation for the world of work. The findings supported other evidence about the benefits of quality career programs and students in school including:

- Activities that demand little of a student’s time such as career guidance, were most strongly associated with positive career outcomes.
- The strength of career guidance is reflected in lower levels of career concentration in some traditional careers – a result of career guidance expanding the range of careers that students have pursued.
- Access to valuable labour market and finance information at school can have a considerable impact on the likelihood of youth from disadvantaged backgrounds progressing to university.

In 2019, in light of technological changes and findings from this report, the OECD joined with the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, the European Commission, the European Training Foundation, the International Labour Organisation, and UNESCO in issuing a joint statement on the “*pressing need for high-quality career guidance*” for youth and adults. They did note however, that, “*the quality of the guidance provided is as important as the availability of a coherent programme of related activities delivered over a school career.*”

Some career advice activities are far less time consuming than others. For example, it is much easier to talk to an entire year level than to hold one on one career sessions with individual students. However, students perceive individual career sessions to be much more useful. A study by Rothman and Hillman (2008) looked at how useful students in Australia found various career interventions at school. Overall, students felt the most useful intervention was the individual meeting with the career professional. This finding was consistent across year levels, genders, ethnic background, and

¹ *Dream Jobs? Teenagers’ Career Aspirations and the Future of Work, OECD, 2020*

location (with the exception of year 10 students not intending to complete year 12). The same study found that the students felt the least useful intervention was the talk to all Year 12 students.

Research has shown there is a clear financial benefit to populations achieving sound career advice. A 2008 study in Northern Ireland looked at the impact of adult interventions through the Educational Guidance Service for Adults, *Regional Forecasts, 2008*. They found that for every £1 of public money that was invested, £9.02 of nett additional tax revenue was achieved through a reduction in unemployment benefits and improved progression through the workplace to higher paid positions. Despite its focus on adult interventions, career research shows that career interventions have a significant impact no matter where they occur throughout the lifespan.

In June 2020, the report from the Education Council review into secondary Pathways called, *Looking To The Future*, was released. It recommended early intervention in career planning and a wide range of career activities for all students during their secondary schooling years. These are summarised in Figure 2 below:

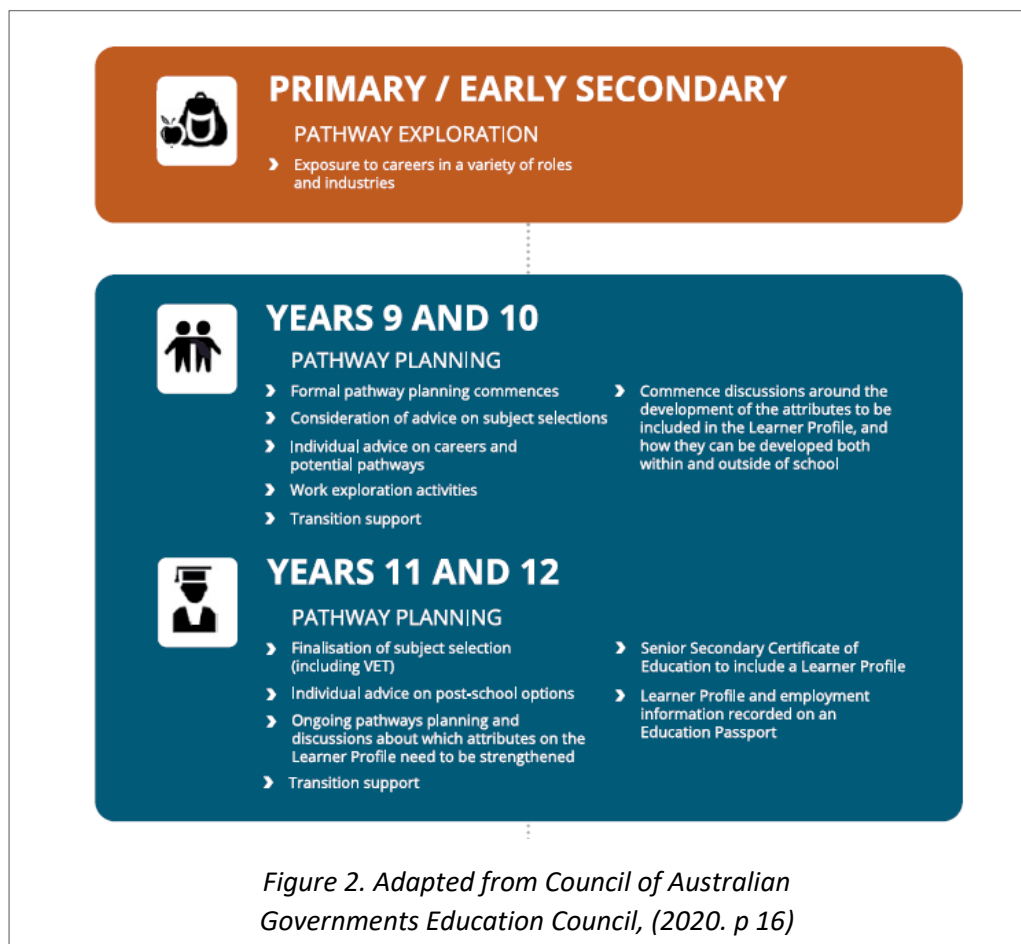


Figure 2 highlights the wide range of activities that career practitioners are expected to provide if students are to be well prepared for future employment success. Some of these activities are more effective than others.

In 2017, the Careers Industry Council of Australia and McCrindle released the results from a national survey that identified which career development activities were found to be the most effective. The

results revealed that having an interview with a career advisor was the top-rated activity. The research also highlighted the fact that only 53% of part time career practitioners were able to fully implement this in their schools due to time constraints.

2. Career Education in Victoria

In 2017, the Victorian Government commenced an enquiry into career education in Victoria. They took submissions from many stakeholders and in August 2018 released their report, *Inquiry into Career Advice Activities in Victorian Schools*. The report made 37 Findings and 46 Recommendations about careers in education. The following findings and recommendations from the inquiry are relevant to this report:

Finding 8: Many school career practitioners in Victoria do not have adequate time to provide career development services to students due to high workloads and competing responsibilities.

Finding 10: Many Victorian schools do not allocate adequate human resources or funding to career development, which diminishes the quality of career development services they deliver to students.

Recommendation 13: That the Department of Education and Training mandate secondary schools employ one career practitioner for every 450 students enrolled.

Recommendation 14: That the Department of Education and Training commit ongoing funding to support government schools to employ one career practitioner for every 450 students enrolled in a secondary school.

Recommendation 15: That the Department of Education and Training support schools to limit the teaching loads of career practitioners to enable more time for career development and student counselling.

These findings and recommendations were a great step forward in identifying what was needed to improve career education in schools. Of note is the recommendation mandating ratios of practitioners to students. Unfortunately, many of the valuable recommendations from the inquiry have not been implemented.

The number of time constraints that school career practitioners work within is extraordinary. The Yarra Careers Group surveyed their members to find out more about the ratio of students to career practitioners. This was calculated as the number of students at Years 10, 11 and 12 divided by the number of full-time equivalent career practitioners at a school.

- Within the sample of 29 schools, the ratio varied from 87 students per FTE career practitioner to 1,125 students per FTE career practitioner.
- Over half of the schools had above the recommended 450 students per career practitioner.
- The 5 schools with the highest ratio of students per career practitioner were all Government schools.

This range in ratios highlights the great disparity across schools in the way that career education is viewed and resourced.

The Victorian Government's plan to redesign career education in schools (outlined in its 2018 report, *Transforming Career Education in Victorian Government Schools*) included an investment of over \$100 million. Part of the funding was to train over 400 new career practitioners and to introduce

career profiling for all Year 9 students in government schools in Victoria (a program which is now underway). With many of the initiatives still to be rolled out, it is imperative to recognise that these will only increase the expectations of the current school career practitioner workforce.

The extent of some of the future initiatives is extensive and come in addition to already stretched resources. They include, but are not limited to:

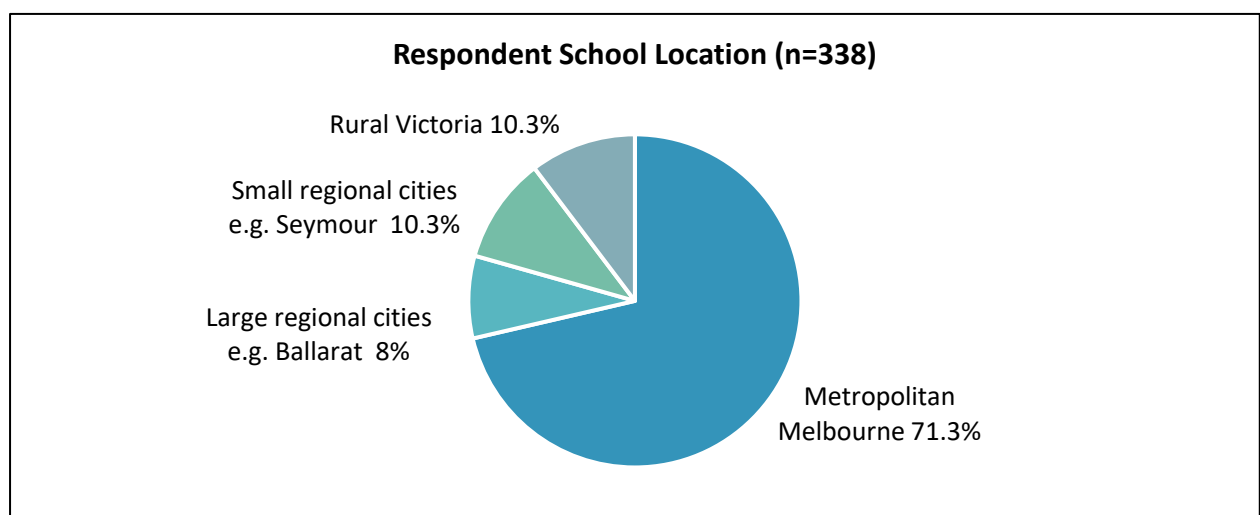
- recommendations that career education should begin in Year 7
- all students should develop an e-Portfolio in Year 9
- all students in Year 10 to 12 in Government Schools should develop detailed and robust Career Action Plans
- students from disadvantaged backgrounds and from remote and regional schools should have access to mentoring and visits to employers.

3. Methodology

In early 2021, the Yarra Careers Group in conjunction with the Career Education Association of Victoria (CEAV) undertook a survey of school career practitioners in Victoria. Over 330 career practitioners responded to the survey. The survey involved 56 questions related to the activities of career practitioners in Victorian Schools.

Over 71% of the respondents were from metropolitan Melbourne but there were also representatives from large regional cities like Ballarat and Geelong (8%), small regional cities such as Seymour or Morwell (10%), and some from rural Victoria (10%). The respondents represented a large cross section of the population with representatives from Government schools, Independent schools and the Catholic sector. Around half of the respondents were teachers and half were not currently employed as teachers.

It is estimated that there are around 600 career practitioners in Victorian schools. This means that over half of all practitioners responded to the survey.



4. Findings of the Survey

Some of the key findings from the survey are summarised below:

- 97% of respondents held a tertiary qualification in the field of career education (a career specialisation is a post-graduate qualification).
- Respondent career practitioners recognised in teaching positions are paid according to their teaching level.
- The other half of career practitioners are employed in Education Support positions.
- Many of those in Education Support positions came into the role from outside of school or from other roles within schools.
- Of the 118 Education Support practitioners in Government Schools, nearly a third reported that their position was originally a teaching position but had recently been reclassified (or incorrectly classified) as an Educational Support Position. Over 60% of these were reclassified to Level 1, Range 3: salary between \$67,187 and \$78,634 and over 20% were reclassified to Level 1, Range 2: salary between \$57,514 and \$66,077.

Classroom teacher salaries in Government schools range from \$72,058 for a starting teacher up to \$108,003. Clearly, this classifying is done as a cost cutting measure by Victorian schools. While it might be assumed that being reclassified or incorrectly classified leads to a change in work tasks and duties, this has not been the case. For many of those who have been reclassified, their work expectations have increased. Over a third of the Education Support respondents (35.7%), reported that they are required to supervise students in a teaching role (without a teacher present).

The situation in Catholic and Independent schools varies but many had similar stories. Over a quarter of career practitioners in both Catholic schools and Independent schools who were paid as Educational Support positions reported that they were required to supervise students in a teaching role. Over 70% said that they were required to deliver career curriculum classes.

The Victorian Government has established high expectations for which career services will be provided for students, but they have not set guidelines for the level of recognition career practitioners should receive. Many of the requirements for career practitioners involve leadership in their field. Career practitioners are qualified professionals who are expected to run programs, initiate curriculum and have a sound knowledge of a wide range of post-schooling options.

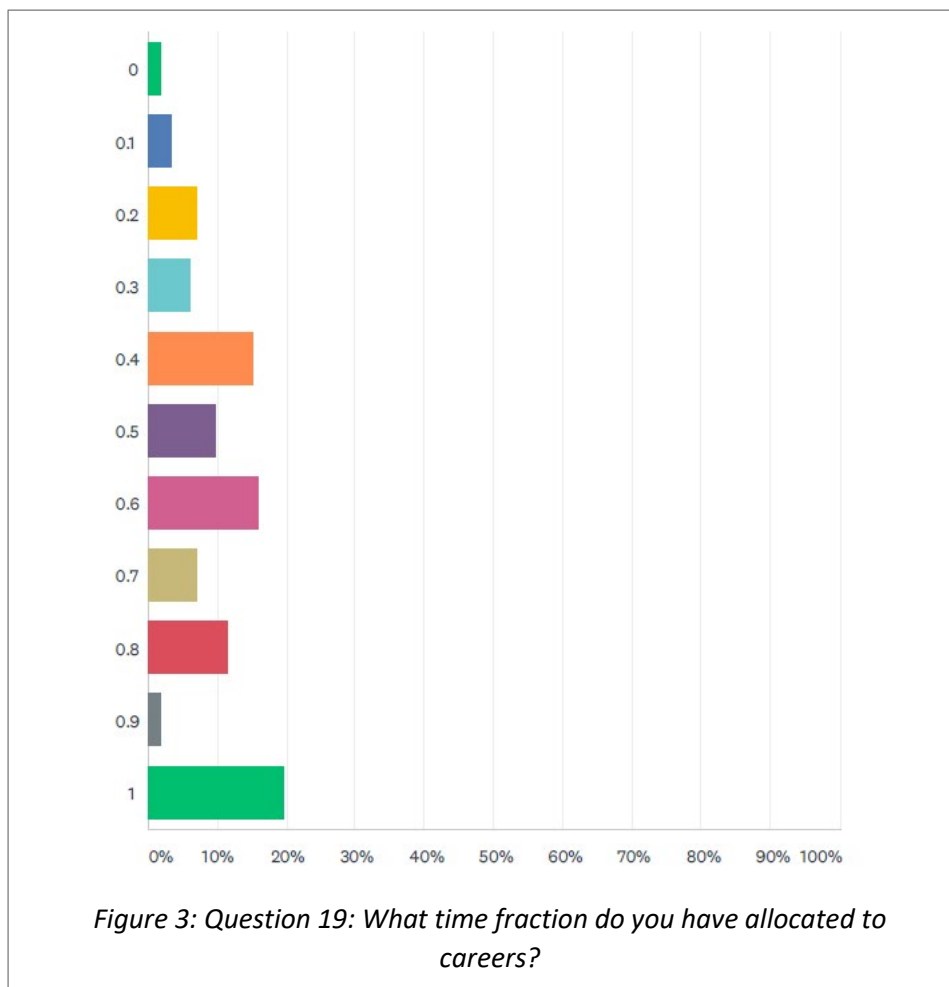
- Most career practitioners who responded maintained professional membership of the Career Education Association of Victoria (95%).
- Many respondents also maintained professional membership of the Career Industry Council of Australia (41%).
- Some were members of the Career Development Association of Australia, local industry boards, or Local Learning and Employment Networks.
- Professional expertise was also retained by attending:
 - regular career practitioner days (96%)
 - industry information sessions (81%) and VTAC briefings (91%)
 - regular career group network meetings
 - workshops on VET and other course options, and other relevant webinars.

Career practitioners are professionals who should be recognised as such.

- Some of the practitioners who responded to the survey commented on their individual situations. One respondent noted that they counsel and support all the Year 11 and 12 students at their school which is nearly 900 students and oversee the full program on a 0.8 FTE allocation.
- Another practitioner who responded chose their time allocation as being 0.1 FTE when in fact they are only allocated 45 minutes per fortnight.
- One respondent stated they are expected to design pathway options for any student who is denied enrolment into their school, and for any student who has left the school when deciding on postgraduate positions or wanting to change direction many years out of school. This is in addition to counselling their own school's students.
- Another respondent received a Position of Responsibility payment for their role but was only offered the payment 3-years into the position - this was \$1000 less than the other positions of responsibility at the school.
- A respondent employed in an Education Support position was given a 0.2 FTE allowance for careers but had never been given any job description explaining what was expected of the role.

These responses are an indication of the wide range of issues that career practitioners are dealing with in their roles because of unclear conditions.

Teachers who are also career practitioners in schools deal with other issues. Meeting with entire year levels of students takes large amounts of time, particularly as these meetings raise other issues that need to be addressed. The amount of time out of a full-time load that the career practitioners had allocated to careers is summarised in Figure 3 below:



Some of the responding teachers work full time in careers (18%), while others have very little time allocated to careers.

- 8% reported that they had 0.2 FTE allocated to careers
- 6% had 0.1 FTE allocated to careers
- 2% had no time allocated for careers.

0.1 FTE is 3-hours per week - enough time to see 6 students for 30 minutes each.

It is not possible to fulfil a career practitioner role, given all the requirements of the position, with so little time allocated. Over half of all respondents came from schools with a compulsory work experience program and in almost 80% of cases, this program was managed by the career practitioner. In a quarter of these schools, it is organised for over 200 students. Most also visited students when they were on work experience (78%) and met with students to debrief their work experience (71%).

Many of the responsibilities of career practitioners in schools are related to management. The role involves designing programs, developing curriculum, managing major events such as career expos and work experience programs and liaising with a range of key clients such as parent groups and ex-student networks. Examples of these activities can be seen below in Figure 4.

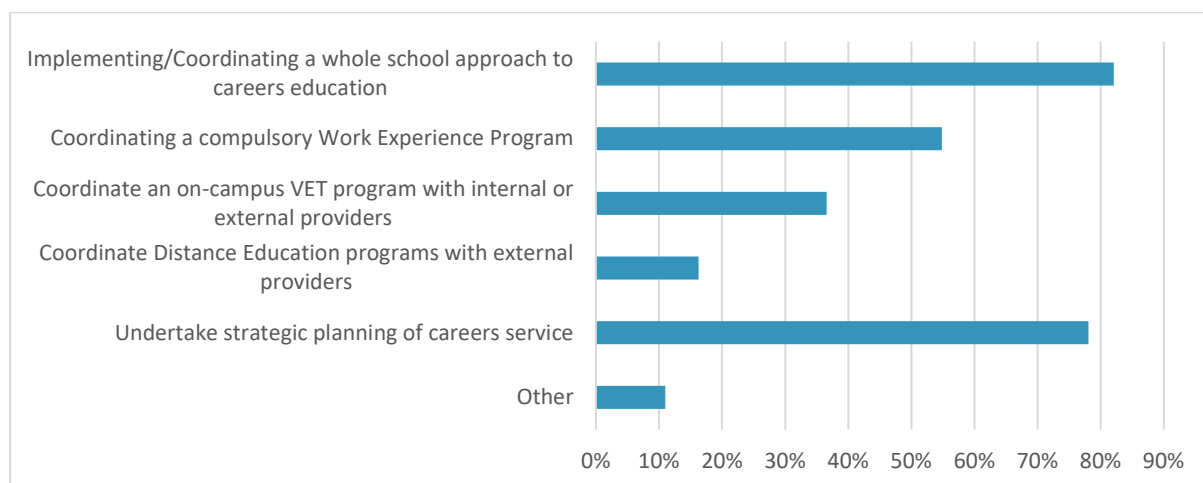


Figure 4: Question 45: In your current role, in which of the following tasks and duties do you perform managerial responsibilities?

In addition, career practitioners also manage aspects of the work for various year levels such as managing groups of teachers to deliver career curriculum and activities. This involves supporting teaching colleagues who don't have career qualifications or expertise, educating staff about career pathways (including within the learning area), and setting expectations for staff.

It is encouraging to see that the Victorian Government clearly sees the need for strong career advice in schools and is providing funding and resources to assist in this process. However, decisions about time allocation and remuneration are being decided at the individual school level and this has resulted in dramatic inconsistencies in career education between schools. If the Victorian Government wants students to receive effective career education and support, then minimum conditions should be established for the time allocated to careers and the pay grade of practitioners.

Career positions in education require qualified professionals to manage their areas with a high level of autonomy and develop curriculum and resources across senior levels of the school. Practitioners

must manage finances, work with the wider school community, guide other professional staff and report back to the school leadership. They must liaise with a wide range of different professional bodies and will face expanded responsibility as career work is extended to extend to more junior levels of the school. Considering these responsibilities, practitioners employed as Education Support career practitioners should be graded at least as Level 1 Range 4.

The following role description reflects the minimum requirements of career practitioners in schools at Level 1 Range 4:

Range 4 is distinguished by broader management responsibility, particularly in the areas of finance, human resource, delivery of professional student support services and/or clinical management and other support functions. Range 4 is responsible for managing a range of functions under a wide range of conditions, subject to the size and complexity of school operations. Management responsibility extends to ensuring appropriate support levels are maintained across the school. Range 4 generally provides key support and timely advice to the leadership team and school council, and liaises with the general school community, the Department, and other government agencies and support providers.

Professional student support services at this level will carry out their duties and responsibilities, relative to their professional discipline, with a higher level of autonomy and with minimal reliance on professional supervision. This position would generally be filled by an experienced professional. At this level a position would be responsible for the development and implementation of professional support programs within an educational environment, including guidance to other professional staff.

An education support class position supports the educational services being provided to students but must not include duties of teaching as defined in clause 2.6.1 of the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Vic) or its successor. Supervision of students cannot be required except where it is an integral part of the employee's position or involves supervision of students individually or in small groups, in controlled circumstances, where the responsibility for students remains clearly with a teacher.

Source: Dimensions of Work Education Support Class, Victorian Government Department of Education and Training, 2019.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The Victorian Government sees the need for strong career guidance services in schools and is prepared to fund career practitioner resources and training. However, school career guidance and services are impacted by inconsistencies across the state due to individual decisions made at the school level that have led to:

- reclassification or downgrading of many Education Support practitioners in schools
- downgraded or wrongly classified Education Support practitioners being required to perform higher pay-grade tasks and responsibilities
- teacher career practitioners performing a range of other work that conflicts with their time and ability to deliver quality career services
- limited time allocation for the delivery of quality career guidance and career activities.

As a result of these findings, we make the following recommendations:

- I. Minimum requirements are set by the Victorian Government around the amount of time that schools must allocate to career education. This should be linked to student numbers in secondary schools.

Total time allocation in a school for career education should be at a minimum:

- 0.5 FTE for schools with student numbers in Year 10-12 of under 200
- 1.0 FTE for schools with student numbers in Year 10-12 of between 200 and 400
- 1.5 FTE for schools with student numbers in Year 10-12 of between 400 and 600
- 2.0 FTE for schools with student numbers in Year 10-12 of over 600
- schools with over 400 students in Year 10-12 should allocate an additional (min) 0.3 FTE administrative support to career services.

N.B. The Government's aim to start career education earlier in schools will impact the availability of the current career workforce and the minimum estimates provided above. As career services roll-out to primary classes the ratio of career professionals/time allocation to student numbers must be adjusted upwards to accommodate the increasing workload.

- II. Due to the management responsibilities that are inherent in all career practitioner roles, career practitioners who are employed in Education Support Roles in Government Schools should be recognised as Level 1 Range 4 (as a minimum).

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