



A National Framework for Career Development in Australia

The Council of Australian Governments has set important and ambitious objectives to improve levels of educational participation and attainment in order to lift workforce participation and productivity, and to improve social inclusion in Australia. To realise these goals the Australian and state\territory governments have entered into partnership agreements spanning pre-school to post compulsory education and the vocational education and training sectors.

The National Partnership Agreement on Youth Attainment and Transitions formalises the responsibilities of Commonwealth and State /Territory governments in the provision of career development services designed to maximise the engagement, attainment and successful transitions of young people. COAG has also agreed to a Youth Compact to ensure that every young person is able to access an education or training place. The Australian Government has also set targets to improve levels of higher education attainment and to expand participation by groups currently underrepresented in higher education.

The measures agreed by COAG and reflected in the partnership agreements will see wider education and training opportunities, increased choice, improvements in teaching and learning, investment in capital infrastructure and greater access to information and communications technology.

These reforms are being undertaken at a time of the most significant economic turmoil in decades which, while having less effect in Australia than many other countries, still creates an environment of considerable uncertainty in the labour market. These uncertainties and the impacts of globalisation, technological change and the need for environmental sustainability will continue to transform the nature of work and workplaces.

To understand this complex and changing environment and to capitalise on the opportunities available to them, both in education and training institutions and in the labour market, both younger and older Australians need to be able to access relevant, high quality and accurate information, to receive advice and support about how to access and interpret information and to make informed and effective choices about study and career options.

A range of OECD countries have recognized the importance of effective career development in assisting students to achieve study that leads to employment outcomes. The EU recently defined career development in a holistic way as being much more than just the provision of information to students:

“ a continuous process that enables citizens at any age and at any point in their lives to identify their capacities, competences and interests, to make educational, training and occupational decisions and to manage their individual life paths in learning, work and other settings in which those capacities and competences are learned and/or used. Guidance covers a range of individual and collective activities

relating to information-giving, counselling, competence assessment, support, and the teaching of decision-making and career management skills.” EU, 2008.

Recent OECD work on human capital suggests that career management skills may play an important role in economic growth. It points out that less than half of earnings variation in OECD countries can be accounted for by educational qualifications and readily measurable skills. It argues that a significant part of the remainder may be explained by people’s ability to build, and to manage, their skills. These ‘meta-skills’ include career management skills.

Poor choices result in poor completion rates, low levels of learner engagement and motivation, poor transition rates to further learning, poor transitions into the labour market and high levels of labour market turnover, reducing productivity levels and increasing levels of unemployment.

However the development and implementation of demand based funding models means that individuals must be able to make informed choices in an environment where marketing by providers is becoming more sophisticated and the amount of information available to individuals is increasing exponentially making it more and more difficult for individuals, particularly those with limited experience to make informed career judgements.

To consider these issues the Career Industry Council of Australia and TAFE Directors Australia recently convened a roundtable aimed at identifying strategies and priorities to improve both career service and career literacy in Australia. In addition to CICA and TDA roundtable participants were drawn from peak education and training bodies, researchers, government agencies, universities, TAFE Institutes, school principals and career development providers.

The roundtable was not a representative or decision making body but participants identified strategies and priorities which CICA and TDA believe merit consideration as a key element of the COAG reform process.

Having put in place measures to improve student experiences, options and outcomes attention must now shift to the way in which students across the sectors and age cohorts can make informed decisions and choices to fully benefit from the improvements flowing from the COAG initiatives. Many valuable initiatives have been put in place in recent years including Myfuture and the *Australian Blueprint for Career Development*.

As a guiding principle and in the context of the devolved structure for service delivery reflected in the national partnership agreements, TDA and CICA believe that all students should have a nationally consistent entitlement to high quality, relevant and accurate information and the capacity to access and interpret that information.

This principle can best be achieved through an agreed National Framework for Career Development in Australia.

The key elements of the framework are:

- Development of career literacy in individuals.
 - Career literacy includes the skills of understanding one’s own strengths and weaknesses, and needs and wants; of being able to identify relevant opportunities, and access information on them; of being able to take career-related decisions; and of being able to present oneself effectively in order to gain access to courses or jobs.

- The development of a model of career information services as a continuum of services available to individuals and reflecting their differing needs over the course of their learning and working lives;
- Capacity building in both of these elements including an appropriate quality assurance model for career development services.

Based on common principles this framework should include guidelines for both career development services and career information services, span the education sectors and service providers, reflect the diversity of the sectors and service providers and build on existing policies and initiatives including the *Australian Blueprint for Career Development* and Myfuture.

Specific areas for further development of the framework include:

- Agreed language and terminology across service providers so that individuals are more easily able to interpret information;
- The development of career literacy\ capabilities in all AQF qualifications regardless of their different pedagogical basis including models which better integrate work and learning in a way that enables young people in particular to learn from and reflect on work experience, work placement and casual and part-time work;
- Better understanding of the needs of specific groups and of individuals at different career and life stages and targeting of information and services to these needs;
- Clarity and agreement around underpinning policies and roles at national, state, regional and local levels;
- A process to strongly engage industry to increase understanding of and commitment to career services and in providing information and advice to ensure the currency and relevance of services;
- The use of new technology in both gathering information, in information provision and in providing ongoing support to individuals.

The development of the Framework should reflect:

- An understanding of the way in which the national partnership agreements impact on current services and meet future career development needs,
- Outcomes from research and enquiries into career development including the capabilities and effectiveness of current services, identification and sharing of best proactive and taking into account recently commissioned services,
- The need to ‘future proof’ services so that they are flexible and adaptable to changing circumstances
- An understanding of international experience and best practice

To progress the development of this framework CICA and TDA will:

- Seek to have the issue of career development considered by the COAG Productivity Action Working Group, including the need for a National Framework for Career Development and the ongoing national structures needed to support its implementation;
- Convene an invitational seminar to further develop the key elements of the framework.