



MASTER BUILDERS
A U S T R A L I A

SUBMISSION TO COAG Education Council

Review of Senior Secondary Pathways

December 2019



© Master Builders Australia Limited 2019.

Master Builders Australia Limited

ABN 68 137 130 182

Level 3, 44 Sydney Avenue, FORREST ACT 2603

T: +61 2 6202 8888, F: +61 2 6202 8877, enquiries@masterbuilders.com.au, www.masterbuilders.com.au

This submission is copyright and all rights are reserved. No part of it may be reproduced, stored, transmitted or otherwise distributed, in any form or by any means without the prior written permission of the copyright holder. Images on the cover are winners of Master Builders National Excellence in Building and Construction Awards.

Introduction

This submission to the Review of Senior Secondary Pathways represents the views of Master Builders Australia. It is informed by our experience and the experience of our member associations and the building and construction businesses we collectively represent. In preparing this submission we have engaged with our state and territory associations, business owners, employers, apprentices and vocational training providers.

Master Builders Australia is the nation's peak building and construction industry association. Federated on a national basis in 1890, Master Builders Australia's members are the Master Builder state and territory associations. Over 129 years the movement has grown to over 33,000 businesses nationwide, including the top 100 construction companies. Master Builders Australia is the only industry association representing all three sectors—residential, commercial and engineering—of the construction industry, an industry that generates over \$200 billion for the Australian economy annually.

The building and construction industry is facing an ageing workforce and significant labour shortages over the coming years. As at the 2016 Census, 74,117 workers in the industry were aged 60 or over, equivalent to 8.1 per cent of the construction workforce at that time. Total employment in the industry is anticipated to exceed 1.3 million by May 2023, an increase of nearly 120,000 on May 2018. The required growth in the building and construction industry workforce will be this plus replacement of workers who exit and/or retire.

The pathway from senior secondary school into apprenticeships is a key source of labour for the building and construction industry and, as such, we are pleased to be able to contribute to the Review of Senior Secondary Pathways. This submission discusses:

- Addressing the bias toward university pathways
- Improving awareness of the diversity of career opportunities and pathways
- Developing skills for success
- Helping students to be work ready
- Addressing concerns with vocational education and training (VET) in schools
- Working collaboratively with the National Careers Institute.

All pathways and occupations are valued

The Managing Director of the National Centre for Vocational Education and Research (NCVER), Simon Walker, in a 2019 Vocational Voices podcast noted that parents are the main source of career advice for their children and they view university as being a higher status pathway with greater opportunities, even though many students would be better off taking alternative choices.¹

Parents are key influencers in careers decisions, however, they are often not up to date with the latest available career opportunities and education pathways. In addition, their advice may be based on their own experiences, potentially from some time ago, leading to limited or biased information.

Feedback from a Master Builders member who employs apprentices and has represented the building industry at a number school career days agreed that parents have a bias toward university and school careers education needs to educate parents too. At a recent careers day he participated in parents attended and this was particularly useful to dispel misconceptions. Other members have echoed these concerns and suggested information talks for parents or parent career forums could be beneficial.

Recommendation 1:

To improve parental awareness of the diversity of occupations and pathways, schools and those designing school career programs should look for opportunities to include and educate parents. For example, inviting them to career days or hosting information sessions especially for parents.

In addition to parents, school careers advisers and teachers are key sources of information for students. However, the quality of careers education varies significantly across the secondary schooling system. In some schools being a careers adviser is an additional job taken on without any background. There is a need for greater support for career education in schools.

Current senior secondary careers information favours university over VET pathways. Addressing this bias, overcoming misconceptions, and recognising that higher education and VET are equal and integral parts of a joined up and accessible post-secondary education system – as the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) did at their August 2019 meeting² – will be critical to helping students understand their options and choose the most appropriate pathway for their transition to work, further education and training.

Longitudinal research by the NCVER³ found that secondary students who followed an apprenticeship/traineeship pathway had the highest rate of full-time employment at age 25 (97.4%).

¹ Vocational Voices, 2019. Transcript of Youth pathways: from school to work and everything between podcast; Season 3, Episode 2

² COAG, 2019. Vision for Vocational Education and Training

³ NCVER, 2019. School-to-work pathways.

We need a system that values more than academic results and university pathways. It needs to place equal value on all occupations and pathways, and be centred on the interests and aspirations of students.

Whilst noting that this review is focused on senior secondary school, Master Builders Australia notes that by the time students commence senior secondary school many have already formed views about vocational and university pathways. School careers education should commence earlier, for example in year 8.

Recommendation 2:

To instill public confidence and assist to address the bias toward university pathways, the COAG Education Council should make a public commitment to value all pathways and occupations equally and to put the interests and aspirations of senior secondary school students at the centre of their career pathway education.

Recommendation 3:

All secondary schools should be appropriately resourced to provide quality up-to-date careers education to secondary school students that equally values all pathways and occupations and puts the interests and aspirations of students at the centre of their career pathway education.

Pathways and occupations are diverse

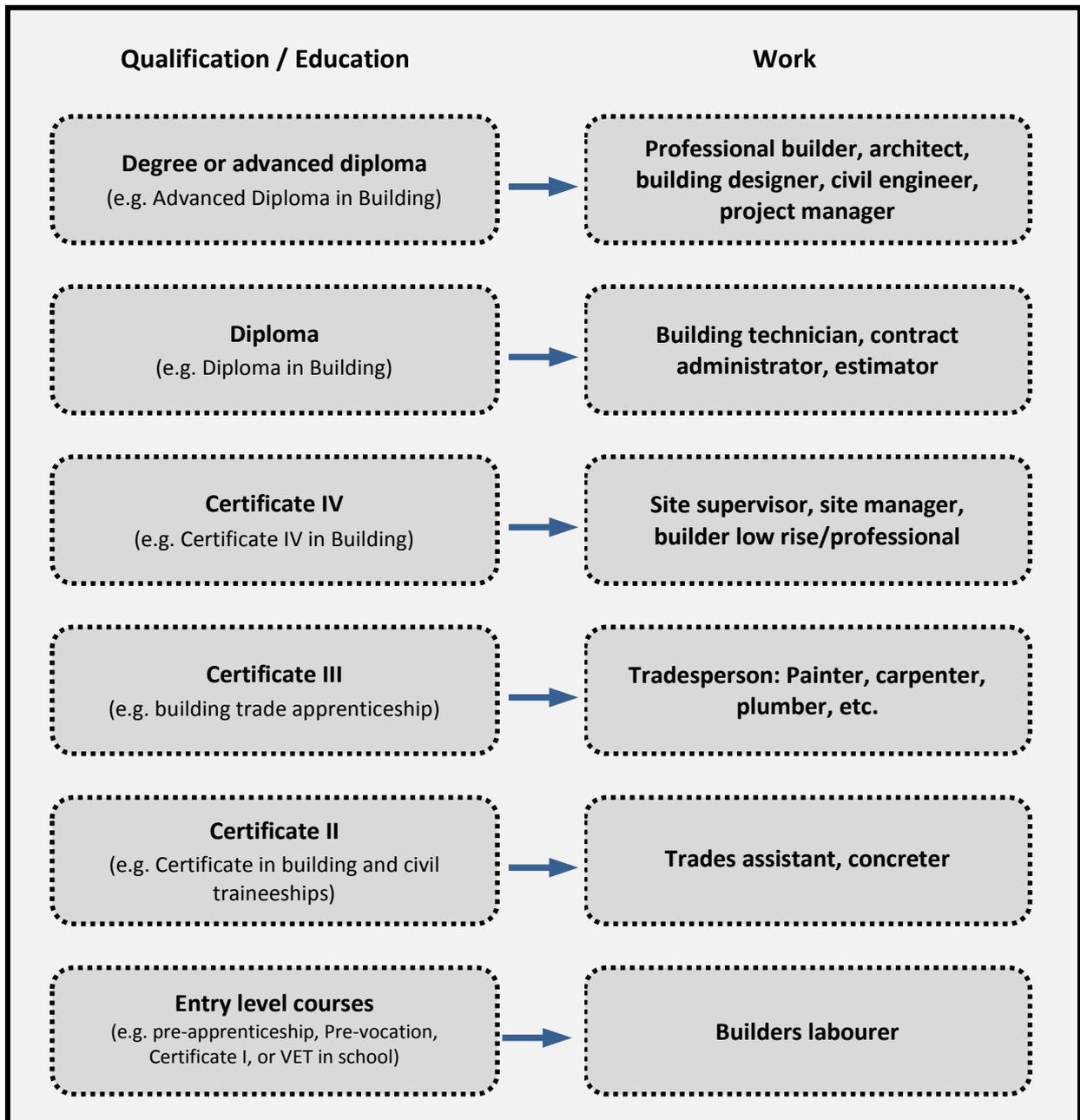
There is a huge diversity of careers available and students often only see the tip of the iceberg. To make an informed decision about their future that aligns with their interests and aspirations students need a careers education system that provides exposure to the breadth of possibilities, both in terms of available careers and the pathways they can follow to access said careers.

For many students careers education means being bombarded with information at careers days or being presented with a multitude of possible directions following a rudimentary aptitude test. As much as possible careers information and exposure should be integrated into the curriculum. For example teaching trigonometry in the context of carpentry or surveying.

Recommendation 4:

To improve student understanding of how school subjects link with careers and to place careers education within the day-to-day context of school learning, schools should as much as possible integrate careers information and exposure into the curriculum. For example teaching trigonometry in the context of carpentry or surveying.

The careers available through vocational education are often broader than the entry level roles students are advised about. For example, completing an apprenticeship doesn't necessarily mean that someone will be a tradie their whole career. They could become a registered builder or a project manager, they could start their own business, become an industry trainer or put their expertise to good use in an industry association. Below is a sample of pathways and careers in building and construction:



Universities have established networks with schools and provide open days and talks on pathways into higher education. VET would benefit from a similar structured opportunity for students rather than students relying on adhoc opportunities to explore VET pathways. We note a key challenge for VET is that nationwide there are over 4000 training providers.

Improving linkages between industry and school career programs may represent an alternative option to assist students to make more informed decisions. Students could have the opportunity to learn first-hand from businesses and industries about the diversity of occupations and pathways available in their sector, the realities of undertaking particular work and the expectations of employers. Students could also ask questions and make contacts in their preferred industry.

Work placements can be a positive experience and provide real exposure to daily life in a career or industry. Work experience should be part of secondary and senior secondary education, with students encouraged to undertake placements in different sectors and different sized businesses. This experience will also assist students to understand the work environment, develop realistic expectations and be work ready upon completion of school. Providing work placements to students will require close linkages between schools and industry.

Other opportunities could include grant funding for initiatives that target specific industries or audiences. For example, Master Builders Australia, through a grant from the Commonwealth Office for Women, developed the Women Building Australia program to encourage female participation in the building and construction industry. This program includes information booths at career expos around the country and a mentoring program.

Recommendation 5:

Schools should partner with industries and businesses to leverage their knowledge and experience to provide informed real world careers information to students and facilitate work placements for students as part of their secondary and senior secondary education.

A skilled path to success

As noted in the discussion paper, the nature of work is changing. Routine tasks are being automated and many entry-level roles are disappearing. In the construction industry, for example, robotics and building information modeling have the potential to transform how work is done and managed.

Michael Brennan, Chair of the Productivity Commission, highlighted in a speech to TAFE Directors Australia in September 2019 that:

It will be individual tasks, rather than entire jobs, which are most likely to be automated in the future. In general, it has proven easier to automate routine tasks... It is tasks that rely on perception, creative intelligence, social intelligence, empathy or high levels of dexterity that have proven harder to automate.⁴

⁴ Brennan, 2019. Future of Markets and TAFE: <https://www.pc.gov.au/news-media/speeches/future-markets-tafe>

Transitioning from school to post-secondary education to an ever changing working environment will require students to be flexible and resilient. School students that learn strategies to manage uncertainty, embrace new experiences and develop emotional intelligence will be better placed for the pathways beyond school than those who don't get this opportunity.

The discussion paper notes that there is contention around what skills key stakeholders – students, educators and employers – expect young people to gain through their schooling. This should come as no surprise given it is in senior secondary school that student pathways diverge from the comparatively homogenous schooling experience that preceded it. Each stakeholder group looks through their own lens at what the student will do after school and the skills they will require for this. For example, for many students it is about being independent and so they place value on learning life skills.

Whether it is skills for life, employment or further education, having a strong foundation is essential – numeracy and literacy are this foundation. The recently released findings for the 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)⁵ show there is room for improvement in Australia's reading, mathematics and scientific literacy, although we did perform on par or better than the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average.

- Reading literacy: 59% achieved the National Proficient Standard* (the Standard) (slightly above the OECD average of 54%)
- Mathematical literacy: 54% achieved the Standard (equal to the OECD average)
- Scientific literacy: 58% achieved the Standard (slightly above the OECD average of 52%).

While not detracting from the importance of numeracy and literacy, there are a range of other skills and qualities that would be beneficial for students graduating secondary school to have. These include:

- Self-awareness, resilience and emotional intelligence
- Analytical thinking and problem solving (assessing situations, risks, opportunities and consequences)
- Working autonomously (initiative and personal drive) and in teams (collaborative, cooperative and interpersonal skills)
- Communicating and interacting with diverse individuals and groups of people.

Employers in the construction industry value students learning the skills necessary to be work-ready when they graduate from secondary school. This is explored further in the next section, *The path to being work ready*. In addition to this, it is also critical that employers have the skills necessary to relate to young people and support them in the workplace.

⁵ ACER, 2019. <https://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1035&context=ozpisa>

*National Proficient Standard: In Australia, students who scored at or above Level 3 achieve the Standard. This level represents 'a reasonably challenging level of performance where students need to demonstrate more than the minimal skills expected'. 14,275 15-year-old Australian students from 740 schools took part in the 2018 PISA.

The path to being work ready

Apprentices and trainees, unlike most other post-secondary education pathways, go straight into their careers. A key challenge employers face when hiring an apprentice is a lack of work-ready candidates. Learners that commence without being work-ready are less likely to complete their apprenticeship. This costs employers, trainers and government time and money, and can create issues for the apprentice's future work prospects.

Our view is that learners sit on a continuum of work readiness. If schools, training providers and employers are able to understand and assess if a learner is work-ready or requires additional training, such as a pre-apprenticeship, then education, training and employment outcomes can be improved.

In 2016 Master Builders Australia received funding from the Australian Government under the *Innovative Arrangements for Apprenticeship and Trade Training Delivery Pilot Project* to conduct four pre-apprenticeship introduction to construction pilots.

Whilst the pilots were designed to provide participants with introductory skills and knowledge in a range of construction trades and job roles, the research and evaluation processes also identified that employers are very aware of the attributes a work-ready apprentice needs to maximise their chances of success. Many of these attributes are applicable to any work environment, whilst others are industry specific.

The attributes identified include⁶:

- Motivation and interest in the industry and a basic understanding of the 'industry-speak'
- Work ethic and experience
 - Employers look for apprentices with work experience as they have found this correlates well with an improved understanding of the world of work. Many employers nominated experience in the fast food industry highly as it provides an understanding of the pressures of customer service and requires workers to be on time, well presented and work in a team.
- Communication and basic social skills
 - Once in the workplace apprentices need to be able to speak up and communicate with subcontractors and people from diverse cultural backgrounds.
- Understanding of and good attitude to safety
- Willingness to observe and learn with a sense of self-responsibility and a 'good attitude'
 - Employers highlighted that skills can be taught, attitudes can't.
- Realistic expectations about the physical nature of construction jobs, the type of work involved and the nature of the work hours
- A driver's licence (or on the way to getting one).
 - Not having a driver's licence can be and a barrier to recruiting young apprentices.

⁶ Lista Consulting, 2018. Evaluation of Master Builders Australia Ltd Pty Pre-Apprenticeship Project

In other research and consultation undertaken by Master Builders Australia, employers have also identified a lack of literacy, numeracy and time management skills as key issues for many apprentice candidates.

Following the successful pilots, the final report in 2018 recommended the development of a work-readiness continuum and associated assessment tool. This would detail the attributes, skills and knowledge required by industry for various apprenticeships and would enable candidates, schools, training providers and employers to assess a candidate's readiness for work. If a candidate is not sufficiently work-ready the assessment tool would be able to identify the areas for development to increase employability. Progressing this work through further consultation, research and testing is subject to financial support, the results of which could then be extrapolated to other industries.

Recommendation 6:

To improve student employability and enhance pathway progression the government should develop, or provide funding for industry to develop, a work-readiness continuum and assessment tool to assist students, educators, trainers and employers to identify students that are work ready and the areas for development and support in those that are on their path to becoming work ready.

Vocational education and training in school

VET in school presents a real opportunity to highlight the value of VET and the rewarding careers it can lead to. For students that complete a VET course and seek employment in the same industry, it demonstrates to employers that they have a genuine interest.

At present, however, the quality of VET in schools varied. The discussion paper states:

There are concerns over the quality and outcomes of VET delivered to secondary school students, including a lack of value by industry, and inconsistent approaches toward competency-based quality assurance. Whether this is the reality or not, these concerns represent a reputational risk to the sector.

Concerns with the quality of VET in school is an issue that has been raised with Master Builders Australia by our members. In addition to the concerns noted in the discussion paper, we have also been told that:

- VET in school students do not have appropriate access to real work situations
- Some schools do not have appropriate training facilities and/or have trainers that lack industry experience
- There are regulatory impediments preventing industry trainers and tradies from teaching in schools
- Some schools engage RTOs that train to the minimum benchmark rather than ensuring that students are competent to workforce expectations on completion.

These issues undermine the value of qualifications attained through VET in school and can negatively impact employment prospects. For example, competency-based wage progression for apprenticeships can mean that if a student holds certain qualifications an employer is required to pay them as a second year apprentice, even if they don't have the skills or experience. Consequently the employer may choose not to hire them.

Addressing the VET in school quality issues will require coordination and collaboration between policy makers, schools, the VET sector and industry.

Recommendation 7:

The review should qualify and quantify the extent of the VET in school issues and the impact on student pathways, with the final report to propose recommendations to address these issues.

The National Careers Institute

Master Builders Australia notes that the Commonwealth Government has established the National Careers Institute to simplify and strengthen careers development and information for Australians. At this point it is unclear how the school system and the careers education it provides to students will interact with the Institute.

The co-design process for the National Careers Institute and this Review are taking place concurrently with some overlapping objectives. It is critical that silos don't develop and that the intelligence garnered through each consultation process is shared for the benefit of both. Additionally, the Review panel and secretariat, and the National Careers Institute should identify opportunities for joint consultative processes.

We note that the National Careers Institute will be setting up a grants program to boost partnerships between industry, employers, schools and tertiary providers, enhance information and address service gaps. Careers education in schools may benefit from the COAG Education Council providing funding for a grant program specifically targeting initiatives that connect industry and schools.

Recommendation 8:

The Review panel and secretariat work with the National Careers Institute to: identify opportunities for joint consultation on shared objectives; ensure that silos do not develop, and share findings and intelligence.

Recommendation 9:

The COAG Education Council should fund a grant program for industry-school initiatives and projects to improve students understanding of career opportunities and assist them to make informed decisions about their post-school pathways.

Summary of recommendations

Master Builders Australia recommends:

- 1 Schools and those designing school career programs look for opportunities to include parents, such as inviting them to career information days, in order to improve parental awareness of the diversity of occupations and pathways, and to address the bias toward university pathways.

 - 2 The COAG Education Council instill public confidence and assist to address the bias toward university pathways by making a public commitment to value all pathways and occupations equally and to put the interests and aspirations of senior secondary students at the centre of their career pathway education.

 - 3 All secondary schools be appropriately resourced to provide quality up-to-date careers education to secondary school students that equally values all pathways and occupations and puts the interests and aspirations of students at the centre of their career pathway education.

 - 4 schools integrate careers information and exposure into the curriculum – for example teaching trigonometry in the context of carpentry or surveying – to improve student understanding of how school subjects link with careers and to place careers education within the day-to-day context of school learning.

 - 5 Schools should partner with industry and businesses to leverage their knowledge and experience to provide informed real world careers information to students and facilitate work placements for students as part of their secondary and senior secondary education.

 - 6 The Government improve student employability and enhance pathway progression by developing, or providing funding to industry to develop, a work readiness continuum and assessment tool to assist students, educators, trainers and employers to identify students that are work ready and the areas for development and support in those that are on their path to becoming work ready.

 - 7 The review qualify and quantify the extent of the VET in school issues and the impact on student pathways, with the final report to propose recommendations to address these issues.

 - 8 The review panel and secretariat work with the National Careers Institute to identify opportunities for joint consultation on shared objectives; ensure that silos do not develop; and share findings and intelligence.

 - 9 The COAG Education Council establish and fund a grant program for industry-school initiatives and projects to improve students understanding of career opportunities and assist them to make informed decisions about their post-school pathways.
-