



**Australian Government**

**Department of Education,  
Science and Training**

# **School Students Making Education and Career Decisions: Aspirations, Attitudes and Influences**

## **Final Report**

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## **Privacy**

In all cases, personal names used in quotations in this report are fictitious.

In Chapter 3, because most schools employed only one Career Adviser, where appropriate, school sites have been de-identified in relation to comments about the operation of career information services. Elsewhere in the document where privacy is at stake, quotations have also been de-identified.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Introduction

This study, *School Students Making Education and Career Decisions: Aspirations, Attitudes and Influences*, was contracted and funded by the Department of Education, Science and Training (2003). The study investigated five key themes, namely:

- Education and career decision-making processes;
- Career Advisers and career information services in schools;
- Vocational Education and Training in Schools;
- Traditional trades as a career; and
- Teaching as a career.

Each of these themes was investigated from the perspectives of students, parents, school Career Advisers and Principals.

Very broadly, the study investigated the ways that Year 10 and Year 12 students make education and career decisions, the processes that they draw on in arriving at these decisions, and critical factors that influence their thinking about a range of study and career issues. In examining decision-making processes, the study paid particular attention to the influence of Career Advisers, the uptake and reception of Vocational Education and Training in schools, attitudes to traditional trades and school-based New Apprenticeships, and current thinking about teaching as a career.

Importantly, the study examined whether decision-making of this kind was associated with students' gender, and with the socio-economic and geographical demographics of the schools that students attended.

## Methodology

In order to examine education and career decision-making processes in relation to a range of school demographics, school sites were selected to represent socio-economic (upper-, middle-, and lower-) and geographical (metropolitan and rural) demographics of the catchment areas in which the schools were located. To this end, the following sites were selected:

- 2 schools – one lower and one middle SES school – were located in Perth in Western Australia.
- 3 schools – one lower, one middle and one higher SES school – were located in Brisbane in Queensland.
- 3 schools – one lower, one middle and one higher SES school – were located in Sydney in New South Wales.
- 1 school was located in a rural location in New South Wales.

In each of these schools, focus group interviews were conducted with Year 10 and Year 12 students, with Career Advisers (where more than one existed) and, on occasions, with interested staff who shared career-advising responsibilities. Individual interviews were conducted in the case where only one representative was available namely, with Principals, and with Career Advisers where there was only one within the school. In New South Wales parents of Year 10 and Year 12 male and female students were also interviewed in focus groups.

In Queensland and West Australian schools, 4 focus groups of students – Year 10 and Year 12 male and female – were interviewed. In New South Wales where the research effort was concentrated, 8 cohorts of students were interviewed. In this case, male and female focus groups were further distinguished in relation to the criterion academic/ non-academic orientation to school as judged by school staff. The focus groups were thus, Year 10 and Year 12 academic males and non-academic males, Year 10 and Year 12 academic females and non-academic females.

## **Key Findings**

Key findings are reported here in relation to each of the five key themes outlined in the Introduction to this executive summary.

### **Education and career decision-making processes**

**Key Finding 1:** Students overall had high ambitions for their careers. The majority of boys and girls hoped to go into the professional occupations. This was reflected in the strong preference for university study rather than VET after school. Students also sought fulfilment in their careers, with personal satisfaction in the job mattering most to students, ahead of remuneration, work-family balance, and job security.

**Key Finding 2:** The vast majority of students interviewed had invested time and thought into developing their future plans. Very few were completely undecided. Many students exhibited a high degree of flexibility in their thinking about career options and, thus, the concept of multiple career options (ie Option A, Option B etc) was strongly evident amongst the students. Students were often clearer about wanting to go to university or TAFE than about what to study there.

**Key Finding 3:** Students, parents and staff identified that many students commenced their career planning during the junior grades of secondary school – earlier than students had in previous years. In light of this, teachers and parents expressed concern that students may be making choices too early. The view was also expressed that students identified as ‘at-risk’ of leaving the school system might be influenced to remain within the educational system if involved in even earlier (i.e., before Year 10) career planning.

**Key Finding 4:** Influences on student career planning were complex and diverse.

- Parents viewed their influence as being minimal, yet students and Career Advisers frequently claimed that parents were a key influence.
- Many students considered themselves to be ‘self-determining’ while some cited parents and family members to be influential. (The influence associated with schools and career advising services is discussed in the next theme)
- For many, their level of academic achievement set the parameters for the kinds of careers to which they could reasonably aspire. Nevertheless, for many students their aspirations were kept buoyant by articulated pathways across and within institutions, and knowledge of ‘back door’ entries to courses to which they aspired.
- For both male and female students the consideration of whether, and/or when, to have a family was rarely featured in their accounts of what influenced their career decision making – they made little connection between these life decisions.



**Key Finding 5:** The information provided to students to enable them to make subject choices and the processes through which the information was made available varied between schools as did students' perceptions of the processes. While some students reported confidence in their understanding of the process, others expressed low levels of confidence. Student confidence was linked to the processes operating within particular school sites.

### **Career Advisers and career information services in schools**

**Key Finding 1:** The type of service provided by a Career Adviser was found to vary significantly between schools with two opposing approaches on a continuum of service delivery being identified. In the student-centred approach, the career adviser worked proactively with the student, while in the information centred approach the adviser primarily disseminated information. Students and parents at schools with a student-centred approach to career advising expressed confidence in their access to the school-based information, support and services. Students from schools that adopted an information-centred approach to career advising were significantly less confident about accessing helpful school-based support and information.

**Key Finding 2:** General awareness amongst students of the career services and information available was considered by Career Advisers to be satisfactory. Timetabling priorities in schools were identified by Career Advisers as a crucial determinant in the scheduling of career classes and as a determinant of year levels at which formal exposure to career exploration commenced.

**Key Finding 3:** Tensions were identified concerning the philosophy of practice adopted by Career Advisers with some identifying themselves as proactive and interventionist in shaping students' career aspirations compared to other Career Advisers more reluctant to express their role in such terms.

**Key Finding 4:** Career-related information used by Career Advisers, students and parents was sourced from diverse places including government publications, school information events, internet sites and university Open Days. Career Advisers who adopted a student-centred approach were identified as a key resource by students and parents whereas those who adopted an information-centred approach were not viewed as a key resource.

**Key Finding 5:** The counselling or interpersonal skills of Career Advisers were valued highly by many students. This was most evident in comments from female students at schools that adopted an information-centred approach.

### **Vocational Education and Training in Schools**

**Key Finding 1:** The formalised language or terminology of 'VET' was not commonly used in school sites and, as such, students and parents had a limited understanding of the term per se. When the concept was explained to – or 'named' for – the students however, they were able to identify and demonstrate an understanding of that which constitutes 'VET.' Many parents and students associated VET with TAFE colleges and studies. Principals and Career Advisers tended not to distinguish subjects as being – or not being – VET, preferring to refer to the subjects without labels, and thereby signalling their taking up of a non-specific, broad-based, curriculum approach.

**Key Finding 2:** There was a sense of valuing different pathways for students – of it being a case of ‘horses for courses.’ Principals, Career Advisers and parents perceived VET in a positive light and espoused the view that VET pathways provided valuable options for students. Many of the students also perceived VET in a positive way. The lower and middle SES students and the rural students, in particular, saw VET subjects as providing valuable qualifications, key links to vocational pathways, employment opportunities and access to life skills. While this was the case, many – who encompassed all geographical, gender and SES demographics – also voiced negative perceptions, experiences and suspicions of VET.

**Key Finding 3:** Generally, students, parents and Career Advisers shared the perception that VET was for the non-academically oriented student. Those enrolling in these subjects were sometimes referred to as “drop kicks,” “drop outs” and “bludgers.” VET subjects were generally seen – by students, Career Advisers and Principals – as less intellectually demanding and less emotionally stressful in that they were more likely taken for enjoyment and as a break from a more rigorous academic load than for any other reason by the majority of enrolled students. Additionally, many students were uncertain whether VET subjects counted towards the university entry score and tended to steer away from them because of this.

**Key Finding 4:** Institutionally-based issues of concern were raised within and across Queensland and New South Wales schools. These issues included: the impact of the particular school site upon the practice of VET within the site, strained and frustrating partnerships between TAFE colleges and schools, the inflexibility of cross-institutional timetabling, transportation difficulties and the lack of resources available to schools.

### **Traditional trades as a career**

**Key Finding 1:** Students were generally unfamiliar with the term ‘traditional trades’ that appeared not to be part of their everyday lexicon. Parents and school staff, by comparison, used the term with awareness and certainty. This point is made explicit as the difference in language usage and fluency with the term appears to signal an intergenerational difference in personal knowledge and awareness of trades. For the younger generation, trades seemed to be less visible in their world where other occupations have gained ascendancy.

**Key Finding 2:** Male students in low SES schools, and in the rural school, expressed more interest in taking up a traditional trade as a career than any other group. Few students attending upper and middle SES schools – male or female – reported an interest in adopting a traditional trade as a career or in pursuing a school-based apprenticeship. In New South Wales where focus groups were selected in relation to the criterion of academic/non-academic orientation to school, it was evident that within the low SES and rural schools, it was non-academic male students who were interested in trades as a career. Academic males in these schools responded more like their male peers in middle and upper SES schools in that they generally were uninterested in pursuing a trade as a career.

**Key Finding 3:** The non-academic male students in low SES and rural schools who were interested in pursuing a trade as a career viewed the prospect positively. They saw trades

as offering good opportunities, a chance in life, and good wages. The vast majority of students who did not share this interest viewed trades in negative terms – as offering too low a salary, too little prestige, too little security and unfavourable working conditions.

Parents as a group were divided in their view of trades as a career while staff were generally supportive of the career decisions that students made for themselves.

**Key Finding 4:** Parents, Career Advisers and Principals expressed concern about the difficulties of finding opportunities in training for traditional trades and were somewhat critical of the current operation of school-based New Apprenticeships. There was concern, for instance, that students were mostly able to access McDonald's and Big W 'traineeships' rather than 'traditional apprenticeships' that were proving much more difficult for schools to secure.

While school staff and parents offered in-principle support applauding the diversification of the curriculum, both groups expressed on-going concerns about too-early specialisation at school that might truncate future choices available to students. Specifically, there was concern that early specialisation into vocational pathways might serve to consolidate socio-economic and cultural patterns of access to higher education and to labour.

### **Teaching as a career**

**Key Finding 1:** Students attending the low SES metropolitan schools and the rural school expressed greater interest in teaching as a career than those attending the middle and upper SES metropolitan schools. In low SES schools and in the rural school teaching appeared as a relatively attractive career option. By comparison, in the middle and upper SES metropolitan schools, teaching was often dismissed on the basis that a teaching salary could not support their life style.

**Key Finding 2:** There was a strong sense of consensus amongst students, parents and staff that teaching salaries were too low, promotional pathways too few, that the status of teaching was depressed and that university entry levels to teaching programs were declining inappropriately. They also expressed varying concerns about the conditions of working in schools that centred on the difficulties of managing student behaviour – teaching as a repetitive and uninspiring set of work practices – and the inadequate resourcing of schools – all of which served to detract top candidates from aspiring to a career in teaching.

**Key Finding 3:** The under-representation of men in the teaching workforce was generally attributed to teaching salaries. While there were some dissenting voices, many students, parents and staff argued that many men still assumed prime financial responsibility for their families and that a teaching salary was inadequate in this event. The very low percentage of men who choose to teach in the primary and early childhood sector was attributed to the force of biology and the continuing acculturation of boys and girls into sex-segregated occupations, with teaching being identified as a female profession and the nexus between women and young children identified as 'natural'. Suspicion associated with men's (sexual) motives for working with young children was also widely cited as a deterrent to male uptake of teaching as a career.

**Key Finding 4:** Informants generally agreed that in order to induce high quality candidates to teach, teaching salaries need to be improved, promotional pathways augmented, the social status of teaching enhanced, and university admission requirements raised. In order to recruit more men into teaching, stereotyped perceptions of teaching as a feminised profession need to be challenged on all fronts and suspicion surrounding men who choose to work with young children needs to be put into a rational perspective.

**Key Finding 5:** Students at five schools challenged the interviewers when it came to questions about the recruitment of males into the teaching workforce. For them, the issue of who should teach was firmly located in performance-driven criteria rather than in issues related to the gender of the teacher. Students spoke spiritedly about ‘good’ teachers and ‘bad’ teachers, some of them male, some of the female. The message was clear – these students wanted ‘good’ teachers, whether they were male or female was of little consequence.

# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction to the Report

### 1.1 Introduction

This study, *School Students Making Education and Career Decisions: Aspirations, Attitudes and Influences*, was contracted and funded by the Department of Education, Science and Training (2003). The study investigated five key themes, namely:

- Education and career decision-making processes, including aspirations and influences;
- Career Advisers and career information services in schools;
- Vocational Education and Training in Schools;
- Traditional trades as a career; and
- Teaching as a career.

Each of these themes was investigated from the perspectives of students, parents, school Career Advisers and Principals.

Very broadly, the study investigated the ways that Year 10 and Year 12 students make education and career decisions, the processes that they draw on in arriving at these decisions, and critical factors that influence their thinking about a range of study and career issues. In examining decision-making processes, the study paid particular attention to the influence of Career Advisers, the uptake and reception of Vocational Education and Training in schools, attitudes to traditional trades and school-based New Apprenticeships, and current thinking about teaching as a career.

Importantly, the study examined whether decision-making of this kind was associated with students' gender, their academic achievement and with the socio-economic and geographical demographics of the schools that students attended.

### 1.2 Methodology

In order to examine education and career decision-making processes in relation to a range of school demographics, school sites were selected to represent socio-economic (upper-, middle-, and lower-) and geographical (metropolitan and rural) demographics of the catchment areas in which the schools were located. To this end, the following sites were selected:

- 2 schools – one lower and one middle SES school – were located in Perth in Western Australia.
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- 1 school was located in a rural location in New South Wales.

(See Appendix A, Section 1, for more detailed information).

In each of these schools, focus group interviews were conducted with Year 10 and Year 12 students, with Career Advisers (where more than one existed) and, on occasions, with interested staff who shared career-advising responsibilities. Individual interviews were conducted in the case where only one representative was available, namely, with Principals, and with Career Advisers where there was only one within the school. In New

South Wales parents of Year 10 and Year 12 male and female students were also interviewed in focus groups.

In Queensland and West Australian schools students were grouped according to gender and year level generating 4 focus groups of students, namely, Year 10 and Year 12 male and female interview groups. (See Appendix A, Section 2, for more detail). In New South Wales where the research effort was concentrated, students were grouped according to gender and year level, and in relation to whether students were considered to be 'academic' or 'non-academic'. The grouping 'academic'/'non-academic' relied on teachers' knowledge of students' subject selections and, to a lesser extent, on teachers' perceptions of students' aspirations for the future. (See Appendix A, Section 3, for information on this criterion). Thus the focus groups in New South Wales were Year 10 and Year 12 academic males and non-academic males, Year 10 and Year 12 academic females and non-academic females. (See Appendix A, Section 3, for more detailed information).

The establishment of focus groups was greatly assisted by the paid service of a School-based Project Liaison Officer who contributed significantly to the overall effectiveness of the data gathering exercise. (See Appendix A, Sections 4 and 5, for detailed discussion).

While detailed information on methodological issues mentioned above are provided in Appendix A, Appendix B displays tables indicating the number of students, parents, Career Advisers, Principals and others who participated in individual and focus group interviews at each site. Appendix C shows the individual and focus group protocols that were used at interview.

### **1.3 Background to the Study**

There is already much information about the pathways that young people take when they leave school and the careers that they follow. What is lacking, by contrast, is an understanding of the reasons for the choices made and of the influences and attitudes that underpin them. This understanding is fundamental to the development of policy in areas such as career counselling, support for young people while at school and in transition, boys' education, measures to deal with shortages in key areas such as the trades and teaching, and vocational education in schools.

Years 10 and 12 are particularly critical points in the lives of students, when students have to make important decisions about their future in education and in the workforce. Previous research by the Australian Council for Educational Research based on the longitudinal surveys of Australian youth has suggested that only 10% per cent or so of students do not continue at school beyond Year 10. Around 95% indicate that they want to go to further education and training, with a strong preference for university over vocational education and training (VET) (Rothman, 2001). In practice, at the end of Year 12 only a slightly higher proportion of students go to university than to VET courses (McMillan & Marks, 2003).

These data raise questions about how students in Year 10 and Year 12 form their career aspirations, how and by whom their views and attitudes are influenced, and at what points in their student careers they begin to make decisions about their futures. Previous research has identified parents, peers and teachers/school career advisers as key influencers (ANOP, 1990; Wilks & Orth, 1991; McMahan & Patton, 1997; Foskett & Hemsley-

Brown, 2000). If these influencers are significant in determining the choices and decisions that students make, it is important to know how these influencers form their views of the merits of various options.

By virtue of their position, school career advisers could be expected to play an increasingly important part in the career decision making of students as they move towards Year 12. In practice, their role and influence on Australian senior secondary school students is not particularly well understood. This also applies to career information more generally (Patton & McCrindell, 2001; OECD, 2002; Stokes, Wierenga & Wyn, 2003).

One important decision that students need to address is what subjects to choose for their final years in secondary school. A high proportion of senior secondary students (44% in 2002) now include some “VET in schools” subjects in their program. This proportion has risen rapidly among male and female students since 1996 (MCEETYA, 2003a).

VET in Schools refers to subjects or programs taken as part of a senior secondary certificate that on completion provide credit towards a nationally recognised VET qualification. Some VET programs studied while at school count towards university entry scores, while all such programs provide credit for particular TAFE courses and lead into traineeships and apprenticeships. VET subjects and programs at school are mainly delivered in TAFE colleges. These programs are usually at Certificate I and II level under the Australian Qualifications Framework and they cover specific industry areas such as Construction, Business and Hospitality as well as more general areas such as a certificate in Work Education.

The strong take-up of VET in schools appears to suggest that they have been well received by students. However, with the exception of Fullarton’s research (2001), there has been no in-depth analysis to date of which students enrol in these subjects, the reasons why they enrol or do not enrol in such subjects, the attitudes to VET in schools among those who do and those who do not enrol, the status of these courses among the student population and, more generally, whether VET in Schools has helped to raise the profile of VET within schools.

Broadly speaking, student choices in the recent past have led to a satisfactory supply of skills in most occupations. However, two particular occupational groups, the traditional trades and teaching, raise some concerns.

The so called “traditional trades” include occupations such as bricklayer, carpenter, motor mechanic, metal tradesperson and hairdresser, which require completion of a 3-4 year New Apprenticeship to gain a trade qualification. Workers in these trades are employed primarily in the manufacturing, construction, utilities and vehicle repair industries. Traditional trades are to be differentiated from those New Apprenticeships which have been developed in the last 10-15 Years, most of which are shorter in length and are available primarily in the service sector, such as retail and tourism.

The number of New Apprenticeships in the traditional trades has tended to move in line with the economic cycle and during the 1990s has changed only to a limited extent. By contrast, New Apprenticeships in the non-traditional areas have expanded rapidly. As a result, at the end of 2003 there were around 125,000 New Apprenticeships in training in

the traditional trades, representing 31% of all New Apprenticeships in training (NCVER, 2004).

Industry has reported a declining interest among young people in the traditional trades (Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 2003). The attitudes that contribute to these career decisions by students and the influences on such attitudes by, among others, parents, peers and career advisers, are currently poorly understood.

Attracting, recruiting and retaining people to teach has now become a priority in all jurisdictions. This broadly reflects two trends. While in the past the supply of teachers has been broadly adequate to meet school needs nationally, recruiting difficulties have existed for certain secondary specialisations, particularly the physical sciences and mathematics, technology studies and languages other than English (LOTE), and for many rural and remote and some metropolitan locations. Secondly, the median age of school teachers has risen from 34 to 43 years in the last 15 years, 44 per cent being older than 45 years (ABS, 2003). Many of these are expected to retire in the near future, potentially exacerbating existing recruiting difficulties.

An additional area of concern is the low proportion of males in the teaching workforce. The gender imbalance is particularly strong in the primary and lower secondary sectors. Furthermore, statistics tend to show that the imbalance if anything may get worse as the proportion of males among new graduates in teaching is declining (MCEETYA, 2003b). While not all agree, some researchers have argued that the lack of male teachers as role models may impact negatively on boys' education.

Recognising that incentives are needed to attract more talented people to become teachers especially where shortages are identified, the Australian Government decided that fees for students in funded places in teaching would not increase under the higher education reforms (Nelson, 2003). However, developing further policies to raise the supply of teachers, including male teachers, requires a better understanding of the attitudes of school students and their parents towards teaching and what factors impact on their decision to consider or not consider teaching as a career.

## **1.4 Structure of the Report**

The remainder of this report is structured around the five focal themes referenced in this chapter. In covering these themes, Chapter 2 investigates issues related to education and career decision-making. Chapter 3 focuses on the role and significance of Career Advisers and career information services in schools. Chapter 4 investigates the movement of Vocational Education and Training into schools and maps responses to Government efforts to broaden curriculum offerings within schools. Chapter 5 examines current attitudes to traditional trades and the availability of school-based New Apprenticeships, while Chapter 6 examines attitudes to teaching as a career, with a particular focus on the gender imbalance in the teaching workforce.

Each of these themes is examined from the perspective of students, parents, Career Advisers and Principals. Throughout these chapters there is an attempt to identify whether there are trends in the data that are associated with students' gender and/or with the socio-economic and geographic demographics of the schools that students attend.



## CHAPTER 2

### Education and Career Decision-making

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter describes and discusses findings from the focus groups about:

- The career aspirations and intentions of Year 10 and Year 12 students, how well formed these intentions were, when students had started thinking about careers and how this changed as they moved through their schooling (Sections 2.2 and 2.3);
- The influences and influencers on student decisions (Section 2.4 and 2.5);
- Subject selection and its relationship to career aspirations (Section 2.6).

#### 2.2 Young Peoples' Career Aspirations and Intentions

This topic immediately engaged young people and in most cases it was evident that the interviewees had invested time and thought in developing their future plans. Most young people across the three states voiced an opinion on their education and career aspirations and intentions and indicated that they had reached conditional decisions, involving a range of possible options.

##### 2.2.1 Multiple Aspirations and Intentions

Young people clearly had either commenced the planning process or were actively involved in developing their future education and career pathways. On the whole, they were articulate and thoughtful in their responses to the opening questions about the differences between having a 'career' and having a 'job'; their involvement in post-school education and training and their levels of certainty about their career plans.

On the issue of the differences between a 'job' and a 'career' Year 12 students stated that:

S: *A career is something that you enjoy and a job is something that you do for the money. (Year 12 Female – Lower SES WA)*

S: *A job is what you do now to get some money and a career is what you want to do for the rest of your life. (Year 12 Non-Academic Female – Upper SES NSW)*

S: *A career tends to be more something that you go and get an education for like university ... and a job requires less skill. (Year 12 Non-Academic Male – Upper SES NSW)*

S: *Job, I sort of see is you leave school, you go into a job, not necessarily with skills but a career you sort of see you've got to go into further training. (Year 12 Non-Academic Male – Middle SES NSW).*

Generally, students across all states and school locations were in agreement that a 'job' is something that is a short-term means to an income and does not require a great deal of skill or further education, whereas a 'career' is long-term, planned, enjoyable and involves further education and training.

### 2.2.2 Post School Education and Training: Multiple Options

Very few young people interviewed for this project were ‘clueless’ about their future education and career plans, almost all young people had thought about their future options and engaged in planning their post-school pathways. There was little or no difference in terms of the nominated variables: geography, gender, academic grouping, SES. Students exhibited a high degree of thoughtfulness about their futures: they had distinguished between ‘jobs’ and ‘careers’, they expected to be engaged in post-school education and training and they expressed a moderate to high degree of certainty about their intentions for the future. In many cases they emphasised that there was not a single plan. Most students had ‘Plan A’ and ‘Plan B’ and they exhibited a high degree of flexibility in their thinking about their options.

Most young people expressed the view that they would be involved in post-school education and training that was either directly related to their employment or was a general preparation for an as yet unspecified career. The transcripts provide evidence of this widely held view and the following comment is ‘typical’:

S: *Anything you want to do nowadays, you have to do further education, even if you’re on the job already and you learn something new, they usually send you off to TAFE to finish that ... you never really stop at Year 12 – you’re always learning. (Year 12 Non-Academic Female – Upper SES NSW)*

In attempting to gauge students’ level of certainty about their future education and career plans they were asked to rate this item on a scale of 0 = least certain to 5 = most certain. The majority of young people’s level of certainty about their plans was in the 3 – 5 range at both year levels. There was little variation between metropolitan and rural or between low, middle and upper SES schools, or in terms of gender or academic achievement. Some students were undecided (0 – 2 range) but these responses were in the minority. However, young people were rating their level of certainty in terms of multiple education and career plans. Many had ‘Career Plan A’ and ‘Career Plan B’. This level of planning indicated active engagement with ideas about their futures:

S: *I like the electricians I work in but, if it’s not that, I’d like to be an engineer. (Year 10 Male – Lower SES QLD)*

S: *I’ve thought about a few things – one being hairdresser or owning my own bar. With hairdressing, I’d say about 3 and the bar about 4. (Year 10 Female – Lower SES QLD)*

S: *5 for university but 3 or 4 for computing. (Year 10 Male – Middle SES QLD)*

S: *I put four ‘cause since I was a little kid, I wanted to go and do research, not so much be a doctor. I never really considered doctor. Mum and Dad kind of talked me into it and so now I’m pretty convinced but even if I do become a doctor, I don’t really like the patient side, the clinical side, I think I’ll go into research. If you become a doctor, there’s so much more options that you get. That’s why I’ve decided to be a doctor but since I was a little kid I’ve liked research so that’s my back-up. (Year 12 Academic Female – Upper SES NSW)*

S: *A 3 or 4 for medicine or law. (Year 10 Academic Male – Lower SES NSW)*

S: *I want to be a chef. That's my main option – but there's also quite a few other things that I'd like to at least try. (Year 12 Male – Lower SES WA)*

Even some Year 10 students had made a definitive decision about their future:

S: *Five, yeah, I'm determined to be a police officer. (Year 10 Non-Academic Male – Lower SES NSW)*

Parents appeared to be well informed about their children's plans for the future. They spoke with authority about their children's career planning and decision-making processes and there was a high level of parent participation in the planning stages through conversations with children, advice from family members and assistance with work-experience placements. The level of information that parents in this study exhibited may be due to the selection procedures used by the schools. It is likely that schools encouraged 'active' parents to engage in the study. These parents also would be more accessible to school staff. In the case of the rural school in the study, many parents were either teachers at the school or worked in the school office or at other schools in the district or they were actively involved in the school through parents' groups.

The views of parents was in contrast to school staff who appeared to underestimate the amount of time and effort that young people had spent thinking about their futures.

Students in both the academic and non-academic groups expressed a preference for attending university over TAFE. Non-academic students expressed this view less often than academic students. Often, students were of the view that their parents expected them to attend university even if the students themselves preferred TAFE or work as a post-school option. These points are explored in more detail under Section 2.4.

### **2.2.3 Student hopes for their career**

Some quantitative data on student career hopes, aspirations and intentions was obtained through a short questionnaire that was administered as part of the focus groups. Particular issues that students were asked to answer included what mattered most to them in thinking about what career they might have, what type of job they might end up doing after completing their main education and training, and what they hoped to do on leaving school.

Personal satisfaction in their work was the most frequently mentioned condition that mattered most to students in their career, followed by remuneration. Balancing home and work life and job security came next. This was the same for boys and girls. Academic students placed much more emphasis on personal satisfaction than non-academic students. By contrast, job security and working with others mattered more to non-academic students.

**Table 1: Percentage of students indicating what mattered most when thinking about careers (students could nominate 3 matters)**

	Boys	Girls	Academic	Non-academic	All
<i>Job security</i>	32	29	23	31	31
<i>Balancing home life and work</i>	40	37	42	35	39
<i>Personal satisfaction</i>	55	59	75	49	57
<i>Flexibility of working arrangements</i>	7	10	12	6	9
<i>Remuneration</i>	52	49	52	45	50
<i>Helping others</i>	21	33	31	24	28
<i>Status/prestige</i>	7	4	7	3	6
<i>Working with others</i>	28	25	21	34	26
<i>other</i>	6	3	1	7	4

Note: Not all students were classified to the academic/non-academic categories.

Students in the focus groups overall had high ambitions about their careers. While 10% did not have an opinion of the kind of job that they may end up in, 56% thought that they would have a career in a professional occupation<sup>1</sup>.

As expected, academic students had much higher expectations of a professional career than non-academic students. However, even among the latter, the majority expected to be in at least para-professional and trade occupations.

There was little difference between the expectations of boys and girls in terms of the likelihood of professional careers, with more than half of each group expecting to be in professional occupations. Almost 7 in 10 students of both sexes expected to end up either in a professional or para-professional career. Among those not expecting a professional career, boys were more likely to aim for trade careers, while girls were expecting to be in clerical/service worker occupations.

**Table 2: Type of job that students thought they would end up doing on finishing studies, percent**

	Boys	Girls	Academic	Non-academic	All
<i>Professional</i>	54	57	73	41	56
<i>Para professional</i>	13	10	8	14	11
<i>Trade</i>	17	8	4	15	12
<i>Other</i>	5	12	3	14	9
<i>Don't know</i>	10	9	12	13	10
<i>Non-response</i>	2	3	0	3	3
<i>Total(rounded)</i>	100	100	100	100	100

Note: Not all students were classified to the academic/non-academic categories.

<sup>1</sup> These figures are broadly in line with those from other surveys (Rothman, 2001), which suggests that the sample may after all be not too different in composition from an average group of students.

These results are consistent with what the students said they hoped to do after leaving school. Almost 80 per cent said that they hoped to undertake further education and training, rising to 90 per cent among the academic students.

University study was the clear preference for boys and girls, accounting for nearly 3 in 5 students. Among the academic students the proportion rose above 4 in 5. By contrast, only 1 in 5 or so students indicated that TAFE or apprenticeship/traineeship was their desired destination.

Boys and girls had much the same desire to go to university and to continue with further education and training. The major difference was that boys not expecting to go to university tended to think in terms of apprenticeships/traineeships, while girls were more interested in non-apprenticeship TAFE courses.

**Table 3: What students hoped to do after leaving school, percent of students**

	Boys	Girls	Academic	Non-academic	All
<i>Get a job</i>	10	10	6	18	10
<i>Get an apprenticeship or traineeship</i>	19	5	6	14	12
<i>Go to TAFE</i>	4	15	1	16	10
<i>Go to university</i>	56	58	83	34	57
<i>Other</i>	5	4	3	8	5
<i>Don't know and non-response</i>	6	8	3	10	7
<i>Total(rounded)</i>	100	100	100	100	100

Note: Not all students were classified to the academic/non-academic categories.

Data from the focus interviews supported the quantitative data represented in Table 3 in that many academic students expected to attend university and a number of non-academic students also expressed the view that university was their preferred option.

### **2.3 When Do Young People Make Career Decisions?**

Parents expressed the view that their children had either decided on a future career at an early age or that they had engaged in discussions about their options from early high school and that they firmed-up their views in Year 10.

Career Advisers and other school staff involved in career advising and the principals commented on when they thought students started to shape-up their ideas about what they wanted to do. Generally, this group considered that Year 10 was where students had opportunities to engage in career planning in their schools but there was an acknowledgement by many staff that young people engaged in the process at an earlier stage and some schools had implemented formal programs at Year 9:

*I: At what level do you think students start accessing career advice?*

*CA: About Year 10. It's a Year 10 kind of thing here. (Career Adviser – Lower SES WA)*

- CA: *I think they have a sense, in Year 10, but I think it's very young and very early, and what we do is we test them, but we also then try to say 'What do you like?' and 'What are you strong at?' ... our key goal is to make them do the things that they like and the things that they're strong at. And just to make them get that sort of self knowledge. And they say 'Yes, I think I'd like to do journalism or photography or be an engineer' so it's vague, but that's fine. I think in Year 10 that's all we want from them. I think they start to get focus in Year 12. (Career Adviser – Upper SES NSW)*
- PR: *Well from my experience probably not until Year 10, although we're working on pushing that back into the Junior School, that's part of our planning at the moment is to take it back, not only to Year 7 but into Primary Schools and that's where the real gain comes in [but] ... I don't really think many of them start focusing on it until Year 10 and even then it's a struggle to get them to think. (Principal – Rural NSW)*
- CA: *Formally we have career education in Years 9 & 10 as part of our Life Skills programs. (Career Adviser – Middle SES Qld)*
- CA: *We allow the students to participate in work experience programs [in Year 10]. ... I encourage the students to come up and speak to me about their careers as early as possible from year eight if possible, not too many come at that stage, and I usually start them off in a process of thinking and exploring and not necessarily making decisions. (Career Advising Team – Lower SES Qld)*
- CA1: *... I have Year 12s now who have chosen a pathway like [Tertiary Entrance] and they're not passing and now they are extremely stressed and now five weeks or six weeks before the end of the year ... they are thinking 'What am I going to do when I finish school?' So, and there's some kids in Year 10 who have already selected their career pathway and know where they are going to go.*
- CA2: *... and I talked to some kids today who have known what they were doing since they were pre-primary.*
- CA1: *And some will have no clue, I mean some will walk out of here in six weeks, some of those Year 12s and still have no idea.*
- CA2: *And some of our Year 12s last year we kind of had a policy in the school where we encouraged every kid to put in a TAFE application and there were quite a few kids who put in a TAFE application and then started the course and didn't like it. So they're still changing.*
- I: *Do you think many of their ideas change significantly between Year 10 and Year 12?*
- CA1: *Definitely. I think realism hits them.*
- CA2: *And yet we have Year 10 kids who are like, 'I'm going to do law' and then they pick a TE stream and at the end of Year 11 they're failing and they're like, 'I can't do this.'*
- I: *When do you think students decide what they really want to do?*
- CA2: *Depends on the kid I think.*

*CAI: Some kids know from ... primary school, other kids will leave here after twelve years of school and still have no idea, (Career Advising Team – Lower SES WA)*

### 2.3.1 Early Starters

An alternative view was put by one Career Adviser who commented that students or their parents appear to be thinking about future careers and in some cases making decisions, prior to Year 10:

CA *Traditionally, it seems to have been around about Year 10 simply because students by virtue of the system have to make decision in Year 10 as to where they're going to go in terms of post-compulsory. But having said that, I have spoken to a large number of Year 9's this year, in fact I fielded two phone calls from parents this morning about their sons' and daughters' decisions for Year 10 based on where they want to go, from a career perspective. So, it would appear that Year 9 is now that threshold. That is the point where kids are making decisions. (Career Adviser – Middle SES WA)*

Many young people expressed the view that their career planning had started prior to Year 10:

S: *I've had my plan for about a year now ... (Year 10 Female – Middle SES Qld)*

S: *I always wanted to go into medicine since I was very young – so it's like a set path. (Year 12 Male – Lower SES WA)*

Other students expressed the view that career planning should commence earlier in their schooling:

I: *And for the rest of you, when do you think [career planning] starts to shape up?*

S: *Year 9. (Year 12 Academic Females – Upper SES NSW)*

S: *Year 11 & 12 is the only time you really get the opportunity to see careers ... they should have more careers expos in Years 8 & 9. (Year 12 Female – Lower SES WA)*

Parents also reported that in some cases their children had made decisions at a relatively young age although they warned of the dangers of too early a start on the decision-making process:

S: *Well, [daughter] wants to join the Navy and do some nursing and she's wanted to do that since she's about 10 [years of age]. (Parent of Year 12 Female – Rural NSW)*

S: *Our [son's] focus is on veterinary science, that sort of area. Always has been that way, no ifs or buts. (Parent Year 10 Male – Rural NSW)*

S: *I actually think that it's too dangerous to actually start vocationalising them too early. (Parent Year 10 Female – Upper SES NSW)*

Some schools implemented formal programs prior to Year 10. The 'school-to-work' programs commenced during Year 9 for students who were considered to be 'at risk' of leaving school with no plans for further study or work, however, Year 10 was viewed as the year level where the schools focussed most of their career advice:

I: *So, at what year level do students actually begin accessing career advice and services?*



CA: *Generally Year 9. ... I've been doing some work with a separate class which has been created for students at risk as part of the school-to-work program. (Career Adviser – Lower SES NSW)*

Many Career Advisers and Principals expressed confidence in a cross-curricular approach to career advising that could be introduced prior to Year 10. Members of career advising teams in several schools commented on what they considered to be resistance by classroom teachers to the idea of introducing career planning earlier in the curriculum:

CA: *'Oh no! Not another thing. What else...' you know 'You're going to take the kids away from the basic thing', well actually in the syllabus that's coming out there's a lot of career orientated stuff anyway, so... and the teachers do it without even knowing. (Career Advising Team – Rural NSW)*

CA: *I think this whole school-to-work thing has become very big and new, but once we can get systems in place to resolve the time issue, I really believe in ... the cross curricular approach to careers and at a lower [year] level. But it's also something that you need to win conduits from within the teaching staff. It's heavy, and I understand that they are really overworked. (Career Adviser – Upper SES NSW)*

However, some schools expressed the view that they were prevented from assisting students at an earlier stage than around Year 10 through structural issues such as timetabling problems around fitting more career development work into the earlier years and a lack of resources (staffing and classroom time) to service students prior to Year 10 (apart from the 'school-to-work' programs for 'at risk' students in Year 9). Principals and Career Advisers commented that a 'culture change' would be required if assistance with career planning was to be offered prior to Year 10 as it would require classroom teachers to be involved and traditionally they were not prepared to be involved in career development curricula.

## **2.4 Influences on Decision-making**

This section examines influences on decision-making from the point of view of students (2.4.1), parents (2.4.2) and principals and career advisors (2.4.3). Within the transcript data there is a sense of the fluidity of students' planning as they weigh the outcomes of various 'unknowns' such as academic achievement, university entry, their own changing interests, availability of study options linked to cost of further study, and job opportunities.

Young people were strongly of the view that they were 'self determining'. Although some students commented that their parents wanted them to follow a particular path they claimed that they would be supported no matter what they chose to do. Where young people felt that they were under some pressure from their parents it was usually in regard to post-school study options. Several young people clearly felt that there was a parental expectation that they would choose university as an option, even when they expressed a preference to 'go and work with dad' in the family business. Parents often expressed the view that they hoped that their children would not follow the career path of the parents. This view was expressed more strongly by parents in trades or small business. It was also a view expressed by teacher-parents. Career counsellors expressed the view that parents

exerted the strongest influence on students' post school education and career aspirations while Principals were more inclined to claim that teachers exerted more influence.

#### **2.4.1 Students' Views of Influences on Decision Making**

Many young people expressed the view that they were responsible for their own futures. They held and expressed a strong sense of their own 'agency', 'self-determination', 'independence' and 'free will'. These views appear in the transcripts of interviews across all states irrespective of SES and geography although it found its strongest expression within the focus groups interviewed in an upper SES New South Wales school. Year 10 academic girls at this school provided a chorus of 'me' in response to the question about the key influences on decision-making. Non-academic Year 10 boys at the same school provided a similar response with one boy commenting:

- S: *I reckon if you're influenced by other people too much then you're not going to do it. Unless you want to do it for yourself, then you're not going to do it. If you're doing it for your mum, then ...*
- I: *Forget it?*
- S: *Yeah.*

In other schools there was a range of responses from a strongly expressed view that parents were driving the career and education decisions through to the view that young people were acting independently but with the support of their parents. In many cases, young people were explicit about their parents' expectations that they would attend university:

- S: *I want to go to TAFE. I would rather go to TAFE than university.*
- S: *So would I.*
- S: *I would rather do it but I think that I have to go to university.*
- I: *To do what, what do you want to do?*
- S: *I'm not sure. What my parents want me to do.*
- S: *... my dad, he wants me do be in vet science and I used to want to do that and then I started to change my mind because I didn't like it. Parents are a big thing.*
- S: *They just tell you what they would like and you have to just try and live up to their standards. (Year 10 Non-Academic Females – Rural NSW)*
- S: *Mum and Dad want me to do one thing but I want to do something else but, I'll end up doing what they want me to do for sure. (Year 10 Academic Female – Middle SES NSW)*

Other young people acknowledged their parents' expectations that they would attend university and they were somewhat excited by the idea:

- S: *I'll be the first person in my whole family to go to uni straight from school ... [there is] huge pressure to go to uni straight away, from pretty much everybody in my family. (Year 12 Female – Middle SES WA)*
- S: *... because nobody in my family's ever gone to uni they're really worried about how to get it done ... (Year 12 Female – Middle SES WA)*

Half of the academic Year 12 males interviewed at one middle SES NSW school cited parents as the major influence on their thinking about career and education options. All of

the non-academic Year 10 males at the same school cited parents as the major influence. These students emphatically rejected the idea that they were influenced by teachers or by the Career Adviser. At the Rural NSW school parents also were cited by young people as being very influential and at the lower SES Qld school students offered a somewhat poignant view of their parents' hopes for them:

- S: *I just want something to earn me heaps of money and my parents are happy.*  
I: *And is that very important as in their influence – your parents role in you making the decision as to your career?*  
S: *Yeah.*  
S: *It is to me.*  
S: *... they want me to become something and not be a dole bludger.*  
S: *It depends, like some parents haven't had the opportunity to go that far and they expect their children to go the furthest they can go. And that's what's happening with me, they expect something that might not happen.*  
S: *Sometimes they put like too much pressure – hope and pressure.*  
S: *And makes you feel bad if you don't go ahead with it. (Year 10 Females – Lower SES QLD)*

On the other hand, responses by young people attending a lower SES NSW school were mixed with many students citing a range of influences from media, work experience, family and friends. The transcript data indicate that many students at most schools viewed parents as being a strong influence, although they also expressed the view that they would have their parents support for whatever they chose to do:

- S: *I've just got pressure to go to uni and do something. My parents don't care really what I do. They say, 'That's up to you' but they want me to actually go to uni ... (Year 12 Non-Academic Male – Upper SES NSW)*

In the following extract an academic Year 12 female attending a middle SES New South Wales school voiced the complexity of parental influence by acknowledging that her parents were both pushing her toward university but that they insisted that she do that for herself, while at the same time the young woman claimed that this was what she wanted for herself anyway. The insistence on 'autonomy', or what could be described as internalisation of the parents' wishes was a common theme throughout the transcript data:

- S: *That's what my parents say - 'Make sure you get a degree that will definitely get you a job.' And, once you have that job, once you have that job security and once you have that money built up, you can go back to uni and do another degree if you want.*  
I: *So your parents are fairly keen for you to do uni?*  
S: *Yes, they're keen for me to do uni. But, I've always accepted it as just the next progression for me and it's something that I want to do myself so, like, even though my parents do want me to do it, they insist that I do it for myself as well. (Year 12 Academic Female – Middle SES NSW)*

Young people also looked at the career paths of parents and other family members and made decisions in light of their observations:

- S: *Well in my family we have a definite contrast between lifestyles. We have one part that are professional, the other are labourers, and professionals obviously have a better lifestyle. I always wanted to be a professional. (Year 12 Male – Middle SES WA)*

S: *My dad hates his job. He has to stay in it 'cause we need the money for a mortgage. So I've decided not to do it because I needed the money. He hates it, and I don't want to be like that. (Year 10 Academic Female – Upper SES NSW)*

#### **2.4.2 Parents' Views on Influences on Decision Making**

Parents did not believe that they influenced their children although this view tended to contradict the transcript data from students and Career Advisers who viewed parents as being very influential. Parents often indicated a strong commitment to supporting their children through the decision-making process in an encouraging but non-directive manner. However, several parents expressed the view that their children should attend university and not choose the career path that they themselves had chosen. Teacher-parents were particularly discouraging of their children's desire to become teachers. Parents who were nurses or trades people also tended to express the hope that their children would not choose those career paths:

P: *My husband is a mechanic and even though we've got a business so we're probably better off than just a mechanic, but [son] said one day 'Blow Uni, I'll just come down and work for you Dad and if you can't get a good worker, I'll do it. I can!' and we both just went 'No way!.' You know 'You are not being a mechanic, you need to go to Uni' so ... He would probably be extremely... he has the ability to go to Uni, but he would probably be extremely happy to do hands on, step into Dad's shoes, follow his idol, and be probably quite comfortable for the rest of his life. But I think we all just want the best for our kids and we don't see what we have as being the best. [general assent] (Parents of Year 10 – Rural NSW)*

Often the parents held themselves up to their children as 'counter models', claiming that they did not want their sons and daughters to follow the parents' career path. Often this was due to the parents' perception of their own work as not being a desirable occupation either in terms of status or working conditions. Parents who were trades people, or who owned their own small business, or who were labourers were the most vocal in their insistence that their children not follow the parents' paths. Often the negative perception of the parents' work derived from the conditions such as long hours, inability to get time away from work (small businesses), hard, physical, outdoor labour and poor pay and conditions:

P: *I never, never said to my children 'You have to be a doctor, you have to be a nurse or whatever,' as long as they have something they want to do, it's fine by me. But no cleaning! Cleaning is enough for them to clean their own house, not as a job. Cleaning, I do enough of that. That's right, I don't want to see none of my children do what I'm doing, I don't have a choice, so ... (Parent of Year 10 Female – Lower SES NSW)*

Many parents also were explicit about their expectations that their children attend university, or about the importance of university. These parents strongly encouraged their children to go to university because it was seen as a pathway that would lead to success in life. Often, the young people were the 'standard bearers' in the family in that they would be the first person in the family to have the opportunity to attend university. The massification of universities has led to an expansion of opportunities for young people and parents recognised and encouraged university education as a realistic option for their children:

S: *I don't value the career thing. University thing, I think I value that very much. I think not only as a degree and to get a job, but as a learning experience, and a broadening experience of the person. (Parent of Year 10 Male – Upper SES NSW)*

### **2.4.3 Principals' and Career Advisors' Views on Influences on Decision-Making**

Generally, Career Advisers did not believe that they exerted a strong influence on young peoples' decision-making. Some considered that they had 'zero influence', citing parental influence as the major factor. Others commented that the school had some influence but that individual teachers did not play a significant part in students' decision-making:

I: *So if the family's are influential, how much influence do you think that the... say a Career Advisor has?*

A: *I'm a marginal compared to the family. (Career Adviser – Rural NSW)*

CA: *... At subject selection time I get a lot of kids who want to do particular subjects but their parents want them to do something else because the parents have got their career plans for the kids ... (Career Adviser – Middle SES NSW)*

I: *So what do you think the key influences on students thinking about their careers?*

CA: *Their parents, number one. (Career Adviser – Lower SES WA)*

On the other hand, Principals were more likely to view teachers as being influential:

I: *What role do you think teachers play in helping students with finding a career ...*

Pr: *I think they play a huge role. Initially it is a good role but sometime it can be a not good role because a teacher can have a particular bias and can influence the student. (Principal – Upper SES QLD)*

Pr: *... Teachers have a fairly big impact upon – the kids' experience of teachers that they've had in the junior school ... their experience of studying a particular course ... (Principal – Middle SES NSW)*

## **2.5 Other Influences**

Apart from parents and family, other significant outside influences cited by young people were work experience and academic achievement and their future plans to have, or not to have children. Work experience was a clear influence, both positive and negative, and it was cited by parents, young people and by school staff as being a significant factor in assisting career planning and decision-making. Students who held part-time jobs outside school also expressed the view that their job was assisting them to make decisions about future work:

S: *My cousin works in insurance and I've done a couple of days work experience at her office – and found that I really enjoy doing that sort of thing. (Year 10 Female – Lower SES WA)*

S: *'Cause my step-dad works in the mines and he does a shift like two weeks on and one week off and I just wanted to do that ... and he suggested I get a*

*trade behind me first and then I started to do work experience and work placement and I just like it. (Year 12 Male – Middle SES WA)*

The question relating to young peoples' plans to have children elicited a range of responses from 'definitely' to 'probably'. Very few young people indicated that they were not planning to have children.

### **2.5.1 Academic Achievement as an Influence on Students' Decision Making**

Academic achievement was viewed by some students as a barrier to their career choice particularly if they anticipated not achieving the score they needed for university entry. Young people attending some schools (higher and lower SES NSW, lower SES Qld) appeared to be well prepared to find alternative pathways into university if their score fell short of the required entry level. This preparation was related to the strategies the schools had in place to apprise students of the full range of tertiary options, including TAFE pathways into university and financial support for university study:

*S: TAFE is a university. Just easier to get into.*

*S: Like, when I picked up business, most of my friends said oh what's the point you might as well just leave school and go into uni or something.*

*S: Some people have told me it's the cheats way out because...*

*I: They've told you it's a cheaters way out?*

*S: Yeah because – oh easy way out because in Year 11 you have to do your level one uni ... but at TAFE you do it all in one year.*

*I: So you can do senior in Year 11 – you can do senior in one year?*

*S: Yeah at TAFE. My friend did it, and he's working now.*

*I: Like, English, Maths, Science..?*

*S: Yeah, my cousin – he's doing it now.*

*S: And they've got a range of other courses so, after school, it's pretty good in a way. I think it's good.*

*S: It's smart if you want to get out into the workforce early. If you want to get out a year early, you can do that.*

*S: He's going to uni now. He went to TAFE and did it all in one year and he's going to uni now, so it's pretty good. (Year 12 Non-Academic Males – Lower SES NSW).*

*S: Oh I was just thinking about how bad my results were. ...in my earlier years I was top in all my classes and everything, I was always in the top ones and it just mentally let me know that I can do whatever I want in life. Whatever I feel I want to do, I know I can get there if I put my mind to it. Results, they let you know what you're capable of and, obviously, what you're not capable of. (Year 12 Academic Male – Lower SES NSW).*

*S: The Guidance Counsellor ... recommends courses to you basically on what your results are doing. Because, obviously, if you're failing three subjects, you're not going to get into an OP two or three course, so they try to get you into courses that will probably get you your career option. (Year 12 Male – Lower SES QLD).*

Young people, also, were aware of pathways into their preferred courses through internal university channels such as course transfers. Students who did not achieve the required entry score for their preferred degree had mapped options for entering via a course for

which they did qualify. They would then attempt to transfer to the preferred course at the end of the first year. Other students expressed the view that they would enrol in a related degree if they did not achieve the required entry score for their first option:

- S: *I hope to do Law next year. I've wanted to be a lawyer since I was in year 7. If I don't get the UAI, I'll do an Arts degree and try to transfer after a year.*
- S: *...I'm planning to go to Medicine, and if I can't get there I'll probably be doing Medical Science. (Year 12 Academic Males – Upper SES NSW).*

### **2.5.2 Other Influences: Children – To Have or Not to Have?**

Young people were asked to respond to two questions about their own plans to have children in the future and whether those plans would affect their career decisions. Overall, the transcript data do not support a link to gender or SES on this topic. Apart from a slightly more positive response to the children question by males than by females young people tended to claim that they would 'definitely' or 'probably' have children in the future. On the topic of whether or not this decision would impact on their career decision-making the responses varied from individual to individual with some young males indicating that there would be more pressure on them to have steady employment and reasonable incomes. Young men at the rural NSW school commented on the need to have a career that did not take them away from the family for long periods of time:

- S: *I was thinking about being a doctor but people say you've got no time that's yours, you're so busy and I don't want to be away from home so much. (Year 10 Academic Male – Rural NSW)*

Some young women commented on the need to have careers that did not involve a great deal of travel that would take them away from the home while most did not think that having children would affect their career decisions. The topic generated a high level of animated discussion and it was clear that most young people had considered the question of children although they did not appear to have connected the decision to have children with career planning. Year 10 and Year 12 responses from young males and females across both academic groupings who were attending an upper SES school appear below. These comments typify the responses provided by young people at other schools:

- I: *Ok, I'm going to do a hand count. Who's definitely thinking that they will have children in the long-term?*
- S: *I probably will eventually.*
- S: *Not for a while.*
- S: *Eventually.*
- I: *So you're all thinking that you will have children ... 'eventually' was the expression?*
- S: *Not for another 10 or 15 years!*
- I: *Does it impact on the way you think about your careers?*
- S: *Not really.*
- I: *No? Anybody? (Year 10 Academic Males – Upper SES NSW)*
- I: *Could I ask you ... are you planning to have children some time?*
- S: *Yeah.*
- S: *Yeah, some time.*
- S: *Yes, definitely.*
- S: *... I reckon when I'm older I will.*
- S: *Yeah, sure, of course.*

- S: *I don't want one now, but maybe things may change when I get older.*
- S: *Definitely.*
- S: *I might have kids somewhere along the line.*
- S: *Not sure.*
- S: *10 years' time.*
- I: *Do you think that if you generally want to have children, does that influence what you think you can do?*
- S: *No.*
- I: *Does it shape up your idea of what kind of a job you should have?*
- S: *No.*
- S: *Nuh. (Year 10 Non-Academic Males – Upper SES NSW)*
- I: *Everybody! So you're all thinking that some time you will have children.*
- S: *Yeah. (Year 10 Academic Females – Upper SES NSW)*
- I: *OK, so we've got four of the girls saying that yeah, you're already thinking about having ... oh, well, no ... maybe in the future! And we had a couple of 'maybes'? One ... two ... (Year 10 Non-Academic Females – Upper SES NSW)*
- S: *What did the girls say, because I'd be surprised if they all said 'Yes.'*
- I: *All the boys have said yes, that they're certainly going to have children and the girls have mostly said yes, have mostly said yes, but all the boys have said yes, that they did want to have children, so why this easy response? Any comment?*
- S: *Well, maybe if you don't have children you think your life has been pointless, like at the end you say there is no result after me, when I die everything ends. (Year 12 Academic Males – Upper SES NSW)*

## **2.6 Subject Selection and Career Planning**

Young people in Year 10 expressed the view across many schools that they did not feel that they were well informed to make the subject selections that they were required to make. Parents tended to corroborate this view in all schools apart from the upper SES NSW school:

- I: *At the moment you're doing choices for subjects for the next two years at school. How do you know that the subject that you're choosing are going to help you get to where you want to go?*
- S: *It doesn't just tell us where you want to go, it's just something that you're good at that you can get good marks for your UAI and then you choose the courses.*
- S: *... but I just filled mine out and I think I chose them all wrong because I want to be an air hostess now. ... I should have done languages or something. (Year 10 Non-Academic Females – Lower SES NSW)*

Many young people relied on a range of information from universities and family to assist them with subject selection:

- S: *I rang up the University and asked for the subjects needed and I picked them.*
- S: *It's the same subject. When you study business studies here and you go onto university to business as well.*



I: *How do you know that? Was it something you read, from hearing people talk or?*

S: *From the university books that they send out every year. I looked in that and it says 'recommended knowledge' and then it lists subjects.*

S: *My sister helped me out a bit. She's at uni now. Her and her boyfriend helped me a bit. (Year 10 Academic Males – Lower SES NSW)*

I: *So, how do you come to making the decision about the subjects next year? What happens?*

S: *You get a piece of paper at the end of this year and you take it home and give it to your parents. Then they'll talk to you and check it. (Year 10 Male – Lower SES Qld)*

Students at some schools (higher SES NSW and WA) reported being well informed about subject selection while other students reported low levels of confidence in the information they had been given at school:

S: *Not very informed. (Year 10 Non-Academic Females – Lower SES NSW)*

I: *So do you think you are well informed about the subject choices you have and how they affect your careers?*

S: *We've done a couple of programs but they have been extremely disappointing.*

S: *Such as career build up.*

I: *And who said it was pompous?*

S: *All of us- it was unanimous.*

S: *It's supposed to tell us what subjects we should take and what they believe we should do whether to go to university or TAFE which direction we should head. That's basically what the program was about.*

S: *It didn't really do that at all.*

S: *It broke down what subjects and like what things we enjoyed or what we wanted to be when we grew up. (Year 10 Females – Middle SES QLD)*

Transcript data indicate that the parents who were interviewed at schools in New South Wales were highly active participants in the subject selection process. Given the level of parental engagement in the process and the variable levels of preparation that parents would have received for this task it may be the case that students' whose parents were not well prepared for the process would struggle to make appropriate subject choices:

P: *They were given a University courses book, which [son] found quite interesting, a little book with the different subjects ...*

P: *Actually, it was quite helpful, because I know, we went through it and I suggested that 'Well, you'd better take this, Advanced this, because you're not going to get into certain Unis, and you won't be able to have a selection' whether he chooses Sydney Uni or whatever ...*

P: *Well, he went through the only thing, and the only thing he was interested in was Music, so ...*

P: *But you know what, it takes a lot ... none of the kids would really feel like reading through it all – I don't think Luke read through it all. I did, but he didn't. It's just too much. (Parents of Year 10 Males – Upper SES NSW)*

Other parents relied on electronic sources for information about subject selection:

- I: How well informed do you think you are about giving your kids information about careers? Do you feel fairly well placed, or do you, what sort of resources do you draw on? Like you said ...*
- P: The Internet. We found anything they want to find, they can find on the Internet.*
- P: Yes, we went onto the site, we helped him find the site ... they send out all computer disks and things, so everything I need to know is ... I can find them ...*
- P: Yeah. They had to ring for that, and there's another site on there that he went on actually and got information.*
- P: I would just wait until [child] decides what she wants to do and then any information she needs, I'll find it. I'd probably start it at school. I'm not on the Net at home ... I'll start at the school, once she decides.*
- P: I'm pretty much the same. I know they get on the Internet, I know they download a lot of music and whatever, and my eldest son downloads movies and ... I'm pretty much the same, if they want any information I'll try to chase it up for them, but they don't really tell me what they want, but if they tell me I will look for it. (Parents of Year 10 Females – Lower SES NSW)*

All schools reported that they arranged information nights for parents on subject selection, however, Principals expressed disappointment in the low attendance rates of parents at both the parent interview sessions and the subject selection information evenings:

- Pr: We actually bit the bullet last year and decided we have to have obviously the usual parent teacher interviews which most schools have and, I looked at the turnout of parents on that particular evening and the first one we had was at the end of obviously at the end of term one and we had, I think about a third of our parents come. So we decided that that wasn't good enough we're talking about really crucial decisions for kids. We want parents to be involved in this, we want kids to be involved, and we wanted teachers/Advisers of some sort. (Principal – Lower SES QLD)*

Career Advisers were satisfied that students were being provided with adequate advice about subject selection although they, too, expressed disappointment at what they considered to be low levels of participation by parents in information sessions run by the school. However, young people continued to be somewhat sceptical about the types of subject selection advice they were receiving from teachers.

One member of the project team attended the subject information evening at her research school (at the invitation of the Principal) and was impressed by the effort that school staff put into the events. However, teachers expressed disappointment at the number of parents attending the session. Some researchers noted reports from their own schools of low attendance rates by parents and students. During the information evening at one school, the researcher observed that Heads of departments tended to promote their own subject areas at the expense of providing information about what was suitable for particular careers.

During the interviews some school staff tended to focus on the importance of students choosing subjects on the basis of 'enjoyment' or 'pleasure'. One school, however,

discouraged students from choosing more than one VET subject and this could be seen as contrary to the ‘pleasure principle’.

## **2.6 Key Findings**

**Key Finding 1:** Students overall had high ambitions for their careers. The majority of boys and girls hoped to go into the professional occupations. This was reflected in the strong preference for university study rather than VET after school. Students also sought fulfilment in their careers, with personal satisfaction in the job mattering most to students, ahead of remuneration, work-family balance, and job security.

**Key Finding 2:** The vast majority of students interviewed had invested time and thought into developing their future plans. Very few were completely undecided. Many students exhibited a high degree of flexibility in their thinking about career options and, thus, the concept of multiple career options (ie Option A, Option B etc) was strongly evident amongst the students. Students were often clearer about wanting to go to university or TAFE than about what to study there.

**Key Finding 3:** Students, parents and staff identified that many students commenced their career planning during the junior grades of secondary school – earlier than students had in previous years. In light of this, teachers and parents expressed concern that students may be making choices too early. The view was also expressed that students identified as ‘at-risk’ of leaving the school system might be influenced to remain within the educational system if involved in even earlier (i.e., before Year 10) career planning.

**Key Finding 4:** Influences on student career planning were complex and diverse.

- Parents viewed their influence as being minimal, yet students and Career Advisers frequently claimed that parents were a key influence.
- Many students considered themselves to be ‘self-determining’ while some cited parents and family members to be influential. (The influence associated with schools and career advising services is discussed in the next theme)
- For many, their level of academic achievement set the parameters for the kinds of careers to which they could reasonably aspire. Nevertheless, for many students their aspirations were kept buoyant by articulated pathways across and within institutions, and knowledge of ‘back door’ entries to courses to which they aspired.
- For both male and female students the consideration of whether, and/or when, to have a family was rarely featured in their accounts of what influenced their career decision making – they made little connection between these life decisions.

**Key Finding 5:** The information provided to students to enable them to make subject choices and the processes through which the information was made available varied between schools as did students’ perceptions of the processes. While some students reported confidence in their understanding of the process, others expressed low levels of confidence. Student confidence was linked to the processes operating within particular school sites.

## CHAPTER 3

### Career Counselling and Advising At Schools

#### 3.1 Introduction

The chapter describes and discusses:

- The nature of career advising in schools<sup>2</sup>, including the background of Career Advisers (who they were and their paths into the role<sup>3</sup>) and the way they approach their job
- Student and parent confidence in current school career advising arrangements;
- Career information sources used by Career Advisers, students and parents.

#### 3.2 The nature of career advising in schools

##### 3.2.1 Background and qualifications of career advisers

The Career Advisers had entered their role through widely varying means. One Career Adviser had taken up a non-classroom role after an injury prevented him from working in the classroom. The Career Adviser role in Queensland schools is incorporated under the wide umbrella of personal counselling and evaluation for special assistance as school Guidance Officers. Several Career Advisers moved from full-time teaching loads to either part-time or full-time career advising because of personal interest and/or the link between their role in VET and work education and informal career advising. One Career Adviser, held in high esteem by the students, parents and staff, assumed the role after an approach by the school Principal:

*... he said, 'This is an offer – you've had the most experience in this school with anything' because I used to be the TVET ... co-ordinator at that stage ... I thought, 'Yeah, I'm looking for a transfer' because I'd been here for a very long time. 'I need a change of scenery and a change is as good as a holiday, I'll give it a go'. So that's when I said 'Yes' and went off to be trained.*

Several Career Advisers had formal training in careers advising. For some, the training had been in the 1980s and for others it was more recent. Some of the courses had been undertaken as in-house courses provided by a state education department, while others had studied or were undertaking study in graduate courses in career advising through a university. Several belonged to professional organisations or mentioned an intention to join one.

Career Advisers in several schools were employed full-time, while other sites employed Career Adviser staff on fractional time. Some school sites had an equivalent full-time

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<sup>2</sup> In this chapter, because most schools employed only one Career Adviser, where appropriate, school sites have been de-identified in relation to comments about the operation of career information services.

<sup>3</sup>The terms Career Adviser, Career Counsellor and Guidance Officer were used throughout the interviews to describe the person or people within a school setting with a recognised role of assisting students in school subject selection and with their decision-making with regards to future work or career aspirations. Guidance Officer is a term specific to Queensland and the role of a Guidance Officer embraces a number of functions including, but not confined to, assistance to students with determining career directions. For the purpose of this chapter the term Career Adviser will be used and understood to incorporate the other titles earlier mentioned.

position divided between two staff. At several school sites other teaching staff including Deputy Principals and Principals, were involved in specific aspects of career advising as adjunct and complementary to the designated Career Adviser.

### 3.2.2 How career advisers see their role - Philosophy of Practice

Tensions were evident in the views held by Career Advisers about the nature of their 'advising' role. Resistance to the concept that a Career Adviser shaped or formed a student's career direction was observed amongst some Career Advisers. This contrasted with the views expressed by other interviewees that revealed a proactive, intentional involvement in the decision-making processes of students. The Careers Advisers at one site, for example, where their role was viewed as one of 'excellence' by all interviewed, described their role as one of 'shaping' the decisions of some students and 'advising' the decisions of others:

CA: *We do shaping for some students and we do advising for others ... So, for example, a lot of School to Work children...there's a lot of work that we put in. And we really help to shape, because a lot of that is knowing the system and how to get around it and how you can manage within the system that the parents don't know. That's how we help them. And again, it depends on your relationship with the other children that are academic. Some you will shape, definitely, others you will advise...I think often, the other thing that we do, I often like to play the Devil's Advocate with them. So that's what I try to do, and I say, 'But why?' And that's what I see my role as. And so it's influential in the sense that they might question, 'What else?' (Career Adviser)*

The Career Adviser from another school described his very active and directive approach when working with students in making post-school decisions:

CA: *Yes, the absolute bottom line if you're deciding to choose from a subject range, you must choose the ... not necessarily, I say 'subjects', but the areas that you're good at, because you will do well at them, because you enjoy them and you enjoy them because you do well at them. You'll not set yourself up for chemistry if you don't like science, and if you don't like science I'd say don't think about being a doctor or anything like that. If you don't like making decisions, if you don't like business, if you don't like some sort of mathematical things, don't become an accountant – forget it, you're wasting your time even thinking accountancy ...*

*... What you enjoy should [influence] what you do ... because the fact of the matter is that if you've some delusion in your head that you want to be something, and what is required to be that you don't like, than you're in the wrong game baby! (Career Adviser)*

The Career Adviser from another school stated that he didn't "give advice" describing his role as "making sure that there is enough information out there and that it is available for the kids, and giving it to the teachers, and letting the kids know where it is – is probably my role I think." He also described a process he would use with students when exploring post-school options:

CA: *I guess what I would probably say to them and that happens a lot, you know they say they want to be doctors and things, say, 'Well that's good that's your goal. OK that's great let's plan for that but let's aim for plan B. If plan*

*A doesn't make it then plan B and then you sort of work out plan B.' You don't rain on their parade but you try and get them to be a bit more realistic in a softer way. (Career Adviser)*

The comments from several Career Advisers working in different states reflected considerable caution about the idea that they might take on an active 'shaping' role in working with students in planning post-school options:

CA: *I just lay out options. I don't tell students, 'Oh no, you can't do that'... that's not my place. And it's professionally dangerous from a political point of view ... So I'm fairly loathe to ... it would be very, very bad for me to say to a student outright 'I don't think you can do this'. Rather it would be more saying to them something like 'Well you've expressed this idea ... Have you had a look at the kind of marks that you would need to get your Higher School Certificate to get into that?' And then they go off and look at them and say, 'Oh well I'm not in the top 2% in my population at school ... in my year at school so it may be unrealistic'. (Career Adviser)*

I: *How significant do you think Career Advisers are in shaping students career plans?*

CA1: *Shaping? I think, helpful. I'm not so sure about the shaping.*

CA2: *That's always been a difficult one because you'll get a student, and I know when you get a Year 10 [for] career counselling ... and... you know this kid and you think, 'They cannot do this' but they're adamant they're going to [do] this and you can't, you can't persuade them any other way. So I think we're very limited in a sense to some kids because they've made their mind up and they are going to do it. For those who don't have a clue we can have a bit more influence because we can sort of tell them what the options are, look at their report. I can say to a kid who doesn't know what they want to do, 'Look your report is pretty average you're probably looking at TAFE.' But if you've got a kid who thinks they are going to be a brain surgeon, even though you can't tell them, and their parents are the same as well, with a lot of parents say, 'I want my child to go to uni' ... it's very difficult to try and explain to them that they just don't have [it].*

I: *And Beth you seem to be suggesting that shaping wasn't the function of the Career Adviser?*

CA2: *No, I don't think it's really the right word because I think kids, you know, I mean, it's awful if you're shaping them, they should be shaping themselves and we're just giving them the help to choose the direction they want to go in.*

CA1: *Facilitating I guess. More 'Here's the information, here's what I know, here's my telephone, here's my computer. Ring around, find out'.*

CA2: *'Let's look at the uni courses or let's look at the TAFE handbook together and you tell me what you're interested in and I'm not going to tell you what I think you should be doing'. (Career Advisers)*

### **3.2.3 Main approaches to career advising identified in focus group**

The two distinct approaches to career advising that emerged from the data are best described as: the information-centred career advising approach and the student-centred career advising approach.

The former approach was typified by Career Advisers who collected information and attempted to ensure that it was disseminated throughout the school community. The Career Advisers who adopted this approach were less actively engaged with the wider body of students. Some operated an unstructured drop-in advising system heavily dependent on student-initiated contact. Career Advisers who used the Information-centred approach were found to view their role as that of meeting systems requirements, for example, arranging the paperwork for student work placements or work experience and arranging school run information evenings prior to Year 10 subject selection. These Career Advisers adopted a more passive approach to locating students who would benefit from their knowledge and service. They tended also to work in professional isolation. In schools where this approach was adopted there a lot less individual student advising occurred than in schools where the student-centred approach was in operation.

The latter model of career advising would best be described as one where Career Advisers were actively engaged with a wide cohort of individual students, were proactive in their work with students, actively sought individual student engagement and had achieved a high profile especially amongst the senior students who valued their influence and assistance. These Career Advisers demonstrated a passion for their role and frequently worked as members of small teams where there was collegial input and support. This was expressed in the following comments from a Career Adviser who clearly valued the input of several different professionals to his role at the school:

CA: *Well we've got a pretty good team. I mean we've got a school health nurse who is here 2 1/2 days a week and she is very good at her job and we work together. The learning support teacher, the resource teacher and I work fairly closely together. The Admin and I work fairly closely together. I think I've got pretty good networks outside the school in terms of networking into unis, TAFE colleges and welfare organisations and I use them a lot and we actually conference quite regularly. So yeah I think the school's been pretty good and I mean I think the worst thing in the world would be to be a guidance officer in a school where you feel like you haven't got those support systems and networks built up. (Career Adviser)*

The SES of the schools or the geographical location did not appear to determine the type of career advising service provided. Rather, the approach to career advising was located within the practice of the individual employed in the role of school Career Adviser.

### **3.3 Student and parent views of career advising**

#### **3.3.1 What students want from career advisers**

Emerging from the student comments at schools that provided career advice using the information-centred approach was a theme that had a clear gender bias. Amongst the students interviewed there was a dominantly, but not exclusively, female voice that expressed a clear preference for a personalised career advising service. This is heard in the following excerpts:

S: *More involvement I'd say. More individual involvement. More individual than actually asking us, 'What do you want to do after school?' Certain interviews. I'm comparing it to the other schools in the area. There the Careers Adviser knows, you know, she knows more about you. She knows you personally, she's made you do these tests you know, extensive tests*

*and knows your personality. A bit more involvement I'd say – like individual involvement. (Year 12 Academic Female)*

S: *You need someone to sit down and talk. (Year 10 Non-Academic Female)*

S: *I still don't think it's OK to give people a book...with microbiology or something like that, it can lead on to so many things and often the book can't tell you that. If you want to do a certain career path and you know that you have to do microbiology, but then it doesn't tell you how to go from there, and I think you need people who can actually help you with that. (Year 12 Female)*

S: *I really wish in Year 10 someone had sat down and said, 'Carol, you can't do this kind of TE subject or you can do this kind of TE subject.' (Year 12 Female)*

S: *...they try to help but there's heaps of people that they have to help and it's not really personal and in-depth and they don't say this is the bad parts/the good parts of the jobs. (Year 12 Female)*

The expressed preference, especially evident amongst the female students, was for a Career Adviser to be felt to be approachable and to be someone who would give them time one on one in the student's career deliberations. Male students from schools with an information-centred career advising approach were less vocal but not completely silent in expressing such a preference. In the absence of a Career Adviser initiating individual student contact the male students appeared to have adopted a more solution focused approach to meeting their career advice needs, that is, they operated to answer the questions: 'What information do I need?' and 'How and where do I get it?' Whilst female students had the same questions as their male colleagues, the nature of the relationship they had with their Career Adviser was found to be a highly valued component of the career advising process and one that became apparent in its absence.

### **3.3.2 Student attitudes to career advice received**

Students' confidence in the career information and guidance they received and what they wanted from the service tended to split along the division of the information-centred approach and the student-centred approach.

Students at schools identified as providing student-centred careers advising services described their understanding of careers information, which included the range of services available to them through the Careers Adviser, with clarity and confidence:

S: *Our classes have meetings and stuff with him sometimes, like he calls them and we go and have meetings but we've only had that twice this year or something like that.*

I: *So whole class meetings?*

S: *Yeah. And we've really only been introduced to the whole thing of careers and Career Advisers and stuff this year so he hasn't really been that important but we know that if we need to ask, if we need advice or something like that, on jobs or careers or whatever we can go there. (Year 10 Non-Academic Female)*



- S: *She'll do whatever you want. If you need help with something she'll be there for you and sit with you to explain...*
- I: *Oh that sounds good.*
- S: *If you need a job, like work experience, she'll phone them that afternoon and see if you can work there.*
- S: *She'll get the numbers all sorted out for you.*
- S: *She's very good. (Year 10 Non-Academic Males)*
- S: *I was talking to the Counsellor when I was picking my subjects for next year. He went through the book with me and we had a look at all the different university courses and just about all of them contained physics and chemistry which I want to do next year.*
- S: *...I already sort of had everything set out and then he sort of confirms that everything is OK.*
- S: *...he did say if you wanted to go in and talk about it he'd offer all the good things about it and all the bad things about it to see if that's what we really wanted to do. (Year 10 Females)*
- S: *Yeah, like for medicine, we had to fill in CVs and stuff like that, and she told us how the UMAT test was structured – the fact that we need volunteer work and work experience as well.*
- S: *She organized that for us...all the work experience...*
- S: *And they have contact details and so if they don't have time to organize it then we can organize it ourselves with the contact details that they give us.*
- S: *Very good. We're really grateful.*
- S: *Yeah it's very helpful. (Year 12 Academic Females)*
- S: *I think [he] pretty well provides us with everything we need. I think he works out of his way to provide us with everything we need...I think I'm pretty well informed about all the options, you know – he opens new doors. (Year 12 Academic Female)*
- S: *...if you're not sure what you want to do then they can help you out. (Year 10 Male)*

Students from the school sites referenced above made use of their Career Advisers for a wide range of services. The services offered through the school Career Adviser were highly regarded. The students identified the service to include the provision of valuable contacts and links to the wider community including TAFE, universities, training providers, work experience sites and employers.

Students valued the counselling skills of Career Advisers, for example, “he opens new doors” (*Year 12 Academic Female*) and “he did say he would offer all the good things about it and all the bad things about it to see if that's what we really wanted” (*Year 12 Female*) and many viewed their Career Adviser as being approachable. They valued the Career Adviser providing them with an opportunity for personal exploration as well as providing resources that assisted them clarify their career goals and identify the steps necessary to achieve their objective. Students at these sites also expressed awareness of the time pressures their Career Adviser operated within and made comment about the need for more of what they had:

S: *I think the school needs two Career Advisers.*  
 S: *Because he's always really busy ... I think another Careers Adviser...*  
 S: *...there's not enough time for one person to go around. (Year 12 Academic Males)*

S: *We just need more.*  
 S: *Maybe they should organize to see you. Like, for some people who obviously aren't organized and haven't seen the Careers Advisers, they should allocate time for every Year 12 student to go and see them. (Year 12 Non-Academic Males)*

S: *You can't get an appointment with her...*  
 S: *There's always someone there.*  
 S: *You book in and it's 'Oh sorry no, this is all taken up – this whole week. You can come back Wednesday next week' or something. (Year 12 Academic Males)*

Students from schools located within the information-centred approach to service delivery reported the following:

S: *I went up there and I just asked him if he'd be able to help me get ideas for a job. He palmed a book in my face and gave me pages and told me to read it. I had no idea what, I read the first couple of pages and it went straight over my head, I had no idea what to read. (Year 10 Non-Academic Female)*

S: *It sort of, you get told much about the actual subject like, sure you get the book that says what the subject has in it but you don't actually get told much about what is involved. Yeah and how hard it is going to be and what you have to go through and that.*

S: *I think I found out more from my dad. Dad is a teacher here. I think I have found out more from him than the Careers Adviser.*

S: *He does tell you more.*

S: *We find out more from general discussion with teachers than with career lessons. (Year 10 Non-Academic Males)*

Year 10 students expressed less confidence in their understanding of the services offered through their information-centred Careers Adviser than many of the Year 12 students. This is possibly a consequence of Year 12 students being further along the continuum of career decision-making than those in Year 10 who are generally just beginning to consider their subject options for their senior years:

I: *How important has he [Careers Adviser] been in your thinking about your career?*

S: *I haven't talked to him.*

S: *He helped me with selections.*

S: *No.*

I: *No help?*

...

I: *How about you?*

S: *Just to help me with my selections.*

I: *So he sat down and went through that with you?*

S: *Yes.*

- I: *What kind of information do you need from him?*  
 S: *Well I assume the tasks to do, like what it's about and whether we should do work experience and that.*  
 S: *Give us choices about what we can do.*  
 S: *Yes. (Year 10 Non-Academic Males)*
- I: *OK How important has this school Career Counsellor been for you? In helping you plan where you want to go?*  
 S: *Very.*  
 S: *Not very.*  
 S: *Not very.*  
 I: *Not at all?*  
 S: *Not at all.*  
 S: *He's helped some people.*  
 S: *Well he hasn't helped me.*  
 S: *Like you ask him but he goes on about stuff you don't know.*  
 I: *What kind of help do you need?*  
 S: *If you've been there to tell him what you want to be and he can tell you exactly what you need to do where you need to go after school and what you need. Like, do you need to go to TAFE, university? How to get there and when.*  
 S: *Guidelines of exactly where you need to be and when.*  
 I: *So providing some really accurate information?*  
 ALL: *Yes. (Year 10 Non-Academic Females)*

A level of frustration amongst the Year 10 and Year 12 students' responses at schools with an information-centred approach was noted. It focused on the felt lack of personalised assistance provided to them as they attempted to explore what they needed to know in order to work out what they wanted to do:

- S: *Okay, I just feel that our guidance Counsellor hasn't been really very carefully chosen for the job as our guidance Counsellor. I feel as if she has no clue about what students fear...and she has no clue about what we can do about it ... and it just seems that she hasn't even been making the effort to actually talk to each and everyone of us. She did organise those group interviews. I mean gees – she got you in there – she passed a few brochures about smoking and smoking when you're pregnant – and just shooed you off with crummy pieces of paper you know. (Year 12 Male)*
- S: *I go and see him ... I mean I've been there to see him a couple of times and he just gives me [phone] numbers and stuff to talk. (Year 12 Non-Academic Male)*
- S: *He does help when you go up and ask about unis and stuff but he won't actually tell you what [you] have to do and that .... It's more on a general basis. (Year 12 Academic Female)*

### **3.3.3 Overall views of students/parents about their school career advisers**

Amongst the schools surveyed there was a sharp divide in the perception of the quality and resultant value of the career advice provided by the school Career Adviser.

Students, staff and parents at some schools praised highly the quality of career advising available at their school. The benefit to the confidence of both students and parents concerning the career decision-making process from experiencing the services of a skilled Career Adviser is clearly evident in the following comments from one of the school sites:

S: *I think Mr Ambrose ... pretty well provides us with everything we need. I think he works out of his way to provide us with everything we need. He keeps track of individual students which I think is good because we're not all the same ...*

S: *Definitely. Without him, seriously I wouldn't know what I really want to do. You know what I mean, like he's helped us out that much. (Year 12 Academic Females)*

S: *He's fantastic...he's always here and helping no matter what.*

S: *He's done all he can. (Year 12 Non-Academic Females)*

S: *He has been going out of his way to help us all.*

S: *I don't think they can improve. (Year 12 Non-Academic Males)*

P: *I think they basically cover just about everything kids want to do. I think if the kids have got a career that's not covered the Careers Advisers will go out of their way to sort of help them. I don't think there's a whole lot more left to do in that field. I think they cover it well in my opinion.*

P: *Well I don't know what all schools are like, but I think this school is fantastic.*

P: *The Career Adviser here is very, very good with the kids. (Parents of Year 10 Students)*

Students and parents at one school were highly critical of the Career Adviser and the quality of service provided through that school's career service. Comments were made to the effect that the Career Adviser would be leaving the school soon and that was viewed as a benefit to the school community:

I: *How important has the Career Adviser been in helping you...*

S: *The door's always locked all the time.*

S: *Yeah, I know, he's never there!*

S: *I haven't seen him in the school for half a year. (Year 12 Non-Academic Females)*

Pr: *The good Careers Adviser who's focused and up with current trends and recognises that careers is not a single focus thing but rather a multi-tiered approach, has a huge influence on the kids. We don't have a person like that, at the moment we have a person who's probably become disgruntled and works at a minimal level who doesn't relate well with the kids, doesn't relate well to the parents, not that he...he doesn't really...not being personally critical but that's just the objective reality. He doesn't have an influence on the kids because he doesn't engage the kids. (Principal)*

P: *I think ... the Careers Adviser here is probably just a problem at this school. Because I know the other high school...local high school, they have got an excellent Careers Adviser and many parents from this school often seek his advice. (Parent of a Year 10 Male)*

*P: Well they probably go to someone else don't they? Their first choice is to go to somebody else...*

The link between the quality and skills of the individual in the role of Career Adviser and the quality and resultant value of the career advising experience for the students is self-evident within the data and points unambiguously to the critical issue of ensuring quality in school career advising staff.

### **3.4 Information about careers used by students, career advisers and parents**

#### **3.4.1 Student usage and awareness of career information**

The Career Advisers interviewed generally expressed satisfaction with the level of awareness amongst their student population about career information available at the school. In most of the sites the Career Adviser was involved in conducting formal class sessions that provided opportunities to promote information on the nature of the services available through the school career office. The content, frequency and timing of the sessions varied across the sites and were influenced significantly by school timetabling priorities (see also Chapter 1).

The year levels where career education classes were provided ranged from Year 9 upwards. The number of lessons, the year levels for involvement and the content of the lessons appeared to be school specific. The Career Adviser at one site described the approach he had adopted for class-based career education in the following way:

*CA: One lesson once a fortnight in careers ... is a stand alone. That's evolving for want of a good word. Last year I taught Year 10 classes once a fortnight. This year the curriculum has changed so I believe they have to do both History and Geography in Year 10 so they dropped the careers lessons.*

*I: So it's the timetabling, availability?*

*CA: Yes. So this year I'm teaching Year 9 ....*

*I: And is that the curriculum that you work through with ... Year 10s and now Year 9s? Is that a curriculum you've developed over time or is there a curriculum that you've adopted?*

*CA: I don't think there is a particular curriculum, ' This is what you're going to teach in careers'. I think every Career Adviser chooses what they think is important to teach and fits it into, well in this school it should be, 40 weeks in the year. It should obviously be 20 lessons but you end up with about 14 or 15. So you put into 14 or 15 lessons what you think is important.*

*I: And those lessons are what 45, 50 minutes?*

*CA: Yes 50 minutes.*

*I: What have you chosen as the curriculum for the students?*

*CA: I told you it's definitely Year 9 this year because obviously they're at a different stage but for last year for Year 10 probably the first 3 lessons would have been work experience. All about the value of work experience and how it works and safety of work experience, all those sort of things. Then a group of lessons on how to choose a career, looking at yourselves,*

*your interests, your abilities and all that sort of thing. Putting those together to then start by the time Job Guide arrives in the school to start looking at jobs and trying to see which jobs fit and that sort of thing. One lesson in the year on just subject selection and then I suppose the rest of the year is what I'd call the "nuts and bolts" of things like doing resumes, interview skills, letters, application forms. They never get it finished but that's what I've done during the year. (Career Adviser – Middle SES NSW)*

The issue of timetabling, the pressure to decide what to leave in a program and what to consider a priority, was echoed through several sites. The Career Adviser at a Queensland school that had reported having 80% of their students targeting university entrance expressed her frustration with the timetabling of career classes for Year 10 and the limited opportunities for her to have class involvement. The Principal at the same school described the tension that occurred amongst the teaching staff when the Career Adviser indicated she wanted to speak with all Year 12 students:

*CA: As I said I'm just new here this year ... I can tell you there isn't too much back up of general career information that I am aware of, in the lower year levels. I've had a total of ten minutes talking to the Year 10s this year. That's what the school has allocated me. Ten minutes.*

*I: And that was? What would have [taken] place in that ten minutes?*

*CA: I handed them out a Job Guide. I handed them out the tertiary instruction booklet. I told them about the web sites but until they see what's on them, you know you have to tell them a couple of times. I told them to look at my bulletin board and that would be it. (Career Adviser – Upper SES QLD)*

*Pr: ... she had a program for talking with all the Year 12s. Now of course, immediately, people screamed that you could upset the [school timetable] and it takes out of the time for learning. But everyone at the table seemed to think it was important so we were able to sit down and work out, what could happen with access, what could happen here, we could do that whatever... and we were able to work out a way where that could occur but that was with the cooperation of the heads of the departments. (Principal – Upper SES QLD)*

Outlined in the following excerpt is a program of career education that was viewed by a Career Adviser as being quite comprehensive a view that was strongly endorsed by the Principal:

*CA: Formally we have career education in Grade 9 and 10 as part of our life schools programs. I've written those programs. So in answer to your question formally they start receiving them [career education] in Year 9. Informally, I mean a small school keeps seeing each other in various grades and sends out kids on work placement. We have a career review ...So they I guess informally all kids are aware of information but formal classes in career education start in Year 9.*

*I: And does it gradually build up over the whole time or does it seem to dissipate over the last year or so.*

*CA: I think it probably builds up. The formal part of career education for us [is in] Grade 9 and 10. There is no real formal career education in Year 11. They have a work experience program in Year 11. In Year 12 they*

*have a formal program which prepares them for QTAC, the QTAC preparation program which is the formal part. So in Year 11 and 12 it is much more informal but I think there is a lot of information that we throw at the kids. Let them access them or we get speakers in, we take them out, we encourage them to go [to] career [events]. I think it is probably a reasonably comprehensive career education program. (Career Adviser – Middle SES Qld)*

*Pr: I think we are getting it pretty right now here at this school anyway. Kids get so much assistance like I said, Guidance Advisor and the Deputy Principal and parents and teachers. We have a career and subject expo here and the kids realise that [a] subject is not for them and what have you. I would say that we are getting it right. (Principal – Middle SES QLD)*

### **3.4.2 Sources of information used by careers adviser and students/parents**

Career Advisers drew their information from a diverse array of sources. Comments were made about the never ceasing flow of literature through their mail boxes and the resultant pressure to remain current in the field. Some Career Advisers were actively engaged with networks within their community. For example, one Career Adviser was the chairperson of the Nepean Forum that provided an annual regional careers market, another Career Adviser had links to the local Chamber of Commerce.

Membership of Career Adviser regional groups was another important resource identified by several Career Advisers both for professional support as well as an information resource. Use of the internet and a wide knowledge of useful websites were identified as a significant resource amongst many Career Advisers. The 'Job Guide' and other similar government publications were identified as valuable resources. Some Career Advisers had used or were using 'board games' they had acquired from overseas (UK and USA) as tools for student career exploration.

Students and their parents drew on a wide array of resources in their career planning – those from the more Information-centred Career Adviser schools found it necessary to draw from resources that included using the service of a Career Adviser at another local school. Resources identified from student and parent interviews included: numerous internet websites (government, universities, TAFE, armed forces, private training providers); university Open Days; teachers; Careers Days; literature including the Job Guide; people within their family or wider relationship circles; and school run Information days/evenings. Several students and parents described the value of email in making contact and gathering information from specific sources, for example, a department within a university:

*P: No my daughter's... because she knows her Maths teacher socially she'd talk to him and he sort of steered her in a better direction a bit. When she went to work experience she was able to ask people there about it as well, what subjects she should have and ... so she's just ... I think she's been doing the asking to find out what she needs to do. (Parent of a Year 10 Female – Rural NSW)*

*P: She's been to the careers night and she's also – prior to being invited to the careers night, my elder daughter had that large vocational career book and she'd been right through it reading things that 'Aw this looks*

*interesting' reading that and reading about other ones. So she's actually had a look at what's available. (Parent of a Year 10 Female – Middle SES NSW)*

*P: ... she'll see what her friends are doing, or she'll speak to other people, her peers, she finds out for herself, she goes to university Open Days, she finds out all the information, she gets on the net, she knows what's available, she knows we're there for back up, she'll take us along to things but she's pretty much ... (Parent of a Year 12 Female – Upper SES NSW)*

For many students and parents there was a significant level of information gathering and sifting that occurred independent from the career services provided at the school site and, predictably, more so in the schools where the Career Adviser service was viewed with little positive regard.

### **3.5 Key Findings**

**Key Finding 1:** The type of service provided by a Career Adviser was found to vary significantly between schools with two opposing approaches on a continuum of service delivery being identified. In the student-centred approach, the career adviser worked proactively with the student, while in the information centred approach the adviser primarily disseminated information. Students and parents at schools with a student-centred approach to career advising expressed confidence in their access to the school-based information, support and services. Students from schools that adopted an information-centred approach to career advising were significantly less confident about accessing helpful school-based support and information.

**Key Finding 2:** General awareness amongst students of the career services and information available was considered by Career Advisers to be satisfactory. Timetabling priorities in schools were identified by Career Advisers as a crucial determinant in the scheduling of career classes and as a determinant of year levels at which formal exposure to career exploration commenced.

**Key Finding 3:** Tensions were identified concerning the philosophy of practice adopted by Career Advisers with some identifying themselves as proactive and interventionist in shaping students' career aspirations compared to other Career Advisers more reluctant to express their role in such terms.

**Key Finding 4:** Career-related information used by Career Advisers, students and parents was sourced from diverse places including government publications, school information events, internet sites and university Open Days. Career Advisers who adopted a student-centred approach were identified as a key resource by students and parents whereas those who adopted an information-centred approach were not viewed as a key resource.

**Key Finding 5:** The counselling or interpersonal skills of Career Advisers were valued highly by many students. This was most evident in comments from female students at schools that adopted an information-centred approach.



## **CHAPTER 4**

### **VET in Schools**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter focuses on VET (Vocational Education and Training) in schools. In doing so, it explores:

- Students', parents' and school staff's familiarity with, and understanding of, the concept of 'VET' and of its workings within schools and in TAFE (section 4.2);
- How VET courses at school are viewed by career advisers, principals and parents (section 4.3);
- Students' views on reasons for doing and not doing VET in school subjects, their attitude to students enrolled in VET subjects and whether VET courses have affected their decision to stay at school (sections 4.4 & 4.5);
- The institutional and cross-institutional issues that impact upon the practice and perceptions of VET in schools (section 4.6).

#### **4.2 Speaking in one tongue: Non-specific language of curriculum choice**

Amongst the students involved in the study – encompassing all geographical, SES and gender demographics – there was a limited understanding of the 'formalised' language or terminology of vocational education and training (referred to as 'VET' hereafter). The educational jargon, or 'DEST-speak' has not, it appears, filtrated into student – or school – speak. This was also the case for the majority of the parents interviewed. The responses of both the students and parents to questions about 'VET in schools' ranged from claims of complete ignorance about the term and what it covers through to statements that demonstrated limited understanding and, in other cases, considerable confusion and uncertainty. The Principals, on the whole, also appeared to employ largely informal language practices when making reference to VET. Many of them signalled their taking up of a non-specific, but rather broad-based, curriculum approach through the language practices they employed. Clearly, this was not a 'language practice' frequently employed by students and others within – or outside – the school sites.

Furthermore, this absence of 'formalised' language practices appeared to work in such a way as to 'disguise' classification of the range of subjects available to students. Positively, without the labelling attached to subjects, there appeared to be less stigma associated with VET subjects – less emphasis on the (often perceived lower) status of these subjects. With the undifferentiated nature of subjects, student choice was foregrounded in terms of decision-making. Essentially, the non-specific language of curriculum choice appeared to function in a manner that achieved a positive outcome. This is not to suggest, however, that the 'disguise' was not un-masked at times nor the 'codes' of undifferentiated language practices broken – for they were. When this occurred, and VET was classified as such, negative perceptions of it did surface.

##### **4.2.1 "It's Got a Name"**

While many students demonstrated a lack of familiarity with the term 'VET,' when the concept was explained to – or 'named' for – the students they were able to make connections:

- S: *I knew you could do school subjects with TAFE courses, but I never knew that was called VET education.*
- ...
- S: *We know what it is, but we, I didn't know that it was all of that.*
- I: *Vocational Education and Training.*
- S: *You guys only know because you're actually doing it!*
- S: *We've been hearing about it, but it's like 'OK, that's cool, you can do it – OK, it's got a name!' (Year 12 Non-Academic Females – Upper SES NSW)*

Specifically, the students, and in particular those who were enrolled in such subjects, were readily able to identify that which constitutes 'VET' by naming a range of subjects – rather than by making reference to the concept of Vocational Education and Training as identified by the acronym 'VET.'

For many of the students and parents, particularly in New South Wales, VET was clearly associated with, or aligned to, TAFE. This was the case despite the fact that many of the students studied VET subjects at school. It remained, from their perspective, within the domain of TAFE Colleges and was not referred to in terms of 'VET in school.'

- S: *We're doing a T-VET course where we're going to do it at TAFE. (Year 10 Non-Academic Female – Lower SES NSW)*

- S: *T-VET. It's basically the TAFE version of it. (Year 12 Non-Academic Female – Rural NSW)*

- P: *It's [i.e., VET] part of the TAFE course. (Parent of Year 12 Male – Middle SES NSW)*

#### **4.2.2 Subjects as Undifferentiated**

Schools differentiated between subjects needed to obtain a university entry score and other subjects, but appeared not to engage in the practice of differentiating according to whether subjects were VET or not. Thus, while the range of subject offerings were broadening to include VET subjects, students were often not made explicitly aware of differences between VET and other subjects offered within their respective schools. Such practice became evident in the confusion expressed by students – particularly within the New South Wales schools, and to a lesser extent those within Queensland and Western Australia.

In New South Wales, the students' comments indicated that they were unsure of the classification of subjects and often did not know whether they had chosen to enrol in a VET subject or not:

- S: *I do a VET course but I really don't know the difference. (Year 12 Academic Male – Middle SES NSW)*

- S: *We chose it without knowing it was a VET course. (Year 12 Non-Academic Female – Middle SES NSW)*

These students also made reference to the uncategorised listing of subjects in booklets and selection forms provided by schools:

- S: *Probably because they're [i.e., VET subjects] not ... weren't particularly singled out that much about VET subjects in the subject book. They were just*

– like Sarah didn't know the difference because when we get the book on subjects, they're all listed together. So you know what the subjects are, but subjects ... they're sort of treated, in terms of selections, there's not ... they're all together. (Year 12 Academic Female – Upper SES NSW)

S: *I've picked a VET course. But I still don't even know what it is – because they don't explain it. I think on the back of our selection form it says that if you are wanting to do one of these courses, and then it says more – in brackets ... we haven't been told what it involves and that. (Year 10 Academic Female – Middle SES NSW)*

While far less apparent in the comments of students in Western Australia and Queensland, there was evidence to indicate that they were also at times unsure of the classification of subjects and often did not know whether or not they had chosen to enrol in a VET subject. These students, too, made reference to the uncategorised listing of subjects in booklets and selection forms provided by schools. A group of Year 10 males, for example, expressed such confusion:

I: *And getting the curriculum booklet that you received. Is it clear which ones are VET subjects and which ones aren't VET subjects?*

S: *Not really.*

I: *They're not categorised in any way?*

S: *It's the way it's categorised – they just figured you've got your Core subjects and your electives and that's it. They don't ...*

I: *Right. So what are your Core subjects?*

S: *Just Maths, Science, English*

...

S: *... You can't actually tell. (Year 10 Males – Upper SES QLD)*

Another student spoke of the lack of 'selectiveness' apparent in discussions about subjects in his Western Australian school:

S: *I haven't really heard much around. I don't think many people do them [i.e., VET subjects] ... obviously they do, but I haven't heard people talking about it. Not selectively as a VET subject – they just talk about them as the subject that it is. (Year 12 Male – Middle SES WA).*

### **4.3 “It's Horses for Courses”: Views of school career advisers, principals and parents about VET in school subjects**

Not referring to subjects as VET or not VET appeared to have positive ramifications – namely, the removal of some of the stigma that may be associated with the selection of these subjects. It appeared that the practice of not differentiating between subjects within schools served to broaden the curriculum base and range of options available to all students while fostering the spirit of student choice. There was a sense of valuing different pathways for students – of it being a case of 'horses for courses.'

#### **4.3.1 Non-discriminatory Dissemination of Advice**

Inherent in the move not to differentiate between subjects, it appeared general practice amongst Career Advisers to advocate the merits of VET. Furthermore, they claimed to do so to all students. When asked to comment on the merits of pursuing either a university pathway or a vocational education pathway, they claimed that they did not

advocate one as better than the other. Furthermore, they suggested that their advice to students took the ‘follow your heart,’ ‘it’s horses for courses’ lines:

CA: *I say to the students they have to look at what they are wanting to learn. (Career Adviser – Upper SES QLD)*

CA: *I guess what I’m saying is that on a global thing I’m telling kids, ‘You don’t choose subjects you don’t want to do. (Career Adviser – Middle SES QLD)*

CA: *Off the top of my head, I would say the value is entirely determined by the child.  
... I think if it suits the kid and it’s another option in the armoury of things that can be offered – it’s fantastic, wonderful. (Career Adviser – Upper SES NSW)*

CA: *If it’s applicable to them. I mean we are talking about individuals here. (Career Adviser – Middle SES NSW)*

CA: *VET allows students to broaden their attitude and experience ... Yes, I do advise students to enrol in VET subjects while they’re at school ... (Career Adviser – Lower SES NSW)*

The Principals also advocated such a position and, on the whole, expressed a sense of placing importance upon the need to support student choice and to encourage students to achieve their potential – whatever that be, within whatever field, and by following whatever pathway:

Pr: *I think the primary ... what is fundamental is the sense that you achieve, or that you do the best that you can – there are opportunities there for you that you can grasp through education, be it vocationally-focussed or tertiary academically-oriented education ... So I don’t have a view on what the relative merits are of vocational versus tertiary pathways. It’s ‘horses for courses,’ too. (Principal – Upper SES NSW)*

Pr: *... some of our brightest kids [do VET] – so it’s a balance that we’re after.  
... this mixture – aptitude, interest and the career aspirations – I mean I have a fairly holistic approach ... generally I guess I try to, rightly or wrongly, encourage the kids to think about the whole person ... (Principal – Rural NSW)*

### **4.3.2 Opportunities and Options in Abundance**

The Principals, on the whole, expressed the view that VET pathways provided valuable options for students:

Pr: *There are heaps of options.  
... I think it’s [i.e., VET] been a pretty wonderful innovation and especially now that we can do some of the things that TAFE colleges used to do.  
... I think quite generally – it’s really been embraced by kids in New South Wales, to their benefit, very much so.  
... They [i.e., VET students] seem to be getting just so much more out of that course than they would have got out of the old traditional-type stuff.*

... There's advantage for the brightest kid in the school doing VET subjects anyway, if they've got an interest in that particular regard – I personally think they can all go into [VET subjects]. (Principal – Lower SES NSW)

DPr: ... they've [i.e., students] got the option of doing two things, they can go into the VET course as well as going on to do their Higher School Certificate, so they're not narrowing. They're narrowing in one regard that they can then follow that through at TAFE if they want to or, often, pick up jobs directly from those sorts of experiences, those courses. At the same time, a lot of those students ... don't qualify for University Admission Index so they're not burning any bridges behind them – they are broadening but narrowing in one way, so that if they wish to do that, they've got that as an option. (Deputy Principal – Middle SES NSW)

Parents, too, appeared to hold a positive view of what VET could offer – and also saw it as providing valuable alternatives and options to students. For example, one of the parents claimed that, as an option, VET was “definitely important.” (Parent of Year 10 – Lower SES NSW) She went on to suggest:

P: So the more options that are there, and the more things they can try, I think the better. I think it's brilliant. (Parent of Year 10 – Lower SES NSW)

Others picked up on this notion of different options and opportunities, claiming:

P: Now, they've got the opportunity to try a few different things. (Parent of Year 12 – Lower SES NSW)

P: VET courses in school today – I think they're great because it offers kids something else to do. (Parent of Year 12 Male – Rural NSW)

P: [VET offers] choice. (Parent of Year 12 Male – Upper SES NSW)

VET was seen to provide a broader experience base for students – one that would see them better placed to make informed career decisions when the time came to do so:

P: I suppose that the broader the base that these children have access to, the more capable they're going to be to make some decisions when that opportunity finally does arise. (Parent of Year 12 Male – Rural NSW)

Another parent made reference to the shift in, and expansion of, VET's direction and clientele-base. When asked who she/he thought VET subjects and courses were aimed at, the parent commented:

P: From my experience from older days – it's not my experience now, but from the old experience – it would have been more hands-on technical people or that side who didn't want to pursue a course through University ... It used to be that way, but it tends to be aimed at a lot of people right through now. From what I can see, it tends to be a lot more broad as opposed to being just the old school way of doing things. (Parent of Year 10 Female – Middle SES NSW)

Essentially, VET was viewed as “fantastic” in principle (Parent of Year 12 Male – Upper SES NSW), and as presenting “a win-win situation – for all the kids.” (Parent of Year 10 Female – Rural NSW)

Interestingly, the Career Adviser at the upper SES school in New South Wales picked up on this ‘win-win’ notion. While acknowledging the value of VET for non-academic students, she also strongly advocated it for academic students. As evident in the following discussion – pertaining to TAFE’s offering of block mode delivery during school vacations – she promoted VET as an avenue for enhancing student prospects of entry into competitive tertiary courses:

CA: *I would advise the academic kids to take them over and above [their other subjects] and to take them as a means of getting scholarships and getting into competitive Uni courses. So for example ... there’s a media course that’s being offered for kids who study for a week in Easter, July and October, so they will get two units next year. So that’s ideal for a Journalist, because the courses for Journalism are very competitive, and a lot of them have application forms that go with it. If you can show that you have now done a T-VET course in that field, you’re getting a leg up. So I would encourage those bright kids to do that ... (Career Adviser – Upper SES NSW)*

Evidently, the Career Adviser saw an abundance of opportunities and options available through the VET framework. Furthermore, this shift to a ‘top-end’ focus can be read as a potentially promising avenue or strategy for enhancing and managing the image of VET.

Additionally, while rarely explicit in the voices of the students, there was the perception that VET provided an optional pathway or different opportunities for those who might, were it not offered in schools, discontinue their senior schooling. The occasional instances wherein this perception was made explicit by the students are typified in the following excerpts:

I: *Did you consider going straight to TAFE for instance?*

S: *Yeah.*

...

I: *If you hadn’t had the options do you think you would have left school by now?*

S: *Yeah, most probably. (Year 12 Non-Academic Males – Rural NSW)*

I: *If they didn’t have the option at the school of doing your VET studies the way you did, would you have gone to TAFE?*

S: *Yep.*

...

S: *If you want to go to TAFE at the end of Year 12 you will be competing with other Year 10’s and, because you’ve done your Year 12, you’re better. (Year 12 Males – Lower SES WA)*

I: *Did you consider going straight to TAFE?*

...

S: *Yeah, I probably would have went to TAFE if the course wasn’t there [i.e., at school]. (Year 12 Male – Middle SES WA)*

#### **4.4 Reasons for Enrolling in VET at school**

Students perceived a number of advantages and benefits from enrolling in VET subjects. These were perceived as being fun and, for many, a welcome break from the intellectual demands of some of the other subjects. Others also regarded VET subjects as good preparation for post school training. Similar perceptions were also held by Principals and Career Advisers.

#### 4.4.1. “They are the Good Subjects”

Many of the students interviewed – within all three States – identified what they perceived to be the positive elements of studying VET subjects. As one particular student suggested: “They are the good subjects.” (*Year 10 Non-Academic Male – Rural NSW*) They spoke of VET subjects as being “enjoyable;” “fun;” “exciting;” and as being “different” from, and “not as boring” as ‘normal’ school subjects. Their comments about VET included the following:

S: *I decided I'd do something; it would be something I'd enjoy at school. I might not use it, but ... (Year 10 Academic Male – Upper SES NSW)*

S: *Something new and exciting. (Year 10 Non-Academic Female – Rural NSW)*

S: *I suppose they [i.e., students taking VET subjects] just do it because they like it and they enjoy it, and they think it's going to help them to achieve what they want. (Year 10 Academic Female – Lower SES NSW)*

S: *[It's] something different from Maths and English and some stuff like that. (Year 10 Non-Academic Male – Lower SES NSW)*

S: *It's just a fun course to do. It's different from sitting there in a boring classroom – because you're out doing things, you're practical. (Year 12 Non-Academic Female – Lower SES NSW)*

The practical nature of VET – as signalled in the final comment above – was one viewed very positively by the students:

S: *[VET] helps you more because you are doing more practical stuff instead of sitting in a class and listening constantly, writing and talking our ears off. (Year 12 Female – Middle SES QLD)*

S: *It's more practical so you're not doing theory all the time. You can't motivate yourself enough just doing theory. (Year 10 Non-Academic Female – Rural NSW)*

Additionally, several of the students who had not enrolled in VET subjects went on to lament their decision not to do so:

S: *Now that I look back, I think, I wish I'd done Hospitality or something like that – because it looks fun. (Year 12 Female – Lower SES QLD)*

S: *It kind of makes me jealous because they get to do all this practical stuff and we are just writing, writing, writing, writing. (Year 12 Female – Lower SES WA)*

#### 4.4.2 Gaining A “Head Start”

The view that VET subjects provided valuable qualifications and vital links to TAFE vocational pathways was prevalent in the students’ talk. More specifically, it was particularly prevalent in the talk of the middle and lower SES students and their rural counterparts. VET was seen to provide those enrolled in it with a “head start” (*Year 10 Female – Middle SES WA*) and as functioning “like stepping stones for the rest of your

life.” (Year 12 Female – Lower SES WA) It was also seen to serve as “a back-up” – “something to fall back on.” (Year 12 Non-Academic Female – Rural NSW):

- S: *[Students who do VET subjects] get recognised, like, they get a TAFE thing. So, if they want to go to TAFE – they don’t have to start again. And most TAFE courses are more useful further on in your life. Like the VET courses. You learn a lot more practical skills ... they’re things that can help you when you get out in the work force, even if that’s not the field that you go into. (Year 12 Academic Female – Middle SES NSW)*
- S: *It is an opportunity to get into the workplace – VET gives them an opportunity to experience that. (Year 12 Academic Female – Middle SES NSW)*
- S: *Some of them give you qualifications and some of them get you on your way. (Year 12 Female – Middle SES QLD)*
- S: *[VET] can lead into TAFE. I think there’s various TAFE courses that you can take that are similar. (Year 12 Female – Middle SES WA)*
- S: *I think it’s a good idea. It allows people who want to do a specific career path to start now and go on work experience and have that on their resume. (Year 12 Female – Middle SES WA)*
- S: *[A VET-oriented subject] is something you can do when you leave school and you want to get a job or something like that. It makes it easier because you have background knowledge. (Year 10 Academic Female – Rural NSW)*
- S: *They [i.e., students enrolled in VET] do it to be ahead of everyone else – when they’ve left school ready to do a TAFE course; they’re ahead of everyone else. (Year 10 Non-Academic Female – Lower SES NSW)*
- S: *[Students do VET] probably to kick-start them off. If they’re say doing this course at TAFE or something, they’re already doing what they love and what they want to do, and they’re already one step in front of the other person. ... [You have] certificates and stuff before you leave school. Like it might mean you get a head start in front of everyone else so, after they leave school, they start TAFE, but they’ve already started at TAFE. (Year 12 Academic Male – Lower SES NSW)*

The comment of one student in particular encapsulated the view that participation in VET at school placed those enrolled in a powerful bargaining position in terms of gaining employment. He saw the opportunity to complete grade 12, gain work experience and attain TAFE certificates as a particularly valid reason for taking up VET programs in school:

- S: *I want knowledge to put behind me so that I can go to someone and say, “Give me a job.” If they go, “Have you got any experience?” – I can go, “Yes. Try two certificates for the T-VET, my HSC certificate and my college certificate or Uni.” (Year 12 Non-Academic Male – Lower SES NSW)*

Students also stated that VET provided opportunities to gain valuable “life skills” (Year 10 Female – Upper SES QLD), including those that would enable them to successfully



take up “a part time job” (*Year 12 Academic Female – Middle SES NSW*) or gain “straight job opportunities.” (*Year 12 Female – Lower SES WA*) Several students also spoke of the insights gained through their participation in VET in the following ways:

S: *It made me appreciate school. (Year 12 Academic Female – Middle SES NSW)*

S: *[Now] I’m sort of used to the adult environment ... it’s just like an eye-opener – you realise that the HSC really isn’t that big. ... they tend to show you that right now school’s it, and then after is Uni. (Year 12 Non-Academic Female – Upper SES NSW)*

Finally, one of the students had a strong message for ‘the powers that be’ regarding the value of VET in schools. She stated that:

S: *“I think the Commonwealth really needs to promote VET subjects because it does get you into a lot of things.” (Year 12 Female – Lower SES WA)*

#### **4.4.3 Rhythm, Pace and Enjoyment of Study**

For many of the students – and in particular the males – choosing a VET subject meant a change of rhythm and pace in their study program. VET subjects were generally seen as less intellectually demanding and less emotionally stressful in that they were more likely taken for enjoyment and as a break from a more rigorous academic load than for any other reason:

S: *... a lot of it’s practical, changing the rhythm and changing the speed. (Year 10 Academic Male – Upper SES NSW)*

S: *I decided I’d do something [Multimedia] – it would be something I’d enjoy at school. I might not use it, but ... (Year 10 Academic Male – Upper SES NSW)*

S: *Maybe because they enjoy it.*

S: *Something different.*

I: *Something different?*

S: *Something different from Maths and English and some stuff like that.*

S: *Might be a bit of a break, like something they can relax ...*

S: *They’re doing what they want to do.*

...

S: *Or it might be just like a break subject – something they can just relax in – not get stressed.*

...

S: *You’re not exactly stressed about it.*

S: *Yeah, you’re enjoying yourself.*

S: *Yes. (Year 10 Non-Academic Males – Lower SES NSW)*

The notion of selecting a VET subject for the sole purpose of enjoyment was prevalent amongst non-academic students. A group of year 10 non-academic males discussed their selection of subjects in the following manner:

I: *Why did you decide to put VET into what you are doing next year?*

S: *I like the subject.*

I: *You like the subject. When your mates are choosing VET at school, why are they doing it?*

S: *Because they like the subject. (Year 10 Non-Academic Males – Middle SES NSW)*

This perception was also evident in the voices of the Principals and Career Advisers who advocated a ‘follow your heart,’ ‘do what you enjoy’ mantra. Interestingly, it was particularly evident in their discussion of academic students. Essentially, they saw VET as providing these students with a break from the academic rigours of ‘harder,’ ‘heavier’ school studies. They commented on this issue in the following ways:

Pr: *There’s advantage for the brightest kid in the school doing VET subjects – if they’ve got an interest in that particular regard – because it takes the pressure off the other subjects a little bit. (Principal – Lower SES NSW)*

CA: *Some of them [academic students] actually need a break from the heavy workloads ... (Career Adviser – Lower SES NSW)*

CA: *They [academic students] still say they want to do a VET course because it frees up a bit of time to put more effort and more time into some of the harder courses they are doing. (Career Adviser – Middle SES NSW)*

#### **4.4.4 VET in Schools Affecting Students’ Decision to Remain at School**

Additionally, while rarely explicit in the voices of the students, there was the perception that VET provided an optional pathway or different opportunities for those who might, were it not offered in schools, discontinue their senior schooling. The occasional instances wherein this perception was made explicit by the students are typified in the following excerpts:

I: *Did you consider going straight to TAFE for instance?*

S: *Yeah.*

...

I: *If you hadn’t had the options do you think you would have left school by now?*

S: *Yeah, most probably. (Year 12 Non-Academic Males – Rural NSW)*

I: *If they didn’t have the option at the school of doing your VET studies the way you did, would you have gone to TAFE?*

S: *Yep.*

...

S: *If you want to go to TAFE at the end of Year 12 you will be competing with other Year 10’s and, because you’ve done your Year 12, you’re better. (Year 12 Males – Lower SES WA)*

I: *Did you consider going straight to TAFE?*

...

S: *Yeah, I probably would have went to TAFE if the course wasn’t there [i.e., at school]. (Year 12 Male – Middle SES WA)*

#### **4.5 Reasons for Not Enrolling in VET subjects**

While it appeared common practice within schools not to formally differentiate between VET and other subjects, thus avoiding the subordination of one type of course over another, and while the merits of VET subjects were lauded by principals, career advisers, parents and students alike, judgemental comments were made in reference to VET. This

broad voicing of negative perceptions, experiences and suspicion of VET subjects was evident across all schools, among all SES groups and for boys and girls.

#### **4.5.1 The “Horse for this Course” is the Non-Academic Performer**

The students were quite clear as to who the ‘horse’ was for the VET course(s) – there was seemingly no question about it. VET was the pathway to which the non-academic student was destined – the ‘lot’ of such a student. Essentially, students viewed VET and non-VET subjects to operate within a binary framework: VET was for the non-academic ‘doers’ of physical and undervalued work while, in opposition, non-VET subjects were for the academic ‘doers’ of mentally rigorous and valued work.

The academic students, in particular, were quite clear that VET was the pathway to be pursued by their non-academic counterparts and not themselves:

S: *People don’t recommend it if you’re like an achiever. (Year 10 Academic Male – Middle SES NSW)*

S: *They [i.e., those who do VET] don’t do well in academic subjects. (Year 10 Academic Male – Rural NSW)*

S: *Basically, if you don’t want an OP job or if you don’t have any aspirations for a uni-based career ... they just go for VET subjects because they can’t be bothered studying. (Year 12 Female – Middle SES QLD)*

VET was also seen – somewhat patronisingly – as providing a ‘life line’ to those who were not academically able and, furthermore, as an avenue for which they were seen to be grateful:

S: *I think they’re really grateful, because people who aren’t intellectually smart, with essays and things like that, they have a chance, they still have a chance to succeed – and that’s their chance, that’s their way through. (Year 10 Academic Female – Upper SES NSW)*

Parents shared the perception that VET was for the non-academically oriented student. When asked what ‘type’ of students did VET, their comments included the following responses:

P: *Those that don’t have that aspiration to go to Uni; they want to do something more hands on. (Parent of Year 10 Female – Rural NSW)*

P: *One’s that are not so academically inclined I’d say. (Parent of Year 10 Male – Rural NSW)*

P: *Kids who are not going off to University ... (Parent of Year 12 Female – Rural NSW)*

P: *People that are probably not looking at going to University. (Parent of Year 12 Male – Middle SES NSW)*

P: *If you want to go to Uni you do that, and if you don’t want to you can do this [i.e., VET]. (Parent of Year 10 Student – Lower SES NSW)*

P: *Kids that don't want to go to University. (Parent of Year 12 Male – Upper SES NSW)*

The Career Advisers, while espousing a 'horses for courses' agenda, seemingly viewed the 'horse' for the VET course as the non-academically oriented student. One of them suggested: "I think the VET subjects should be designed to cater for kids who are not wanting to leave school for University." (*Career Adviser – Middle SES QLD*) Another made reference to giving advice about VET in the following way: "I would if ... depending on their circumstances. So, if they're one of [the] less able students ... then I would say 'Well, that's a good idea, do Construction.'" (*Career Adviser – Rural NSW*) Similarly, another stated that, "for some kids who are not academic, I'm advising them to choose pretty much all the VET courses." (*Career Adviser – Middle SES NSW*). Furthermore, this Career Adviser saw VET as being easier than "some of the harder courses" rather than simply being a different option or alternative course of study.

The tension surrounding perceptions of VET, and of the 'type' of student who does VET, emerged strongly in the dialogue between two Career Advisers – both of whom worked in the same school site:

C1: *So that's why the kids who are OP eligible are doing those subjects and for the blockhead kids it's the other [i.e., VET] side of it, where they will come to class to complete the modules to get the piece of paper at the end, where they can sit for two years and all they have to do is go through the work routine ... they're not difficult kids, they're just not – work ethic.*

...

C2: *Can I just add something on VET? I'm probably going off on a bit of a tangent here, another of my soapboxes. A lot of students, I think, see VET as the veggie subjects. The second grade subjects, and unfortunately a lot of the teachers see it that way as well, and so when students go into those subjects they think they are doing the lower, second rate subjects and academically, whilst they don't have the academic rigour that the authority subjects do, they have other rigours ...*

*... there really has to be a change in perception from teachers and kids and parents about the worth of the VET arena. That not everybody really should be doing academic [subjects] and just because you do the VET doesn't mean that you're dumb, you know, you have talents in other areas ...*

C1: *And that's the part of the thing around the OP subjects, theoretically they mean that, you know, these kids are somehow smarter or better or more intelligent or – and ultimately it's just the collection of subjects they choose to do.*

C2: *Book learning as a opposed to practical learning – that's what it all boils down to, isn't it?*

#### **4.5.2 VET Subjects Seen as Not Helping with University Entry Scores**

Expectedly, as with the students enrolled in VET, the VET subjects were themselves also devalued, scrutinised and – at times – viewed with suspicion. The subjects were viewed as "a waste of time" (*Year 10 Non-Academic Male – Middle SES NSW*), as "such a waste." (*Year 10 Academic Female – Upper SES NSW*) They were perceived to be subjects that "won't get you [i.e., students] anywhere." (*Year 12 Female – Middle SES*

QLD) VET was seen to be “easier” because “they’re courses that you can do without studying.” (Year 12 Non-Academic Female – Middle SES NSW) This perception was clearly linked to the importance placed upon University entry requirements: TE (Tertiary Entrance score) in Western Australia, OP (Overall Position) in Queensland and UAI (University Admission Index) in New South Wales.

The relationship between the views of VET as devalued and futile, and the onus placed upon tertiary entrance, was highlighted in students’ comments. As one female student suggested:

S: *...because you’re like getting towards getting a good OP – there’s no point in doing it [i.e., VET] – you may as well stay home. (Year 10 Female – Middle SES QLD)*

A group of academic males also took up, and put forth, a very clear – and somewhat satirical – position in regard to this relationship:

S: *If it’s not going to count for a UAI, I’m not interested in it.*

I: *So if it wasn’t counting for a UAI, not interested?*

S: *Not interested.*

S: *Not interested, no.*

S: *None of the things they offer really appeal to me.*

S: *I don’t know what they offer ... if they offer something terribly interesting, I might ...*

S: *What! Medicine for Beginners? (Year 12 Academic Males – Upper SES NSW)*

It became apparent that VET, as evident in the discussion detailed above, had nothing to offer these academically oriented students – to suggest that it did was seen to be somewhat farcical. Additionally, these students were not alone in constructing deprecatory readings of VET. Another group of academic males voiced a comparable stance – and endeavoured to explain the UAI and its inevitable and important role in the pursuit of their career pathway:

S: *I didn’t really have to look at it [i.e., VET], for what I wanted to do.*

...

S: *‘Cause I think ... TAFE, you don’t need, like you can’t study Medicine at TAFE – you have to study at University and so I don’t need any of those – whatever TAFE gives me ...*

*... it’s not what I want, and I don’t need it – I don’t need to go to TAFE and do the VET courses.*

S: *Yeah, I don’t need to go to TAFE for any of my subjects that I want to do now.*

I: *Are you doing any VET subjects at the school next year?*

S: *No.*

I: *No, OK. And what about you X? You’re the same, or ... so did you not think about doing any, or ...*

S: *No, ‘cause what I want to do is in University.*

S: *At our school we have ... I don’t know about Queensland, but in New South Wales you have the UAI and non-UAI subjects. So, if you want to go to Uni, you have to get at least 10 UAI subjects – and then there’s non-UAI where you don’t need, you can **just** go to TAFE, like you don’t go to University ... (Year 10 Academic Males – Lower SES NSW)*

A cloud of suspicion hung over VET. Many students were suspicious as to whether or not VET was a 'real' school course and as to how it would 'count' as a component of their education:

I: *What do you think students at this school think of the VET subjects? Do they value them in a particular way?*

S: *I think people are worried ... my point of view is I don't ... I can't say I really trust it because I ... for me, it's like ... you come to school to do school, and when you hear about other courses like that, you wonder about it, that it actually will still count the same, or if ... I suppose ... for me, it's like, we didn't even know about it ... I wasn't even informed, I didn't even know that there were those options when I came into Year 12 or Year 11 or whatever it was. I didn't even know they were there.*

I: *So they weren't promoted, is that what you're saying?*

S: *Yeah, they weren't promoted, and they weren't ... they just seemed, like they're not **real** school courses for me.*

I: *Is that what the rest of you think?*

S: *I agree. (Year 12 Non-Academic Males – Upper SES NSW)*

One of the Queensland students also signalled suspicion over the inclusion of VET subjects into one's course selection. She warned:

S: *I don't think it wise to mix board and VET subjects". (Year 10 Female – Middle SES QLD)*

Additionally, parents spoke of the devalued status and worth of VET and of it causing damage to UAI results:

P: *Actually my daughter ... she's going to do Certificate II Retail next year, during Year 11 and 12 with McDonald's, and she can either do that as part of her HSC or she can do it separately. And, she's opted to do it separately because the actual subject itself is done through ... for the HSC that would be marked down drastically.*

P: *... marked right down, yeah.*

P: *For UAI's, yes.*

P: *That's why [daughter] went for whatever – I think it was English 1 – because it [i.e., VET] puts your score down. (Parents of Year 10 Females – Rural NSW)*

This view of it being unwise to include VET subjects in one's course selection was further linked to the need for a 'safety net.' As one student suggested:

S: *I wanted to do like Engineering or just another hands-on one, but I decided to do all six OP ones so that, if one of them got too hard and I completely stuffed it up, it wouldn't matter so much because I would still have five [i.e., OP subjects]. So sort of like a safety barrier sort of thing, in case I stuffed up. (Year 12 Male – Lower SES QLD)*

Clearly, VET was once again perceived to be of little value – if not potentially dangerous – to the academically oriented student in pursuit of a tertiary education.

One of the parents interviewed in the rural New South Wales site also raised his suspicion and concern at the notion of the 'bright' kids getting 'seduced into VET courses.'

Clearly, his reading of VET was that it was not a desirable undertaking for academically oriented students – but rather, a ‘waste.’

*P: I recognise that staying on is a factor of life in the senior school. You are now teaching a different quality of kid – aged 16, 17 and 18 – and therefore, there’s a necessary position for Voc Ed in the right direction ... Voc Ed courses in the senior school. So I acknowledge that and it’s place there. My concern is that academically gifted kids are being seduced into VET courses when we should say, “No, you are a ... got a brain. You should be pushing yourself in these six academic areas and don’t be tempted by that Hospitality, when you can do that later on. Don’t waste this important time of your intellectual development on that. (Parent of Year 12 Male – Rural NSW)*

#### **4.5.3 Dumping Ground for Troublemakers**

Furthermore, several interviewees expressed their suspicion that VET courses functioned as a ‘dumping ground’ for the badly behaved. One parent discussed his son’s negative experience of VET and, in doing so, highlighted the perception that VET is often employed as a behaviour management strategy or source of punishment:

*P: Well, my son was put through one of those courses. Well, because he wasn’t achieving in the conventional subjects, so they decided to try something else, and he and a couple of others from X went over to Y High School, and they were doing a course there – I think it was a multi-media course. It was very disruptive because ... to the kid ...*

*I: That’s really important to know.*

*P: He came back and he said, “They’re a bunch of losers in there, I feel like ... all the kids that aren’t doing well and disrupting, you know, we were in a class with a bunch of other bad kids, you could see they were bad kids.” He felt that it was like a punishment – he was taken out of school, put into another class with a bunch of other kids that he didn’t know, who were rough nuts – and he said, “I don’t want to do that.”  
... Yeah, and he described some of the other kids, and they didn’t sound like they were very nice kids. He’s not a bad kid, he’s not a naughty kid, he just doesn’t like some subjects, so we thought “We’ll get him out of these subjects. (Parent of Year 10 Male – Upper SES NSW)*

This view of VET, as being the ‘dumping ground’ for behaviourally problematic students, was also picked up on by one of the students. He claimed that one of his teachers warned ‘good’ students off doing VET, stating:

*S: It’s only for bad people, because Mr Lovell said if you go ask him he won’t put you in it.  
... You do it to get on discipline and stuff like that... (Year 10 Male – Lower SES WA)*

#### **4.5.4 Attitudes Towards Students Enrolled in VET Subjects**

The non-academically oriented students – those who *apparently* and subsequently do choose VET – were further devalued and demeaned. They were labelled and referred to as “drop-kicks,” “drop-outs” and “bludgers.” This negative and derogatory view of those doing VET became apparent in the students’ comments when they were asked to comment on which students did VET and why they thought this was so:

*S: I think they think it’s full of drop-outs and that.*

- I: *Do they?*
- S: *Yeah.*
- I: *So, if they're not people who are planning to go to Uni and they do VET subjects, they think they're a bit of a drop-out?*
- S: *Yeah. They just get a ... I guess people look at them differently and that, and they treat them differently at the same time.*
- ...
- S: *They couldn't do the hard yards – getting into University.*
- I: *So University is seen as being equal to doing the hard yards?*
- S: *Yeah.*
- ...
- S: *And sometimes family might tell you, 'Don't hang around **that** sort of person' or that, 'cause you might pick up some of their ways or something. They're [i.e., family] sort of stuck up.*
- I: *So there is, you think, amongst the community – there are people who think that ...*
- S: *They're lower and they're not so good or anything.*
- I: *Because they do VET?*
- S: *Yep. (Year 10 Academic Males – Lower SES NSW)*

Interestingly, the non-academic students – and specifically the non-academic males – also spoke in these derogatory terms.

- S: *It's [i.e., VET] just for drop kicks ... It's the whole mentality that like – not just at this school, every school's got it. (Year 10 Non-Academic Males – Upper SES QLD)*
- S: *Bludgers. (Year 10 Non-Academic Male – Middle SES QLD)*
- S: *Bludgers. (Year 10 Non-Academic Male – Lower SES NSW)*

This perception of VET students clearly rang true with another group of non-academic males – all of whom were enrolled in VET subjects. They spoke candidly about how they felt they were viewed by other students:

- I: *What do you think, generally, other students think about people who do VET subjects at school?*
- S: *They reckon we're stupid, I think.*
- S: *The usual thing that I've got is that they reckon, they've got this big idea that TAFE's a school for idiots – but that's just the general thing. They reckon if you don't go to uni, you're an idiot.*
- S: *You're nothing.*
- I: *So you think that's the perception that people have?*
- S: *They don't realise until they're in there. Once you're in TAFE you realise that ...*
- S: *TAFE is a university. Just easier to get into.*
- S: *Like when I picked Business, most of my friends said, 'Oh, what's the point ... you might as well just leave school ...*
- S: *Some people have told me it's the cheats way out ... (Year 12 Non-Academic Males – Lower SES NSW)*



## 4.6 Institutional Issues and the Like

A number of institutionally based issues of concern and the like emerged in the data collected – with the exception of that gathered in the Western Australia schools. It appeared that the constitution of the various school sites themselves had an impact upon the practice of VET. Additionally, strained and frustrating partnerships between TAFE colleges and schools surfaced as an issue of concern. Furthermore, the inflexibility of cross-institutional timetabling, transportation difficulties and the lack of resources were identified as having a significant and detractive impact upon VET studies.

### 4.6.1 School Sites: Cultures, Communities and Clientele

The size and constitution of particular school populations emerged as an influential factor during the exploration VET in schools. It became apparent that some schools were better able to implement more extensive VET programs than were other schools. It also became clear that the community in which a school was located, along with the ethos or culture of the school – as informed by the community – served to impact upon the practice of VET within it.

It became apparent that the size of the school population had a direct effect upon the type of VET program(s) that could be implemented in any given site. One Career Adviser commented on the direct relationship between the size of the school and its capacity to offer subject choices to students in the following way:

CA: *Even at a high school as big as this, we have problems with subject choices because there are not enough kids wanting to do particular things. (Career Adviser – Middle SES NSW)*

The Principal of a Queensland school gave a similar explanation of this relationship as specific to his own school:

Pr: *... we would love to have even more VET subjects in our curriculum. Being a small high school with roughly a hundred or just over a hundred in year 11 [and] a hundred in year 12, we don't have those huge numbers ... so, therefore, when you offer your subject curriculum you don't quite have the choice, the diversity that the big high schools do. (Principal – Lower SES QLD)*

One group of parents in the upper SES New South Wales school spoke in positive terms about VET and the inherent notion of broadening the base of the curriculum – unlike their counterparts discussed previously in 4.4 and in 4.6.3. which follows. In doing so, they alluded to the tertiary-driven focus of the school and local community or suburb. Arguably, their perspective was that the ‘culture’ of this particular geographical – and socially constituted – area sat at odds with the premise underpinning, and the practices of, VET. Furthermore, their dialogue was marked by voices of dissent and a desire to disrupt the dominant culture of the community and school:

I: *Can you see what schools are aiming at, when they begin to broaden the base of the curriculum and start to ...*

P: *Fantastic.*

P: *Choice.*

P: *Because there's been too much focus on going to University.*

I: *Too much focus? Uh-huh.*

P: *... in this whole area – that's the general focus. (Parents of Year 12 Males – Upper SES NSW)*

The parents' perception of the school and community culture as being at odds with VET was added further weight by the claims of a group of non-academic students – those who might be expected to be informed about VET offerings. Interestingly, their claims also sit in opposition to the view that all students were informed of VET options and encouraged to 'follow their hearts' – as espoused by the Principal and careers advisers in the school:

S: *We're very informed of Uni, I think – but with TAFE, I don't think that the school gives us too much information ...*

...

S: *The majority of information is about Uni and then a smaller portion is TAFE – but it's mainly Uni.*

S: *You don't get a huge amount of information on TAFE. You get basically everything and anything you want on University, but when it comes to TAFE, we have to find it out ourselves. (Year 12 Non-Academic Females – Upper SES NSW)*

The size and clientele of the school population, and the school and community culture, were also seen to play influential roles in terms of the VET subjects and programs on offer within the Upper SES Queensland school – as the comments of the Principal and Career Adviser illuminate:

Pr: *We don't really cater in the sense of students who are not tertiary bound I don't believe – very effectively – and that's an issue. You have to recognise what you can do though, so we are in a position of liability and needing to hold and build our market ...*

*... the academic thing is what builds the school – probably most of the people who come here get [an] OP and things. Now vocational education I think is important because there are students here who would no doubt benefit from that – but that's tied in with numbers. We can't sacrifice ...*

*... The only way you can offer more VET subjects is to cut back [on traditional subjects] and we can't – we don't have enough people to do [inaudible] willy nilly to do subjects. So we can't do that without sacrificing some of our traditional subjects, and we can't do that because they're embedded in what the school is. So people who want to go in this job of vocational education really have to go somewhere else I think. It doesn't mean that if we grew larger – I would be looking very clearly ... I think there should be a pathway for students to choose vocational education and training but our clientele – the majority of our clientele is not that way inclined ... so we don't have the ability to do that, but I would like to see it happen. (Principal – Upper SES QLD)*

I: *Why do you think that's that case – where there's not as many students doing those [i.e., VET] subjects?*

CA: *Because we are, have a history of being an academic school. Because we have links with the university streams and we get their uni kids – you know the different professorships and that, and we have international students who are being sent out here by their parents and paying trillions of dollars for schooling ... so they have to go on and do university. (Career Adviser – Upper SES QLD)*

#### 4.6.2 Problematic Partnerships

Several Principals and Career Advisers spoke of the difficulties experienced when attempting to liaise with, and to access information from, TAFE colleges in regard to VET subjects and courses for dissemination to students. They also signalled the need to establish more flexible working relationships with TAFE institutions:

*Pr: I would like them to be able to say – next year at X TAFE, these are the courses we’re offering at Y or wherever the other TAFEs are – what courses they’re offering. The idea of doing a TAFE course and what that means in terms of the AQF, that’s not an issue, we can do that, but the issue would be – what’s being offered? Because, at the moment, we have on our form, “Would you be interested in doing a TAFE course?” but we weren’t able to tell them [i.e., the students] what TAFE courses there are. (Principal – Middle SES NSW)*

*CA: We have a fair amount of information about TAFE, but they won’t commit to anything, so they drive us mad.  
... All TAFEs – they seem to run by the seat of their pants, so we never know what courses they are starting.  
... The fact that the organisation is so woeful means that we can’t really tap into it in the way we would like to. (Career Adviser – Upper SES QLD)*

*Pr: I think there needs to be more flexibility between TAFE and schools – where programs can be taught here. (Principal – Lower SES QLD)*

A case was also made regarding the advantages of having a TAFE within close proximity to the school site – and of such proximity making a difference to the running of VET and to the relationships established between schools and TAFE institutions:

*Pr: The importance of the TAFE College next door to us is a big priority.  
... We have tried over the years to get our kids going over there and using their facilities, and the TAFE come over here and use our facilities – so we have a good rapport with the TAFE College. (Principal – Middle SES QLD)*

This view was supported by the school’s Career Adviser, who claimed:

*CA: I think I’ve got pretty good networks outside the school ... TAFE College – I use them a lot and we actually conference quite regularly. (Career Adviser – Middle SES QLD)*

#### 4.6.3 Troublesome Transportation: Buses, Trains and Automobiles

Transportation, and the necessity of travelling to TAFE colleges, were viewed as areas of major concern to those involved in VET programs. Specifically, Principals, Career Advisers, parents and students alike identified transportation as being a “problem” and travel as a major deterrent to those who might otherwise undertake VET studies. Furthermore, it emerged as a problem for all Queensland and New South Wales schools – with the exception of the middle SES school in Queensland that was located alongside a TAFE college:

*Pr: Transport is a big thing. (Principal – Lower SES QLD)*

*CA: The other problem we have here is they’ve [i.e., the VET students] got to get themselves to X or to Y ... or some other place to actually do the TAFE*

course. They do it in a block, so it's not just one day per week. (Career Adviser – Rural NSW)

P: ... the disruption of getting him [i.e., his son] out of school, dropping him off [at TAFE], picking him up, and making sure he hasn't missed anything here [at school] – we decided no, don't like that. (Parent of Year 10 Male – Upper SES NSW)

S: But, yeah, the thing is the fact that we have to travel probably put me off more. If it [i.e., VET] was at school I would have done it.

S: But yeah, because we have to travel, that really put me off.

...

S: ... there was Music Industry as well – about three or four people dropped out of that because they also had to travel and it was ... they had to pay for a taxi to get there and back, and it was sort of a big issue. (Year 12 Females – Upper SES QLD)

S: It's annoying because I need to take ...

I: You need to ...

S: I need to go there ...

I: Transport?

S: Yeah, I don't have transport, like cars ... it would be too much time – on the way, going and back.

I: So transport is a problem?

S: I've got a car, but last year, there's a public bus going outside the school – so I caught that and the train up. It wasn't hard, but ...

I: But you had to get a train?

S: Yeah. It would have been nice, like they could have organised a mini-bus and encourage people. (Year 12 Non-Academic Females – Upper SES NSW)

#### 4.6.4 Timetabling Turmoil

Timetabling – specifically cross-institutional timetabling – was seen to present another set of constraints and inconveniences for those enrolled in VET studies, and as a deterrent to those who might otherwise have undertaken such courses. The comments of Principals and parents below highlight the timetabling difficulties as evident in cross-institutional programs and allude to the problematic notion of 'double jeopardy' through VET:

Pr: It's a challenge for an inflexible system – like the timetable we have. (Principal – Middle SES NSW)

Pr: The big stumbling block for me was the three-hour block that they [i.e., TAFE] were demanding ... three-hour blocks do not suit our school structure here. (Principal – Middle SES QLD)

P: It must be pretty hard to fit in with the rest of the curriculum ... you might miss an English lesson or something like that ...

P: I thought they were designed, though, so that they were actually allocated – like you allocated a Maths class, you allocated whatever ...

P: No, but they [i.e., Colleges of TAFE] don't fit in with the timetable here, that's the thing.

- P: Yeah, and so then, therefore the kids then – often those kids who are having trouble academically anyway – then get in more trouble. And if you're missing something, like in English ...*
- I: Would any of you actually encourage your kids to do, say, one VET subject?*
- P: No.*
- P: No. (Parents of Year 10 Males – Upper SES NSW)*
- P: With the VET courses, unless they're done on the premises, there's a problem with trying to ...*
- ...*
- P: There's a limited amount of time they've got to devote to the whole school thing, including the UAI-type subjects, so why would you [i.e., travel to TAFE]?*
- I: Other parents have commented on that too.*
- P: ... missing other lessons and then catching up, it's just to rigid ...*
- P: With Hospitality, the teachers have become accredited VET teachers – in school as a school subject ... (Parents of Year 12 Males – Upper SES NSW)*

Students also expressed concern over cross-institutional timetabling. They spoke of this issue as being a major deterrent to their taking up of VET studies. They also voiced concerns about being absent from school, falling behind, and of the subsequent need to 'catch up' on missed class work:

- S: I don't think I would [i.e., take VET], no, 'cause it would take time out of school and just complicates things ... it clashes with the different subjects. (Year 12 Academic Female – Upper SES NSW)*
- S: That's another thing, most courses are on Tuesday from 2 till 5 and that means that you have to miss out on last period if they can't arrange your timetable around it. I used to miss out on one-and-a-half periods every Tuesday, and they managed to make it the same period instead of switching it around. (Year 12 Non-Academic Female – Upper SES NSW)*
- S: And at TAFE ... you're going to miss out on a bit of class. You know, you just don't tend to do your work as well.*
- I: OK. So, you are saying that you decided not to go to TAFE because it was going to mess around with the rest of your school program? Is that – with your timetable?*
- S: Oh, well kind of ...*
- ...*
- S: If you go to TAFE on a Wednesday or something, you'd have to miss out on – like she could miss out on English or Maths or whatever – so you're falling behind all the way at school. (Year 12 Non-Academic Females – Middle SES NSW)*

Importantly, it became quite clear that 'VET in schools' was seen to be a valid option – a viable solution. Conducting VET in schools was viewed as the way to avoid the 'pitfalls' and problems associated with TAFE-based studies. For example, when asked why they chose to do VET at school instead of doing VET at TAFE, a group of students responded in the following way:

S: ... like you don't have to interrupt your schedule ... like the kids doing it – have to leave early certain days. So, it's a bit awkward.

S: I've found a lot of people; they go to go to TAFE but they never make it. They find something else to do – on the way. TAFE is like, boring. (Year 12 Academic Females – Middle SES NSW)

Another possible alternative cited was that of block-mode delivery at TAFE during school vacation periods.

#### 4.6.5 Resources as Restrictive

Principals who proclaimed the importance and value of VET also spoke of the restrictions placed upon their school, staff and students due to the (un)availability and/or (in)adequacy of resources:

Pr: I think the biggest issue with VET in schools is staffing and resourcing. ... I think, look at the staffing scales for schools – most of those TAFE groups, they take a maximum of about fourteen students – we are not staffed to do that, so we don't have the ability to offer too many [i.e., VET subjects] because we don't have the staff to cover them. So that's why it's moving slowly. We all know it's a good thing, but it's not resourced properly. (Principal – Lower SES QLD)

Pr: ... class size is an issue, as many of the programs at TAFE require a maximum of fourteen kids. (Principal – Middle SES QLD)

One Principal commented on the lack of accredited VET teachers, teachers' resistance to undertaking National Training Modules and the costs involved in doing so, as problems encountered within his school site:

Pr: ... when we started out with VET in the National Training Modules within our curriculum ... there were a lot of barriers put up by industry. Like, before a teacher could teach this particular course or teach this National Training Module, this teacher has to have so much industry placement and industry experience. Where we have a teacher coming from University into a secondary school, they just didn't have it. So, we were releasing teachers to get that experience in the area, but it was a huge barrier and costing schools money. Teacher were [also] reluctant to do it ... (Principal – Middle SES QLD)

In line with this, a parent in rural New South Wales commented that teachers were often not adequately trained, and spoke of one teacher who was not qualified enough to “sign off on things” – i.e., modules completed by the students. Additionally, the parents in the rural school suggested that the school was reluctant to, or not going to, offer particular VET subjects because “it's too hard” and “too grey an area.”

The students in the rural New South Wales school elaborated on their parents' concerns in regard to the ‘qualification’ of teachers and subsequent ‘quality’ of teaching of VET within the school. A year 12 academic male student who had elected to take a VET subject commented in the following way when questioned as to whether or not VET was a major focus of his study:

S: It was going to be when I started it, I wanted it to be, but it sort of ... a comedy of errors, like ... the teacher's a bit of a loser and she won't pull her finger out and do anything so we fall behind in it...

*We do one activity for two terms and stuff, and we're just so far behind in the course it's not funny – so I've just backed right off. I don't care about it any more because it's been ruined, if you know what I mean. Like, when I started it, I wanted it to be [i.e., a major focus], but not now, so I don't care. (Year 12 Academic Male – Rural NSW)*

He went on to comment – somewhat mockingly – on his dissatisfaction with the quality of the VET subject:

*S: ... There's too much, I don't know – it's all just stupid. Like, to pass one competency, you've got to ... to pass competency, putting the tools away in the shed, you've got to oil the tools and open them and shut them properly and put them in your back pocket and all sorts of stupid rubbish – just takes forever, and it's just ... I don't know if it's badly structured or if it's just her [i.e., the teacher], I don't know. One of the two. It seems like a waste of time. (Year 12 Academic Male – Rural NSW)*

Finally, the rural students also claimed that the financial cost of resources (including fees) associated with VET subjects was a deterrent, and a factor in their decision not to select these subjects:

*I: Who or what influenced your decision not to enrol in VET at school?*

...

*S: Didn't want to pay the fees.*

*I: Do you have to pay fees?*

*S: Not in Primary Industries you don't. In Hospitality you do.*

*S: Hospitality you do, yeah ...*

*I: What sort of fees?*

*S: You've got to pay for all your metal and stuff, wouldn't you, and all your aprons and stuff, food ...*

*S: In Hospitality, you've got to pay like \$100 for a suit you wear – I don't know what sort of suit ... there's long chequered pants and some white shirt and a hat or something. (Year 12 Academic Males – Rural NSW)*

## **4.7 Key Findings**

**Key Finding 1:** The formalised language or terminology of 'VET' was not commonly used in school sites and, as such, students and parents had a limited understanding of the term per se. When the concept was explained to – or 'named' for – the students however, they were able to identify and demonstrate an understanding of that which constitutes 'VET.' Many parents and students associated VET with TAFE colleges and studies. Principals and Career Advisers tended not to distinguish subjects as being – or not being – VET, preferring to refer to the subjects without labels, and thereby signalling their taking up of a non-specific, broad-based, curriculum approach.

**Key Finding 2:** There was a sense of valuing different pathways for students – of it being a case of 'horses for courses.' Principals, Career Advisers and parents perceived VET in a positive light and espoused the view that VET pathways provided valuable options for students. Many of the students also perceived VET in a positive way. The lower and middle SES students and the rural students, in particular, saw VET subjects as providing valuable qualifications, key links to vocational pathways, employment opportunities and access to life skills. While this was the case, many – who encompassed all geographical,

gender and SES demographics – also voiced negative perceptions, experiences and suspicions of VET.

**Key Finding 3:** Generally, students, parents and Career Advisers shared the perception that VET was for the non-academically oriented student. Those enrolling in these subjects were sometimes referred to as “drop kicks,” “drop outs” and “bludgers.”

VET subjects were generally seen – by students, Career Advisers and Principals – as less intellectually demanding and less emotionally stressful in that they were more likely taken for enjoyment and as a break from a more rigorous academic load than for any other reason by the majority of enrolled students. Additionally, many students were uncertain whether VET subjects counted towards the university entry score and tended to steer away from them because of this.

**Key Finding 4:** Institutionally-based issues of concern were raised within and across Queensland and New South Wales schools. These issues included: the impact of the particular school site upon the practice of VET within the site, strained and frustrating partnerships between TAFE colleges and schools, the inflexibility of cross-institutional timetabling, transportation difficulties and the lack of resources available to schools.



## CHAPTER 5

### Traditional Trades as a Career

#### 5.1 Introduction

The chapter highlights issues related to:

- Knowledge within the school community about apprenticeships, traineeships and traditional trades as a career (section 5.2);
- Student interest in pursuing a traditional trade and/or taking up a school-based New Apprenticeship by demographic and educational achievement characteristics (section 5.3);
- Perceptions by students and parents of the advantages and disadvantages of pursuing a career in a trade area (section 5.4); and
- Parent and staff concerns about the arrangements for school based New Apprenticeships and the availability of apprenticeships and of trade positions for young adults (section 5.5).

#### 5.2 Student Knowledge about Apprenticeships, Traineeships and Trades

In the focus groups, students were asked what they knew about apprenticeships and traineeships and what the differences between traineeships and apprenticeships were. Across the school sites students responded with uncertainty as to what was involved in undertaking an apprenticeship or a traineeship – more particularly, about the differences between the two – and about what constituted a traditional trade. The use of the term traditional trade so consistently required clarification for students that it bears remark and is elaborated further in this section.

##### 5.2.1 Student understanding of apprenticeships and traineeships

Across the three States most students knew very little about apprenticeships and traineeships and were unable to explain with any certainty the differences associated with the terms. Students generally declared that they knew little about the distinctions between, or the technicalities associated with, each but offered scattered comments about which was more valuable, which offered more in terms of qualifications, which took more time to complete. Some students who were at a complete loss to comment declared their ignorance outright or, in a spirit of bonhomie, offered to fabricate a response while others continued to contest the issues within the group:

*I: Do you know the difference between apprenticeship and traineeships?*

*S (All): No.*

*I: So if I asked you to explain the difference, could you?*

*S (All): No.*

*S: I could make it up. (Year 10 Academic Males – Middle SES NSW)*

*I: What's the difference between an apprenticeship and a traineeship?*

*S: Good question.*

*S: A traineeship is when you drop a subject at school and you go off to TAFE on a certain day and learn it.*

*S: No, no you don't go to TAFE. You actually go to the work place.*

*S: I have no idea. (Year 12 Males – Lower SES QLD)*

*I: What do you know about apprenticeships and traineeships?*

- S: *Not much.*
- S: *I know apprenticeships go for four years. I don't really know much about traineeships at all. I haven't even looked into an apprenticeship.*
- S: *Same for me. I've no idea.*
- S: *I know a small bit, but I don't think I really needed to know about them. (Year 12 Males – Middle SES WA)*
- I: *Okay, Anyone know the difference between a traineeship and an apprenticeship?*
- S: *Don't you come out with more qualifications from an apprenticeship? I don't know.*
- I: *For the sake of the tape, everyone's sitting here going 'Dah!' (Year 12 Non-Academic Females – Middle SES NSW)*

The few students who were actually engaged in school-based traineeships were able to describe the ways in which the programs were operationalised through the routines of attending school, connecting with TAFE, and blending work and study. However, even with their experience, they varied in what they believed to be the distinction between a traineeship and an apprenticeship:

- I: *Is it an apprenticeship or a traineeship that you're doing?*
- S: *Traineeship. School-based traineeship.*
- S: *They're exactly the same.*
- I: *Apprenticeships and traineeships?*
- S: *Oh, apprenticeships – no. I'm talking about the length of time.*
- S: *An apprenticeship's actually a four [year program] aren't they? (Year 12 Non-Academic Males – Rural NSW)*
- I: *What do you know about apprenticeships and traineeships? Could you explain the difference between apprenticeships and traineeships?*
- S: *Apprenticeship usually goes for about four years, depends on what you're doing, and an apprenticeship is to get you qualified – qualified tradesman, qualified hairdresser or chef – and a traineeship can lead up to an apprenticeship – it's basically on the job training. (Year 12 Females – Lower SES WA)*

### **5.2.2 Student knowledge of traditional trades**

Students also struggled with the term 'traditional trade'. They were curious about what constituted a traditional trade but they were also tentative about what careers the term 'trade' embraced. This level of puzzlement was widespread and students sometimes offered teaching, nursing and medicine, and once offered the 'Lollypop Lady,' as examples of traditional trades. Amongst an array of suggestions, students also offered more informed, though not always current, job titles:

- S: *Butcher, mechanic, candlestick maker. (Year 10 Females – Middle SES QLD)*

One group of girls guessed that it meant anything from teaching to an historic act of economic exchange – of men bartering on ships – an image far removed from the anticipated one that might have included metal workers, electricians and plumbers:

- I: *If I say to you 'traditional trades' what do you think about?*
- S: *Teaching?*
- S: *Men on ships! ...*

- S: *Yeah, all these boxes!*  
 S: *Instead of using money and all that.*  
 S: *A barter?*  
 S: *Yeah! (Year 12 Academic Females – Upper SES NSW)*

Some were completely baffled by the term:

- S: *It's something that was done in the Middles Ages. (Year 12 Males – Middle SES QLD)*

Apart from the confusion that the term evoked, it is worth noting that 'traditional trades' sometimes operated in the pejorative with young adults. That is, amongst some of the student cohorts, traditional trades were contrasted with newer cutting-edge sources of knowledge and skills that were, from their point of view, more clearly located in the sciences and newer technologies.

- I *What do you see as the advantages or disadvantages of taking up a traditional trade?*  
 S *There are more things available now. There are other options that you can branch into that are more interesting – science, those kinds of things.*  
 S *The non-traditional stuff is more appealing.*  
 S *Yeah! Newer kinds of things. (Year 12 Academic Females – Rural NSW)*

For some students, traditional trades clearly connoted not keeping up with reform, being left behind the times:

- S: *And so I think sooner or later it will be a world where a lot of things are reformed and the people who do learn those traditional skills – not that there's anything bad with it – they do have to keep up with the world changing – civilisation. (Year 12 Academic Females – Upper SES NSW)*

In contrast with the negative use of the term, one student who had chosen a trade as a career made the point that traditional trades were transforming in ways that positively embraced more advanced technologies. In professionalising the image and in technologising the work involved, 'Mechanics' were being transformed into 'Technicians', a positive feature that was reflected in the language practice of naming the trade's workers:

- S: *Something I've ... I went to an introductory thing that was about T3 traineeship and they were saying that it's very ... the mechanics area is becoming more professional, and they call mechanics 'technicians', because it's quite a lot more skills now, and lots of people are doing it at the moment. There's become a need for mechanics, technicians. I think they'll be needed – I think 'cause everyone uses cars. (Year 12 Non-Academic Male – Upper SES NSW)*

While students were generally unfamiliar with the term 'traditional trades' and it appeared not to be part of their everyday lexicon, parents and school staff, by comparison, used the term with awareness and certainty. This point is made explicit here as the difference in language usage and fluency with the term appears to signal an intergenerational difference in personal knowledge and awareness of trades. For the younger generation, trades seemed to be less visible in their world where other occupations have gained ascendancy.

### **5.3 Who Is Interested in Traditional Trades as a Career?**

Focus group results show that interest in the traditional trades depended strongly on student SES, locality, gender and academic orientation.

Across the three states, few students attending upper and middle SES schools reported an interest in adopting a traditional trade as a career or in pursuing a school-based apprenticeship even if they were more readily available. By comparison, more students in the lower SES schools, and in the rural school, were favourably disposed to the idea. Among the latter two groups, boys in these schools were more interested than were the girls.

In New South Wales where the additional student variable ‘academic/non-academic’ had been applied to the selection of focus groups, it was possible to penetrate further to find that male ‘non-academic’ students in the lower SES school and in the rural school were more interested than were male students in those schools who were classified as ‘academic’.

Academic boys in the lower SES school and the rural school seemed to be more closely aligned with boys in upper and middle SES schools than with other boys in their own schools. That is, academic boys at rural and lower SES schools, like many boys elsewhere, held less favourable attitudes to taking up a trade as a career. They appeared to be holding fast to their academic accomplishments as a pathway to a professional career. In contrast, non-academic male students from the lower SES and rural school – as distinct from other boys in other schools – stood out as the most likely candidates to view traditional trades as an attractive and desirable career option.

In summary, where the selection criteria allowed for finer grained analysis, it appeared that more interest in trades existed amongst non-academic male students attending the rural school and the lower SES school than amongst any other group of students.

#### **5.3.1 Student Interest in the traditional trades by SES and locality**

When students were asked if they would consider taking up a trade as a career, they generally explained their response in terms of personal interest: that is, students were either interested in particular trades or not. For the most part, in expanding on their responses, students drew on egalitarian discourses – any number of variations of the ‘horses for courses’ discourse – as they did in relation to questions about the movement of VET into the curriculum (see Chapter 4).

Nevertheless, while students protested that trades were good for those who wanted them – and they would do one *if* they were interested – there was an apparent link between the level of student interest in trades as a genuine career option and the socio-economic status of the school that the students attended. More specifically, more students in the lower SES schools appeared interested in trades than were students who attended the middle and upper SES schools. Likewise, more students in the rural school expressed interest in trades than their peers in middle and upper SES metropolitan schools.

Students in middle and upper SES schools frequently claimed that their interests simply lay elsewhere than in pursuing a trade.

S: *It surprises me when people want to be plumbers. It’s like, well, ‘I want to be a performance artist.’ Then it is usually, ‘Wow!’*

- S: *I was thinking of building, but I changed my mind. (Year 12 Males – Middle SES QLD)*
- I: *Would you consider taking up a traditional trade as a career?*
- S: *No.*
- I: *Okay. Why not?*
- S: *It doesn't interest me.*
- S: *Because I think we would have dropped out in Year 10 if we wanted to do it. Well, I'd have left school to go do an apprenticeship or something, if I wanted something like that. (Year 12 Non-Academic Females – Middle SES NSW)*
- S: *Some people would enjoy, and **do** obviously, that's why they're doing it. And so for us, it's not what we want. (Year 12 Academic Females – Upper SES NSW)*
- S: *I'm not interested in becoming a plumber or a builder or ... but like, if I was, then yeah...*
- I: *What about the rest of you?*
- S: *I've never thought about it. (Year 10 Non-Academic Males – Upper SES NSW)*

Some students were sufficiently self-reflective, sufficiently sensitive to the workings of socio-economic and cultural contexts, as to be self-conscious about how they might sound in their rejection of trades as a career option.

- S: *It's [i.e. a trade] not of interest to us. It's not what we want to end up in.*
- ...
- S: *It makes us sound so snobbish though. It's kind of disturbing. (Year 12 Academic Males – Upper SES NSW)*

Other students acknowledged that the social and economic communities in which they lived shaped their career expectations in divisive ways:

- S: *I think there's a very small percentage of kids around these kinds of areas, like these areas of Sydney who would want to go into trades – like the blue-collar force – because of the expectations society – as in North Shore people are expected to go to University, get those academic jobs, become lawyers, doctors, whatever, while people in the Western suburbs of Sydney, they're the ones –*
- ...
- S: *We're expected to go into white-collar jobs, and people in the Western suburbs are expected to go into blue-collar jobs.*
- I: *So there's a community expectation?*
- S: *Absolutely.*
- I: *Cultural expectation?*
- S: *Absolutely. (Year 10 Academic Males – Upper SES NSW)*

By comparison with students in middle and upper SES schools, there was a sense in which students in lower SES schools and in the rural school held more favourable attitudes to trades and to apprenticeships. At the lower SES school in Western Australia, the girls commented on the ways in which boys who enrolled in Manufacturing and

Industrial Studies (MIS) often found themselves an apprenticeship during the course of their program and dropped out of school before completing senior level studies:

S: *And the MIS boys are apprentices and stuff at places.*

S: *Most of them go to work experience for a month or so and then they drop out because they get an apprenticeship. (Year 12 Females – Lower SES WA)*

Amongst some of the boys in the lower SES schools there was a measure of enthusiasm at the thought of being able to pursue a trade through a school-based apprenticeship. Their main concern was that there was too little information and too little school support for them to move in that direction:

I: *Would you consider a school-based apprenticeship? One where you could still do your schooling?*

S: *Oh. Yeah, yeah. Definitely.*

S: *But then do you go straight to full time when school finishes?*

S: *Yeah.*

I: *What have they told you about it?*

All: *Nothing.*

S: *But I think that's what they do. I think that when you finish Year 12, you just go on to full-time.*

S: *Yeah, I'd do that.*

S: *Yeah that would be real good.*

I: *Have they shared much about how you'd go about it?*

S: *We're not really told that, about them that much.*

S: *They show us that they do exist. We get things in notes that say 'If anyone's interested in a school-based apprenticeship for this, come up and see Miss Hammett.' (Year 12 Males – Lower SES QLD)*

Year 10 students at the lower SES school also showed a marked interest in taking up a trade as a career and responded positively to a question about whether they would begin an apprenticeship if it were available to them through school:

S: *Yep.*

I: *Why.*

S: *It might be my big chance in life from one. That could be the big shot for you.*

I: *And do people mostly take them if they're offered?*

S: *Yes. (Year 10 Males – Lower SES QLD)*

At the rural school, too, there was a palpable sense of interest amongst some of the boys in taking up a trade as a career. In discussing the issue, it was clear that some of these boys had already invested considerable thought in the idea. They saw many advantages in trades and listed the following:

S: *A lot of work for you.*

S: *Job security.*

S: *It needs to be done.*

S: *It gives you a career.*

I: *Okay, so when you say it gives you a career – what's that mean?*

S: *Well, you always can stay in that job. Because you have the Certificate, you can basically go anywhere and still do that job because you're qualified.*

S: *Even if you get another job, say you go to uni or something for a year and get another course and you do that for a while and you don't like it, you can fall back on your trade.*

S: *Then you can get your Clerk of Works and become your own boss and employ other people and stuff – make it your own business. (Year 12 Non-Academic Males – Rural NSW)*

This group of boys, including one who already self-identified as “God’s gift to painting”, demonstrated detailed knowledge of what they needed to do to become an electrician or a builder or a cabinetmaker. They talked about the requirements of a trade, of the necessary study and of the travel that they would have to do to access the program through the nearest college of TAFE. For this group of boys, even the way in which trades are offered was acceptable considering the long-term payoffs in terms of quality:

I: *Now, thinking about the ways that traditional trades are offered – do you think that that’s acceptable to young people? Like, if you think about the length of time that takes and the kind of study that’s involved in doing a traditional trade?*

S: *Yes.*

S: *Yes, it is. Because if you don’t have a proper trade and you go onto a work site and you stuff something up, it’s going to look pretty bad.*

I: *Well, to be a painter – how long is your apprenticeship going to be? Four years. And you’d go to TAFE as well?*

S: *Most likely.*

...

I: *Okay so you think, at the moment, the kind of training and the length of time it takes you to do it is acceptable?*

S: *Yes, it is. (Year 12 Non-Academic Males – Rural NSW)*

### **5.3.1.1 Views of parents and school staff about traditional trades as a career by SES and locality of school**

A Career Adviser at one school, a Principal at another, and a parent group at yet another offered additional insights to understanding the workings of the socio-economic and cultural contexts of their schools as connected to the interest within their school communities in pursuing trades as a career. For instance, at the middle SES school in Queensland, the Career Adviser explained that having a population of refugees within the community amplified the lack of interest in trades as a career. These families, like other struggling families in Australia’s recent past, saw Higher Education as a way of improving the chances of a better life for their children:

CA: *I talk about our ESL population, our refugee population. Those parents are keen to see their kids complete. They value education very highly because they see education as a passport to a better life. They come from Africa where there has been war, or from Bosnia, or from Iraq. Their parents have been involved in civil war and they want to see the next generation make it. So there are a lot of those parents who want to see their kids succeed in school and they have high aspirations for them. Most of them want their kids to go to university. So even though their parents themselves may not come from that background they want to see – probably on reflection – a bit like my generation of parents wanted us to go on to university – we were the first generation that went through that sort of – so maybe it’s a bit like that. I don’t know. (Career Adviser – Middle SES QLD)*

At the upper SES school in New South Wales, the Principal explained that the school was “strongly academically focussed”, that parents were “generally tertiary-oriented” and that

destinations of students were “overwhelmingly tertiary-oriented”. On the basis of HSC results the school had earned its position as the “flagship of comprehensive co-education in New South Wales.” While this effect was at least partly attributable to the socio-economic demographic of the school, it was also attributable to the cultural mix of students. As the Principal explained:

*Pr: Remember I said that about 50% of our population is from non-English speaking background? A high proportion from China and some from Korea. Manual labour is not something they see as high status, and so I think that adjusts their perceptions as well. So a very significant proportion of the population in the school is not focussed on manual labour at all, or anything to do with the hands. It's the mind – and education is a status symbol in itself. (Principal – Upper SES NSW)*

The views of parents were divided along SES lines in a similar way to those of students. Parents of students at middle and upper SES schools demonstrated a relative lack of interest in their children pursuing a trade as a career, unless their children had expressed a strong preference for doing so. By contrast, parents at a lower SES school supported the idea of their children adopting a trade as a career. One parent in the group offered a matter-of-fact account of the way that cultural capital operated to coerce choice:

*P: If you're a bricklayer or a plasterer, you can earn a lot of money. Because there's no point in being good and going to uni – it's what you get at the end of it. It's very well paid.*

*I: So you see it as offering financial rewards – yeah? Can you think of any other advantages of perhaps taking up a traditional trade?*

*P: Well, we're not living on the North Shore so –.*

*I: I don't know – can you explain that to me not being from Sydney?*

*P: We're Westies mate.*

*I: Okay, so what's the implications of – ?*

*P: Well, trades people, blue collar workers in the West – over in the North Shore we've got better people – you know the barristers and the solicitors and the like. (Parents of Year 12 Students – Lower SES NSW)*

The school demographic, it seems, operated in ways that linked the socio-economic and cultural context of the school to students' perceptions of trades as an attractive career option.

### **5.3.2 Student interest in a career in the traditional trades by gender**

When exploring the variable of gender, it was apparent that girls expressed less interest and considered fewer advantages to be associated with taking up a traditional trade for themselves, than did boys:

*S: I don't think girls really go for your traditional type of trade. I mean if you – you cook, you clean and, you know –*

*S: Not really.*

*S: ... I'm not saying that girls don't, but me personally, it doesn't really have any benefits. (Year 12 Females – Upper SES QLD)*

*S: I'd probably do it if I couldn't get anything else, I'd probably try to do something with hairdressing.*

*I: So none of the other trades appeal to you?*

*S (All): No. (Year 12 Non-Academic Females – Rural NSW)*



For some girls, questions about their interest in pursuing traditional trades were so far removed from the reality of their lives and their anticipated futures that they were unable to generate serious discussion. Instead, the group offered good humoured and playful responses:

- I: *So what do you think would be the advantages and the disadvantages about being in a trade?*
- S: *There's just so many of them.*
- S: *It's a bit dangerous, like if you're an electrician or a builder, something like that, something could happen to you.*
- I: *Dangerous?*
- S: *Bricks might land on your head or something! (Year 10 Non-Academic Females – Upper SES NSW)*

While some girls gave the topic short shrift, others engaged more seriously and tried to explain how social processes operated to disengage female interest. In doing so, some girls told stories of friends – usually males – who had achieved occupational success through a trade. At the same time they explained that few trade options were available to them as females because most trades were socially and culturally marked as male. For some girls it was the sheer unattainability of male-identified trades that dampened their interest:

- S: *Like, in Year 10 there's all people coming to school saying 'Jordan's got an apprenticeship as a mechanic', but you never see a girl get anything like a mechanic's job and all that.*
- S: *Like the best she could get was a hairdresser.*
- S: *You're never like a mechanic or panel beater or – you can be a chef but there's not that many options. It seems like they're all at Year 10 probably towards guys rather than girls. (Year 12 Non-Academic Females – Middle SES NSW)*

The range of trades available to girls was generally recognised as being limited in comparison to what was available to boys:

- S: *I think the boys have a wider range of apprenticeships like building and that sort of stuff.*
- S: *Like there is only hairdressing for girls, chef and that's it.*
- S: *I would love to do construction but you would be put down by the boys anyway.*
- S: *We would do wood work and stuff like that but we have to put up with everything else from the boys because they're the top in the subject.*
- S: *And they'd be like 'Do you need some help?'*
- S: *'Did you break a nail?'(Year 10 Non-Academic Females – Rural NSW)*

Within the transcript data there was also a detectable story that circulated amongst girls about the way that formerly female-identified trades had surrendered to equity pressures but that male-identified trades had not:

- S: *Well with regards to hairdressing it sort of ... it used to be the woman would do hairdressing ... and then there would be the barber ... but it's very unisex now whereas the other traditional things like the plumbers and the builders, you don't really see very many women doing it.*

- I: *Right. What about chefs? I mean you're interested in...*  
 S: *I am.*  
 S: *I know you see all the television programs and they're mostly all guys.*  
 S: *Jamie Oliver, Jamie Oliver!*  
 S: *Yeah, he's dreadful. (Year 12 Females – Upper SES QLD)*

This story about shifting gender relations that had opened up formerly female-identified trades and traineeships to boys but had not operated at the same pace in the other direction was also told by a Career Adviser at one school and by a career advising team (AT) of teachers in another:

CA: *I had a girl this morning who put her hand up for a school-based traineeship in automotive – two in fact. So yeah! It is still a minority for girls wanting to go into traditionally male areas. Although the other way round – although hospitality is no longer probably considered traditionally female. There's a lot of boys who are interested in hospitality. This is probably something that has changed over a period of years. (Career Adviser – Middle SES QLD)*

AT: *...but if you look at, yeah, you talk to the blokes who... it's a unit of work, we do mandatory in Work Studies and we talk to the boys about apprenticeship, apprenticeship, apprenticeship ... so they're trades' minded...*

AT: *But they're getting into building or into construction.*

AT: *... whereas the girls tend to be more in the retail area or office.*

AT: *But I'm surprised the amount of boys we've got in Year 11 and 12 who are actually doing traineeships. They were keen to do the part-time traineeships. I've got more boys than girls doing it and 2 of those are at McDonalds. (Advising Team – Rural NSW)*

For these kinds of reasons, girls expressed less interest than did boys in taking up a traditional trade as a career.

### **5.3.3 Student interest in the traditional trades as a career by student academic orientation**

The division of students in new South Wales according to the academic/non-academic criterion allowed for deeper penetration of the data that suggested that a pattern of interest in trades was associated with this variable. Students in the non-academic focus groups were more likely than those in the academic groups to express an interest in taking up a trade as a career.

For instance, non-academic boys such as the following spoke of the option of taking up a school-based apprenticeship or traineeship as something of a privilege, as something that anyone would grasp given the chance, although the data showed that this was clearly not the case:

S: *You see but I think everyone would rather an apprenticeship or a scholarship or a traineeship. I think people would rather that because you know that you're set that you're going to get a job. You're not going to be worried and that'll help you concentrate more on your work. Because you're not going to be worried about if you don't do good I'm not going to get this job. You're doing the apprenticeship or scholarship or whatever, and you know you're going to get a job – I think that a lot of young people would work harder – they'll do their best and push it because they're not worried. They don't have*

*that hanging over their head that they're not going to get work, so why bother.*

*I: So, you're doing it along the way and you can see progress and you know at the end of it there's some satisfaction?*

*S: Yeah, some satisfaction that you will be guaranteed a job. I think that's just excellent because it encourages people – more especially me – I know it encourages myself. (Year 12 Non-Academic Males – Lower SES NSW)*

By comparison with the non-academic students, those identified as academic often spoke in terms of expecting 'more' of themselves than a trade. The not-so-subtle sub-text here was that taking up a trade was a lesser outcome in terms of a career, a theme that was iterated throughout their talk:

*S: It's not like that – I really don't think I could picture myself owning my own hairdressing salon unless I've got some other type of degree. I know I expect more of myself. (Year 12 Academic Females – Lower SES NSW)*

As well as self-expectation, it was sometimes family expectation that focussed academic students on what they could achieve by persevering with academic study to the extent that the uptake of any other option would signal failure:

*S: I don't know. I guess I have to come back to these family expectations because they don't expect us to go and do hairdressing or go and become a plumber or whatever, that's why I've never considered it. I mean, like we joke about it – oh yeah, if I don't make it, we'll go become beauty therapists or something like that, but I know personally that that's something I'd never be able to do. (Year 12 Academic Females – Lower SES NSW)*

In a move to a thoroughly egalitarian discourse, this group of girls finessed their explanation of who would be interested in a trade – given that they were not – by attempting to distinguish between being 'intelligent' and being 'academic':

*S: I'm sure that everyone has their own pathways. Whatever you want to do, that's what you want to do and you take any courses that will provide you with whatever you want to end up doing. It does not necessarily have to do with how intelligent you are or anything like that.*

*S: No, not intelligent but if you're academic. I agree because it's like if you want to do hairdressing of course you're not going to try and get 99, you're really not interested. I guess I agree with that – it's not that you're not intelligent, just not interested – they're more interested in practical work I guess. (Year 12 Academic Females – Lower SES NSW)*

At the upper SES school, a group of academic girls were as self-consciously reflective about how they might sound in describing the effect of their academic achievements on their choice of careers as students at the school had been in describing the effect of the school demographic. The students struggled to explain without being offensive the ways in which a position at the top of the academic ladder shaped their choices. For these girls, it was a matter of their intellectual ability outstripping what they perceived to be the intellectual demands of a trade:

*S: No offence, if anyone really is thinking about that, but I reckon that in the classes we're from, we're a bit advanced for hairdressing. 'Cause we're all from the top ...*

- I: *Tell me about that. Nobody should be offended by that. Tell me about it, Janie.*
- S: *Well, we're all from Maths 1, which means we're all smart enough to get – out of 200 kids – the top 30 places–*
- S: *Which is good!*
- S: *... Everyone from here, we're in the top classes for everything, so why sell yourself short when you've got the ability to do so much more?*
- S: *Those kinds of trades seem for people who aren't ... I guess, this is generalising, but you just get the feeling that if you are smart, you don't become a plumber. (Year 10 Academic Females – Upper SES NSW)*

When it came to the boys, academic male students at the lower SES school expressed no interest in pursuing a trade. It was not the case, as the non-academic male students had claimed, that everyone would grasp an opportunity of an apprenticeship or traineeship if it arose. What these academic boys did talk about was the effect that taking up an apprenticeship or a traineeship at school might have on their UAI.

Like the academic boys in the lower SES school, academic boys at the rural school were not interested in a trade or a school-based apprenticeship. What's more, academic rural boys seemed to be acutely aware of their own promise:

- I: *Now in terms of a traditional trade as a career, would you consider doing that?*
- S: *Yeah, I'd do it probably if I wanted to.*
- S: *I wouldn't – not really.*
- S: *I could do it if I had to but I haven't really looked at it.*
- S: *Yeah, not in my interest area I think. (Year 12 Academic Males – Rural NSW)*
- S: *We aren't the ones that are interested in it [school-based apprenticeships]. The next group would be more interested in it.*
- I: *Why is that?*
- S: *Most of them want to be builders and mechanics and farmers – stuff like that.*
- S: *We sort of, we are more academic and those want to get out as quickly as possible. (Year 10 Academic Males – Rural NSW)*

When it came to articulating the benefits of a trade and school-based New Apprenticeships, some of the rural boys were unabashedly clear about where their academic competence and interest located them compared with other students in the world of work:

- S: *Like, it allows the bread run sort of people – and those who want to do the higher type, more highly skilled things can go to school – and the other people who want to do less sort of book work type things, like more hands on, can just do it – like an apprenticeship or something. (Year 12 Academic Male – Rural NSW)*

In this important respect, academic male rural students responded less like their non-academic male rural peers than like students who attended upper and middle SES schools.

Where parents perceived their children as having academic interests and talents, they mostly agreed that they should pursue their academic strengths rather than consider other forms of learning through traineeships or apprenticeships or careers in trades:

I: *So would you consider a traineeship or an apprenticeship for your child?*

P: *If they weren't academically able to cope with Uni then...*

P: *...if they were not, yeah.*

P: *Or even if it was something that they're interested in.*

P: *If it was their first choice. (Parents of Year 10 Females – Rural NSW)*

P: *My husband is a Mechanic and even though we've got a business– so we're probably better off than just a Mechanic – but Michael said one day 'Blow Uni, I'll just come down and work for you Dad, and if you can't get a good worker, I'll do it. I can!' And we both just went 'No way!' You know, 'You are not being a Mechanic. You need to go to Uni'... He would probably be extremely – he has the ability to go to Uni, but he would probably be extremely happy to do hands on, step into Dad's shoes, follow his idol, and be probably quite comfortable for the rest of his life. But I think we all just want the best for our kids and we don't see what we have as being the best (Parent of Year 10 Male – Rural NSW)*

#### **5.4 Student and Parent Views on the Advantages and Disadvantages of Working in the Trades**

Focus groups were asked about the advantages and disadvantages associated with trade work. Not surprisingly then, the transcripts yielded a range of positive and negative considerations about trades. In the end, the responses needed to be contextualised within other sets of responses about whether students were interested or not in taking up a career in a trade. Those who were not interested mostly offered explanations that focussed on negative conditions associated with the work while those who were interested saw some of these conditions operating to their advantage.

For those who wanted a trade, the money generally looked good and they were more likely to consider that the conditions of work were favourable. By contrast, those who rejected the idea of a trade as a career tended to see the situation in reverse. So, for instance, the rural boy cited above (5.3.1) who self-identified as “God's gift to painting” saw himself as carving out a promising career through his commitment to a trade. Alongside of his sense of promise and commitment other students complained that trades were lacking in terms of salary, security and prestige and that overall they offered poor conditions. In what sounded almost like an aphorism, one student explained, “It's not glamorous ... nobody really dreams about being a plumber” (*Year 12 Academic Female – Upper SES NSW*). And so a litany of concerns like the following emerged:

S: *I don't think it would be stable – no job security. Ones like builders ... you kind of get sacked so easily. I don't know if that's going to happen, but ...*

S: *The money point of view. It's sort of the same as what Yukio's saying, I suppose, with a trade. Obviously you're not going to expect to get paid copious amounts of money ... and I suppose you have to come back to pressures on your decision-making of before – like me – my family gave me the idea not to go towards the trade area, even though I probably wanted to. They persuaded me to a different point of view. (Year 12 Non-Academic Males – Upper SES NSW)*

S: *Spending all day on your feet.*

S: *Oh the usual apprenticeships – some of them aren't very good.*

S: *You get paid very, very badly. You have to get coffee.*

- I: *You've heard you get treated badly?*
- S: *I suppose with every apprenticeship though, you're going to have to do the skungy jobs while you work your way up. (Year 12 Non-Academic Females – Lower SES NSW)*
- S: *It's different for girls than it is for blokes. Guys can go out – they can be a plumber, they can be a builder and that's acceptable and that's a good path for them to take but for girls, I don't know, hairdresser kind of seems like a last resort.*
- S: *Well, it is a job but it's not respected.*
- S: *It's kind of like you're in the big sort of business like you're doing it for movies or something, it just doesn't seem like a job that would be looked up to or something you have to be smart to do.*
- I: *So, it kind of doesn't have a high value?*
- S: *I don't think so. In this society, I think. And that's bad to just base it on but it's the way everyone sees it. (Year 12 Academic Females – Middle SES NSW)*

Some students equivocated in their claims about what trades offered, especially when they themselves were not intending to take up a career. The matter became more hypothetical, one that would allow them to vacillate between points of view, sometimes being critical, sometimes striving for a more egalitarian approach to the topic:

- S: *I reckon the apprenticeships and traineeships, they sort of set you up ...*
- S: *For a lifetime.*
- S: *... yeah, like once you've got an apprenticeship, you're actually getting paid and doing what you want to do.*
- S: *Yeah, but normally after you do that, there's not much else to do.*
- S: *Yeah, you actually finish that, then there's not much work, so you have to stick to that anyway. It's just like leaving school in Year 10 probably, and 20 years away, they're still a mechanic. (Year 12 Non-Academic Females – Rural NSW)*
- S: *Yes, maybe there is more sort of social status when you do have some sort of a degree – you know, you have attended university. But there's lots of people who have attended university who still can't find jobs and that. At least some people [those who do a trade] have established themselves. (Year 12 Academic Females – Lower SES NSW)*

Some parents were hesitant to recommend trades because they believed that the kind of work involved would not suit their children's special talents and ways of operating in the world:

- P: *I don't think Leanne would be satisfied with a traditional trade – you know like I said – the checkout chic or plumber, electrician, hairdresser. That's not her thing she's a bit more creative than that. I don't think that will give her enough scope in that she loves a challenge, she loves an argument, she loved debating and she likes nothing better than to sit down and work out all the Maths conundrums that they were given and various things like that. She's got an enquiring mind. (Parent of Year 12 Female – Middle SES NSW)*

Other parents hesitated to recommend trades to their children, partly because they considered trade work to be monotonous and the remuneration to be insufficient, and

partly because they believed that, even though there was an obvious need for a highly trained workforce, apprenticeships were not easy to get:

*P: My son's capable, but he wouldn't earn enough money, so he wouldn't want to do it.*

*P: Yeah, I think I'd want him to exhaust other avenues, or try other things first.*

*I: Thank you. Why?*

*P: Because I think he might get to a point, a dead-end point with it, at this point. But that may not be the case ... he might be able to rise above that, in other words he might do the trade and then he might start his own business and then develop out that way, and so it's a growing thing, like we were talking about before. I just don't want him to end up being the same thing year after year after year.*

*P: We found that ... in the search that Alex was doing for his Woodwork, that again, people are not prepared to have an apprentice; maybe because, I'm not sure, it's too hard, too difficult, too expensive. I don't know what ... and yet they want, they need the trained tradesmen at the end of it. Where do they come from? (Parents of Year 12 Males – Upper SES NSW)*

For some parents it was a simple case of the salaries associated with trades:

*P: When Paul decided to be a motor mechanic I said 'Well you know there's no money in it mate as being a mechanic. There's no money... there's no future there. Do it if that's what you want to do but, you won't be wealthy doing it.' (Parent of Year 10 Male – Rural NSW)*

Parent concerns like these could be contrasted with the very positive response of parents like the one cited above (5.3.1) who declared from his position as a 'Westie' that "If you're a bricklayer or a plasterer, you can earn a lot of money". The explanations offered here serve only to amplify decisions about taking up a trade as a career that appeared to be well informed by the socio-economic and cultural contexts in which students lived, their gender, and their perceptions of themselves as academically oriented or not.

## **5.5 Parent and school staff concerns about arrangements for School-based New Apprenticeships**

When interviewees were asked about their attitudes to trades as a career pathway and about their knowledge of traineeships and apprenticeships that operated through the school, they raised a number of concerns. These related mainly to school based New Apprenticeships.

### **5.5.1 Parent and school staff attitudes to the general concept of school based New Apprenticeships**

School staff and parents had a lot to say about the pros and cons of introducing traineeships and apprenticeships into schools. For the most part, they were very supportive of the idea of broadening the curriculum base and of engaging as many students as possible in continued learning of some kind. Nevertheless, while staff at schools generally served as advocates, some staff and some parents added caveats asking for careful monitoring and quality assurance of the scheme.

At most schools, in-principle support was clear:

CA: *In all honesty the traineeships, I think are the best things that have happened in education in the last ten or fifteen years.*

I: *Do you have many school-based traineeships?*

CA: *We don't. (Career Adviser – Lower SES QLD)*

Several schools like this one testified that while they supported the scheme, there was much to do to make it a reality. At the middle SES school in Queensland, a school that had a high number of traineeships relative to the other schools in the study, a lot of work had taken place. For instance, management had moved to “flex up” the timetable and to allow one day a week where students could engage in schemes of this kind, and to undertake cross-institutional study at TAFE, with no penalty to their school studies. They had also joined in with a cluster of schools that had initiated a community industry placement scheme whereby schools worked together to identify and share industry placements for students.

Likewise, at the rural school the career advising team and the Principal talked of the networking that was necessary to optimise the school's chances of securing training opportunities for students. One of the advising team was on the Board of Best Employment, one of the local employment agencies, and “sort of stayed there and kept the school interest in that area” that proved to be “quite handy”. At the same time, the Principal reported that he was on the “Board of ‘Work Net’ – a coordinated net work of employers in the town who would provide work placements.”

Having expressed their support for a more diversified set of curriculum offerings, staff sometimes added caveats identifying fundamental concerns and cautions that needed to be observed in moving the agenda forward. For instance, some staff talked about their concern that student traineeships might be less of a benefit to students than to the sponsoring body:

CA: *I mean I can see the benefit for the employers that they are getting someone that they've seen through two years while they are still at high school and they've got them nicely groomed and okay. So I can see the employers can get something out of it but I don't know if the kids do. I mean, you talking about someone at the end of Year 10, or even before, towards the end of Year 10, saying that I definitely want to be a mechanic or I am definitely going to work in retail. They are committing themselves to a lot of hours over the next couple of years and we all know they change their minds regularly over Year 11 and 12 about what they want to do. (Career Adviser – Middle SES NSW)*

Others expressed mixed messages about cheap labour and long-term employment prospects, albeit in low-paying positions:

CA: *... as I was saying a lot of employers that used to get involved in casual employment, your Targets, your K-Marts, your KFCs– they are tending to see the value in school based traineeships A) because it is cheaper, and B) they get to train the kids on the way, and that means that they will probably keep them as long- term employees. (Career Adviser – Middle SES QLD)*

Parents too sometimes worried that students might be exploited and used as cheap labour while they were at school as traineeships sometimes were outside of school:



*P: Well, see, you don't see much of apprenticeships anymore. It's more traineeships, and the problem with the traineeship, like you can be sacked after it. So you've just done 12 months, 2 years of something and still end up with nothing. (Parent of Year 12 Female – Rural NSW)*

*P: And the trouble is, if you get out in the real world, traineeships, people just use them as cheap labour. It just gets the Government's unemployed figures down and the guy gets a cheap labourer and they ... What have you got to have a traineeship for – six months? twelve months? As soon as they've done that, out the door, get another one.*

*P: It's subsidised labour. (Parents of Year 10 Males – Upper SES NSW)*

Parents at the upper SES school in New South Wales also expressed deep concern that the availability of school-based New Apprenticeships would encourage some academically able students to make too-early a decision about their future careers and so close off possibilities that might otherwise remain open to them. These parents warned of the dangers of early specialisation into vocational pathways and advocated a liberal education for as many students as possible to avoid pre-emptive decisions. They warned of the dangers of entrenching social and economic divisions given that students with lesser means of financial support might be more easily encouraged into vocational pathways and might forego the benefit of pursuing their academic ability. And so, the thesis was posed and acknowledged within the group:

*P: ... you've got to create a fluidity in society... what you may end up doing is going back 100 years and streamlining people into vocational things because of their income level, as opposed to their ability level. I think that's a major danger. (Parent of Year 10 Female – Upper SES NSW)*

### **5.5.2 Parent and school staff concerns about the operation of school based New Apprenticeships**

Across all States, levels of SES and geographic locations of schools, parents and school staff reported that the school-based New Apprenticeships scheme had not yet been operationalised to serve school communities in the way it was intended. The scheme itself generally generated in-principle support as a strategic initiative but the way it was operating was the subject of critique.

There was concern both with the number of school-based New Apprenticeships available within schools and the balance between apprenticeships and traineeships. In particular, there was concern that the weight of investment was in traineeships, and that there were too few apprenticeships on offer. Communities were not yielding the number of apprenticeships needed to validate the scheme:

*I: Would there be many apprenticeships available for traditional trades in the town?*

*CA: No, not many, compared to the number of students who are looking for them.*

*I: Oh, so a lot of students are interested in them?*

*CA: Oh yeah! ... but in terms of things like Automotive, Building, there's not a lot of occupations available. (Career Adviser – Rural NSW)*

Parents were also aware of the difficulties involved in providing apprenticeships and suggested that employers needed to be offered more incentives to make the positions

available. Without appropriate incentives, school-based apprenticeships were unlikely to materialise:

*P: ... to make the opportunities for apprenticeship available, the employer has to be encouraged and provided with that incentive. So until that happens, I can't see there being opportunities, or many opportunities out there for prospective apprentices...*

*P: I think, yeah, I'm looking at it from an employer's point of view. But I can't help but do that because you're talking about students who are looking for opportunities that aren't there. In order for those opportunities to arise, you need to make some sort of an incentive available to prospective employers to create them. I don't think that work is the question. I think there's enough work out there to do it. But, well, if you've got a cumbersome process to take on employees, apprentices in the first place just aren't attractive. (Parents of Year 10 Males – Rural NSW)*

It was not clear in this commentary whether these parents were unaware of incentives that were available or whether they thought that the incentives were insufficient to drive the desired response from employers.

Where apprenticeships were not readily available within communities, schools often found themselves at an impasse and were likely to focus on developing traineeship relations with industries to the neglect of apprenticeships:

*Pr: Well in the town like ours, the opportunities for apprenticeships are pretty miniscule really. (Principal – Rural NSW)*

*CA: We haven't got school based apprenticeships – we've only got school-based traineeships.*

*I: The kids said they thought there were school-based apprenticeships starting this year in Year 11.*

*CA: They may have been talking about traineeships. (Career Adviser – Lower SES WA)*

The issue of imbalance in traineeships and apprenticeships underpinned a number of concerned comments about the ways in which the initiative had focussed heavily on retail and service training as opposed to training in a trade, the former clearly being less valued than the latter:

*Pr: We don't get many school-based apprenticeships ... school-based traineeships are not uncommon ... often they're in hairdressers or coffee shops or things like that, or shops, the Retail Traineeships. (Principal – Upper SES QLD)*

*CA: So a lot of traineeships are in that fast food area or in the customer service area which formally would have been a part-time job. So the traineeships probably outnumber the apprenticeships. The apprenticeships are in the traditional trade areas and they are a little bit harder to find. I think the reason for that is that maybe again there is still not a lot of knowledge in the apprenticeship world about school-based apprenticeships. (Career Adviser – Middle SES QLD)*

Another Career Adviser was critical of using the term New Apprenticeships as the conflation of traineeships with apprenticeships disguised the reality of the gross under-representation of apprenticeships in the scheme. This Career Adviser was not at all surprised by the level of confusion surrounding traineeships and apprenticeships and by the blurring of the borders between the two by so many of the interviewees:

CA: *The whole thing is nonsense in the first place. They used to have apprenticeships and we used to have traineeships which are different things. They put them all together and called them all New Apprenticeships but they are still different things. I mean apprenticeships are trade based which need 3 or 4 years training. Traineeships are getting started in something which is not technical based, which might take a year to get a grounding in a particular industry or a particular sort of job. So they are different things ... I tend to not talk about the things as New Apprenticeships and stuff. I tend to talk about apprenticeships and traineeships. (Career Adviser – Middle SES NSW)*

In one school the sense of despair was acute as the Career Adviser advised that it was easier to place students at TAFE or at University than to find them apprenticeships. The low numbers of graduating students who were able to find apprenticeships, even with appropriate subject combinations, testified to the difficulties that schools faced in generating school-based positions:

CA: *... In terms of apprenticeships it is easier for students to get into TAFE and Uni than to find an apprenticeship. And if anybody wanted to pick on anything they could start picking on the education system, and start redoing the system of apprenticeships because we just can't find them. I've done a destination survey for graduates for maybe eight or nine years now and in every graduating class we might have two or three students who get apprenticeships, and that's even kids who have done vocational subjects all through Year 11 and 12. And in most cases it's the father or the cousin or somebody like that. Apprenticeships system, we have a big problem in finding. (Career Adviser – Upper SES QLD)*

This same Career Adviser reported that there were other problems with running the scheme. While she encouraged individual students to pursue opportunities, she claimed that the scheme was “a mess in terms of timetable and supervision of it” (*Career Adviser – Upper SES QLD*). Other teachers too spoke of the disjuncture between TAFE requirements for three-hour blocks of teaching time and the ways in which schools timetabled their days, typically into shorter periods.

### **5.5.3 Difficulties in Accessing Training in Rural Areas**

At the rural school students and parents raised concerns about the extra burden associated with taking up a trade where the study component was not available from the local college of TAFE. Several comments like the following were made that could be important in understanding how rural communities like this one might come to regard trades as a career:

S: *... like the businesses around here are really good because a lot of them do apprenticeships and all that kind of stuff, they offer them. But with their training, a lot of the time they have to travel to [nearby towns] to go to TAFE, which is a bit of a pain sometimes because they're pretty young, and they've*

*got to go over and stay on their own and stuff. It would be better if you could do it through TAFE here. They go something like every second week or something for a couple of days. (Year 12 Non-Academic Female – Rural NSW)*

*P: The only problem with apprenticeships in [this town], they still have to go to [a nearby town] for – depending on the course – 2 or 3 days a week. So you've still got that problem of having somewhere to stick the kids.*

*...*

*P: So study... I think having to go out of town for that is difficult.*

*P: I think, you know, making kids go away is a hassle. And I think it takes longer because they're away, I mean they go away for blocks and ... so yeah, I don't think it's a good deal. (Parents of Year 12 Females – Rural NSW)*

It should be said that while participation in Higher Education was not a topic for this study, the community did not have readier access to a University. The issue of travel was one that would be faced in relation to a number of career choices and was not restricted to trade training. Nevertheless, the community did have a local college of TAFE and was disappointed that the offerings were limited, the consequence of which was experienced in extra cost, travel and “hassle”.

## **5.6 Key Findings**

**Key Finding 1:** Students were generally unfamiliar with the term ‘traditional trades’ that appeared not to be part of their everyday lexicon. Parents and school staff, by comparison, used the term with awareness and certainty. This point is made explicit as the difference in language usage and fluency with the term appears to signal an intergenerational difference in personal knowledge and awareness of trades. For the younger generation, trades seemed to be less visible in their world where other occupations have gained ascendancy.

**Key Finding 2:** Male students in low SES schools, and in the rural school, expressed more interest in taking up a traditional trade as a career than any other group. Few students attending upper and middle SES schools – male or female – reported an interest in adopting a traditional trade as a career or in pursuing a school-based apprenticeship. In New South Wales where focus groups were selected in relation to the criterion of academic/non-academic orientation to school, it was evident that within the low SES and rural schools, it was non-academic male students who were interested in trades as a career. Academic males in these schools responded more like their male peers in middle and upper SES schools in that they generally were uninterested in pursuing a trade as a career.

**Key Finding 3:** The non-academic male students in low SES and rural schools who were interested in pursuing a trade as a career viewed the prospect positively. They saw trades as offering good opportunities, a chance in life, and good wages. The vast majority of students who did not share this interest viewed trades in negative terms – as offering too low a salary, too little prestige, too little security and unfavourable working conditions.

Parents as a group were divided in their view of trades as a career while staff were generally supportive of the career decisions that students made for themselves.

**Key Finding 4:** Parents, Career Advisers and Principals expressed concern about the difficulties of finding opportunities in training for traditional trades and were somewhat critical of the current operation of school-based New Apprenticeships. There was concern, for instance, that students were mostly able to access McDonald's and Big W 'traineeships' rather than 'traditional apprenticeships' that were proving much more difficult for schools to secure.

While school staff and parents offered in-principle support applauding the diversification of the curriculum, both groups expressed on-going concerns about too-early specialisation at school that might truncate future choices available to students. Specifically, there was concern that early specialisation into vocational pathways might serve to consolidate socio-economic and cultural patterns of access to higher education and to labour.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **Teaching as a Career**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter focuses on:

- Perceptions of teaching as a career, including who is (dis)interested in teaching and why (section 6.2);
- The gender imbalance in the teaching workforce with an emphasis on why young men less often choose teaching as a career, especially primary and early years teaching (section 6.3);
- Conclusions about possible inducements to take up teaching as a career (6.4); and
- Student views about the relevance of gender to teaching (section 6.5).

#### **6.2 Perceptions of Teaching as a Career**

Teaching is a very visible profession, one with which most citizens are intimately acquainted through first-hand experiences. Consequently, taking up teaching as a career was a highly contested issue and it evoked strong views from participants. Some students were interested in pursuing teaching as a career; some spoke about it as a ‘fallback’ position – one that they would assume if they were unable to realise their preferred options; and others rejected the option outright. The demographic trends in the data as to who was interested in teaching, and who was not, are discussed in the subsection below.

In exploring this topic, many interviewees expressed concerns about teaching salaries, promotional pathways, the status of teaching and the associated issue of university entry levels to teaching programs. They also expressed concerns about the conditions of working in schools that centred on student behaviour; teaching as a repetitive set of practices; and inadequate resourcing of schools. It was argued that all of these features, as discussed below, would need to be addressed if suitable candidates were to be effectively recruited into the field.

##### **6.2.1 To Teach, or Not to Teach?**

In some schools, students held favourable attitudes to teaching and were considering teaching as a career. In other schools, teaching as a career was an option that attracted very few willing candidates – an option that did not bear serious consideration amongst the student body. In this respect there seemed to be something of an inverse relationship between the socio-economic status of the school and the number of students who were considering teaching as a career opportunity. Specifically, the higher the socio-economic status of the school, the fewer the number of students who claimed that they were interested in teaching. In high and middle SES metropolitan schools, for instance, students tended to be more dismissive of teaching as a desirable career. By comparison, in lower SES schools, and in the rural school, more students claimed that they were considering teaching as a likely career. But even with their more buoyant levels of interest in teaching, students in the lower SES schools and the rural school – like their peers in the other locations – were vocal in their criticism of aspects of teaching. Nevertheless, relativities in responses between schools distinguished by the demographics of SES and geography can be read within the transcript data.

When students in high and middle SES metropolitan schools were consulted about teaching as a career option, they were mostly negative – dismissive at times – about the prospect:

*I: So what do you actually think of teaching as a career, as an option? Anybody considered that?*

*S: Nuh.*

*S: No.*

*S: Teaching? Nuh. (Year 10 Non-Academic Female – High SES NSW)*

*S: I just think that being a teacher would be the worst job possible ever! (Year 12 Non-Academic Male – High SES NSW)*

Amongst the few students who said that they would consider teaching as a career, there were regular declarations that teaching would register only as a fallback position, as a strategic element in a back-up plan:

*S: I'm interested in doing Interior Design, or if that fails, then teaching primary school. (Year 10 Non-Academic Female – High SES NSW)*

*S: If everything didn't work out, then I'd probably consider going into teaching. (Year 10 Female – Middle SES WA)*

*S: It [teaching] would be like the 50<sup>th</sup> option. I'd be an Eskimo before I became a teacher. (Year 10 Female – Middle SES QLD)*

*S: Definitely second option, if I don't get into Law.*

*I: Second option?*

*S: Yeah, second or third option.*

*S: Part-time or last resort! (Year 12 Academic Male – High SES NSW)*

Some parents were also aware that teaching often featured as an alternative pathway – a less challenging one in terms of entry – when the preferred pathway proved too difficult for students to negotiate. One parent explained of her son's interest in primary school work experience:

*P: My son's actually doing a work experience week down at the local primary school, but only as an alternative to his choice at the moment, just to give him an alternative. (Parent of Year 10 Male – Upper SES NSW)*

Principals, too, were aware that teaching was often placed low on the list of desirable career options:

*I: Have you heard opinions amongst the students about going into the teaching profession?*

*Pr: Yeah, I have, and they haven't been positive. They're about – when I'm talking to kids and asking what sorts of choices they want and they say, 'I'd like to do this and I'd like to do that.' Then they say – 'Oh, if I can't do that, I could go to teaching.'*

*I: So, second best?*

*Pr: Or third or fourth. (Principal – Middle SES NSW)*

In reflecting on students' tendency to reject teaching as a career, one of the Career Advisers attempted to maintain a balanced perspective by foregrounding the overall social odds of wanting to be a teacher:

CA: *I mean, the vast majority of them say, 'No way! – they wouldn't be interested'. But that is normal anyway – and if you look at 100 people in society only a few of them would want to be teachers. So most of them say, 'You wouldn't get me doing this job – you would be crazy to do it'. But there are a few crazy ones. (Career Adviser – Middle SES NSW)*

By comparison with students who attended middle and upper SES metropolitan schools, students at metropolitan schools classified as lower SES, and students attending the rural school in the study, were more likely to nominate teaching as a desirable career option. This was true for each of the States where teaching as a career seemed more attractive to students who lived in a school catchment area designated as low SES. At the metropolitan school in Western Australia categorised within the second lowest decile rank in the State, most of the students who were interviewed claimed that they were considering teaching as a career. For instance, while seven of eight Year 12 female students in the focus group reported that they were interested in teaching, four of the eight Year 12 male students also reported that they were interested in teaching in varying capacities:

S: *I wouldn't mind being a maths teacher – like just Year 11 and 12 – but I wouldn't want to teach younger kids. (Year 12 Male – Lower SES WA)*

S: *I want to be a Phys. Ed teacher but thought it would be in Primary school years. (Year 12 Male – Lower SES WA)*

S: *I'd like to do pre-primary so that they run amok but they don't say stuff and be cheeky ... (Year 12 Male – Lower SES WA)*

Interestingly, Year 12 academic boys in the lower SES metropolitan NSW school also expressed commitment to teaching as a career. While the boys reflected thoughtfully on why so few men were attracted to teaching, some of the group revealed strong personal commitment to teaching as a desirable outcome because of the personal satisfaction that it could bring:

S: *... for me, I just love the idea of selling knowledge. Like, helping people and knowing that you've made a difference in someone's life, academically. ... That's the main thing... And also I love kids, I've always loved kids – so that's the main reason that I've got for why I'm doing it [i.e., teaching].*

I: *And what about you?*

S: *Yeah, the same sort of thing. I like seeing people learn ... to see the looks on their faces...*

I: *Makes teaching an attractive career option do you think?*

S: *Yeah, the satisfaction. I guess the satisfaction of knowing the kids are getting smarter by what you're teaching them. And also, for yourself, you know that you're actually helping someone out as well ... Making a difference. (Year 12 Academic Males – Lower SES NSW)*

Similarly, students in the lower SES metropolitan school in Queensland, including Year 12 male students, contemplated the prospect of teaching as a career. While it was not every young person's dream, it was considered desirable to more of these students than to those in middle and upper SES schools:



- S: ... like I'm doing it [teaching] as a double degree because I think I can be an influence. I just want to be an influence on society, and probably just go on to become a Guidance Officer because that way you can have a pretty big influence on teenage rebels like us.
- S: Teaching? No way.
- S: No, I reckon it would be good.
- ...
- S: I reckon it would be good being like a PE teacher and stuff because it's like you get the best hours, you get all weekends off, heaps of holidays. You'd just get to run around and stuff with all the kids.
- S: No. Teaching would be pretty good because it's like – the hours are sort of like – they vary a bit so you don't get stuck into a routine and there's like all this extra stuff that you can volunteer for. You know, you can coach soccer, and whatever else, so you can't really get bored with it. (Year 12 Males – Lower SES QLD)

At the rural school too, students, including boys, were seriously contemplating teaching as a career. According to these students, rural males appreciated the pay and work opportunities associated with teaching:

- S: The thing about teaching is that you are pretty much guaranteed a job. You might not get the choice of where you want to go but you are going to get a job and get money and that is what draws a lot of people to it.
- S: You can get a job anywhere as a primary school teacher because there are not a lot of primary school teachers that are male.
- S: A lot of males are still going from rural [areas] to be teachers. (Year 10 Academic Males – Rural NSW)

## **6.2.2 Salary, Promotional Pathways and Status**

Teachers' salaries, available promotional pathways and the status of teaching were frequently cited by students, parents, school career advisers and principals as reasons why young, capable students were unlikely to be interested in teaching as a career. Within the transcript data, there was a strong sense that salary structure, promotional pathways and the status of teaching acted as a powerful set of interrelated factors that militated against the recruitment of quality candidates into teaching. While there were some dissenting and some silent voices, the transcript data identified a strongly held belief amongst many students, parents and staff that teachers' salaries were inadequate, that the possibilities for promotion of teachers were few, and that the status of teaching had declined over time.

### **6.2.2.1 Student views on reasons for the low interest in teaching careers**

At upper and middle SES metropolitan schools in particular, male and female students – academic and non-academic alike – claimed that the reason that teaching was low on students' lists of preferred careers was that it did not pay enough, it did not offer sufficient opportunities to progress, and it did not offer the social valuing that they desired. This was felt most strongly among high academic achievers. In each State, students made many references to salary, career progression and the relative status of teaching compared with other careers. On the other hand, rural students and those attending low SES schools were relatively silent although some of their parents and staff at their schools were as concerned about the issues as parents and staff were elsewhere.

A number of students provided informed estimates of teaching salaries and spoke pragmatically about the prospects of living on a teacher's wage in a metropolitan city where the cost of living was high. On the basis of salary projections, these students had typically discounted teaching as a career opportunity. As this student explained:

S: *I'd have to have a bigger wage than \$40,000. I don't know how much – that's kind of ball park isn't it? \$40,000 or \$50,000 or something? ... And I don't know, like that wouldn't be enough to convince me, on my own, to buy a house in Sydney. (Year 12 Non-Academic Female – Upper SES NSW)*

Others spoke with apparent insider knowledge and concern about the problems of career and salary progression within teaching:

S: *I suppose most other jobs – if you go into a business – you work your way up the chain. I suppose with teachers there isn't much of that. There's not much opportunity inside a school to move up along the chain. (Year 12 Non-Academic Male – Upper SES NSW)*

S: *I know the first year out of Uni is the highest pay of any University graduate, but then it kind of just stays there whereas others go up ... (Year 12 Female – Middle SES WA)*

Given these considerations, for many students the problem, and the solution, lay in the salary:

S: *Most of the guys that I know, that I'm friends with, say there's not enough money in teaching.*

I: *Is that a consideration for blokes, do you think?*

S: *It's a consideration for everyone. (Year 12 Non-Academic Females – Upper SES NSW)*

I: *What would it take to convince you that teaching might be a good career option for you?*

S: *More money. (Year 10 Male – Middle SES WA)*

With teachers as visible models, some students noted that teaching did not lead to affluent life styles explaining why, at this formative stage, they were less willing to cap their aspirations at teaching:

S: *... look out in the car park, some of the P-platers at the back of the school have better cars than the teachers – that kind of says something as well. (Year 12 Female – Middle SES WA)*

S: *Some of the teachers started working at the Easter show in the holidays cause they had to get money.*

I: *Yeah, O.K.*

S: *'Cause I went to the Easter Show and I saw teachers. (Year 10 Non-Academic Males – Lower SES NSW)*

In one group in particular, students spoke about the compounding effects of salary, opportunity within the profession, and social valuing:

I: *What would we need to do to convince you that teaching would be a good option?*

S: *More money...*

- S: *Teaching's very limited, as I also said before – you don't get to go to other places or whatever. You just have to stay in a school, and that's it.*
- S: *There's also not a lot of promotional opportunities, you don't earn a lot, you really don't! ...*
- S: *[There's a problem] whether it's valuing by society as an intangible value – as in respect – as in the status and the prestige – or the monetary reward ... but without the necessary monetary reward to reflect that respect, it just wouldn't work. And based on economics, I'd have to say I really cannot see how this can be overcome. (Year 12 Academic Males – Upper SES NSW)*

With respect to the status of teaching, some students argued a strong case, as did some parents and staff, that the declining status of teaching was closely associated with declining entry requirements for an Education degree studied at university. In this event it was not surprising that high achieving students set their sights on other professions where salary and social status were higher.

Students in a number of locations, including the rural school, explained the dynamic wherein low cut-off scores for university admission equated with low professional status and a diminished likelihood of successfully recruiting high achieving students into the field:

- S: *Some people have things against being a teacher. Especially since marks for university courses are going down and down. It is not as high class as it used to be I guess.*
- S: *So it is sort of watering down the quality of teaching. That is what I think. (Year 12 Academic Females – Rural NSW)*
- S: *The UAI [for teaching] is between 83 and 88*
- S: *People are so surprised if someone gets a 95 and then decides to become a teacher. It's such a shock! (Year 12 Academic Females – Upper SES NSW)*
- S: *And I think they should – the HSC marks – lift that up a bit, so it's more of a goal, because people think teaching is – you just need a low mark to get into it – it's nothing fancy.*
- I: *So you think that's people's perception of it, because it's easy to get into the HSC, is it? OK.*
- S: *If they put that up, people might strive to actually become it. (Year 10 Academic Males – Lower SES NSW)*

The implications of not recruiting vigorously amongst high achieving students was that there was a taken-for-granted understanding that successful mathematics and science students would more likely be attracted to other careers:

- I: *So the kids who are interested in Science, do you think that they would consider science teaching?*
- S: *Oh no. I don't think so.*
- S: *I think they will go higher than that. (Year 12 Non-Academic Females – Rural NSW)*

This perception was born out in that high achieving mathematics and science students showed little interest in teaching; instead, they nominated a range of fields that they believed would capitalise on their knowledge and skills.

### 6.2.2.2 Parents' views on teaching as a career for their children

Like their sons and daughters, some parents spoke sceptically about teaching as a career, particularly when it came to their own children's prospects. Some parents identified salary as a prime consideration:

*P: Well, to be honest, you would not be able to live in this area if the primary income was a school teacher. I mean, if you look where most of the school teachers probably live – there might be a few that live around the area, but typically [they don't]. (Parent of Year 10 Female – Upper SES NSW)*

Parents also spoke about salary in combination with career progression and status:

*P: I wouldn't discourage it [i.e. teaching], but I wouldn't encourage it either ... It's a bit like, you know, you get to a certain point let's say, and your income gets to that point as well, and then there's nowhere else to go.*

*P: ...and my son in year 12 now would go into teaching, but money would be a big thing and also the way they can't move up, it's very hard to get up to a top job.*

*I: Could I ask you what do you think of the status of teaching at the moment?*

*P: Very low. (Parents of Year 12 Males – Upper SES NSW)*

At the rural school, a group of parents agreed that the status of teaching was undeniably 'low'. They also expressed strong reservations about promoting teaching as a prospective career for their children on the grounds that teachers were not rewarded according to performance, and that promotional pathways were not available for devoted teachers:

*P: You can be a classroom teacher and working your butt off and taking on this committee and that team and this and that, and really putting your heart into your job, and you're sitting next to somebody who rocks in at 9:00, does the basic expectations of the job, leaves at 3:30 and gets paid exactly the same as you, if not more because they've been doing it for longer! (Parent of Year 12 Male – Rural NSW)*

Consistent with the case presented by students, some parents argued that there was a robust link between declining public perceptions of teaching as a career and the declining level of school achievement necessary to secure a place in a university Education degree:

*P: I think there's been a period of time where they've taken anyone to be teachers.*

*P: ... and someone's been teaching because they couldn't get another job. And I think that's why they now have to put some respect back into the profession ... and I think they need to lift the UAI too ... (Parents of Year 10 Females – Rural NSW)*

In each of the NSW metropolitan schools and in the rural school where we interviewed, parents maintained that considerations like these were important in understanding why their sons in particular were unlikely to pursue teaching as a career and why they, as parents, were unlikely to encourage them to do so. This topic is elaborated in section 6.3 in the discussion about recruitment of males into teaching.

### 6.2.2.3 Views of career advisers and principals on teaching as a career

Along with students and parents, Principals and Career Advisers added voice to the claim that teaching was inadequately remunerated and was associated with low public status:

- Pr: I'm constantly talking about the importance of education and I still think that it needs to have a significant increase in salary to raise the status of teaching.*
- I: So, for you, an issue is the status of teaching, linked to salaries?*
- Pr: Yes it is.*
- I: Is it mainly salaries?*
- Pr: Salaries – mainly. Yes, I'd say that is number one – and then I would say that I suppose the issues that we have out there in terms of the publicity that we get. Very rarely do we get the good publicity but certainly will cop the bad publicity. (Principal – Middle SES NSW)*

Amongst the Career Advisers that we interviewed, one drew a salary comparison with her previous low status jobs:

- CA: Oh, I've only ever tried waitressing, bar jobs and cleaning and I came back to teaching and I'd rate it way above that. Yeah, to be honest though, the pay wasn't that different to my cleaning and my bar work. (Career Adviser – Lower SES WA)*

Career Advisers who passionately promoted the idea that students should follow their hearts in choosing a career vacillated when asked if they would advise students to take up teaching:

- CA: Definitely. I mean, because I think it's such a rewarding career. But I suppose you think, what sort of future? ... I would because I think it's a wonderful profession, but in the back of my mind I would think, 'They're going to struggle'.*
- I: In what way?*
- CA: Financially, I think.*
- I: Any other way?*
- CA: Well, I think, as someone said to me, one of the students, she was ideally suited for teaching, and I said, 'Why don't you do teaching?' And she'd done a test – she'd probably done it six times and it said teaching, and she said, 'Because I don't want to be like you – I don't want to be undervalued, overworked and underpaid'. (Career Advisers – Upper SES NSW)*

Adding weight to this line of argument, one Principal argued compellingly on the basis of market economics that salary was the key to improving the status of teaching, and more importantly, to improving the quality of the candidates that teaching attracted:

- Pr: It's market economics. ... that's the way our society values things. You pay them. If you doubled the salary of teachers immediately, more people would go into the teaching programs, and the UAI entry rate would increase – not that that's necessarily a measure of quality – but you're more likely to pick up people who are committed and want to stay in it. (Principal – Upper SES NSW)*

In a more politically pointed claim, one Principal argued that universities had damaged the prospects of attracting high quality candidates to the field by progressively lowering the admissions index for Education degrees. He argued that schools were now facing the costs generated through universities' decisions to make offers in Education programs to

lower achieving students. The decisions were not philosophically driven as they might be in principled moves to liberalise education, but were based on institutions' needs to match university offers with allocated places. According to the Principal, the consequences of setting a low UAI for teaching were already evident in the system:

*Pr: ... you see people coming out to be English teachers who have done the lowest level of English in their HSC. How can they? They can't read, they can't write, they can't do sentences ... It's horrific ... they're going in on the UAI's – really low UAI's – you know, and they're [i.e. universities] just filling their quotas with them. (Principal – Lower SES NSW)*

Having said all of this, it is important to add that staff at one school in particular believed that teaching is well remunerated and is a highly respected career, one that they recommended to students in less qualified terms than what others elsewhere seemed to do:

*CA: ...the money has improved. There is no doubt about that ... the wage is not the only thing that has significantly changed in the last 3 or 4 or 5 years. I don't know, it just seems to have raised its recognition as a profession along with nursing ... I mean, I don't know, research might say otherwise but my own perception is that it is now seen as a pretty good profession. (Career Adviser – Middle SES QLD)*

*Pr: I think that the perception of a teacher, and a career path of a teacher, is more widely respected than it ever has been ... That's how I feel here anyway. Teachers are being treated as professionals in all sections of the society. The parents here treat teachers with respect and that was brought out with the Sunday Mail survey recently. I was amazed with the parents' perception of the teacher, 'Are you satisfied that they are doing a good job?' 'Yes, very much so.' (Principal – Middle SES QLD)*

### **6.2.3 Conditions of Work**

Students, parents and school staff frequently cited the conditions of teachers' work as being an important deterrent to quality candidates entering the field. Apart from salaries, promotional opportunities and social status, the very conditions of working as a teacher, in schools, generated considerable conversation at interview. Emerging themes centred on student behaviour, teaching as a repetitive set of work practices, and the level of resources available within schools.

#### **6.2.3.1 Student Behaviour**

At every school that we visited students spoke about teaching as stressful, a condition to which students willingly confessed that they contributed. Across States, and across school SES and geographic demographics, students made frequent comments like the following:

*S: But I just think teaching – as a job – first of all there's too many worries – too many hassles I think, especially to worry about little kids and stuff, and I think ... I just think being a teacher would be the worst job possible, ever! Have to handle people like us! Just having ... when you start getting into the high schools, the students are less appreciative of the efforts teachers put in, and we can be arseholes – put it that way! (Year 10 Non-Academic Males – Upper SES NSW)*

- S: *Because I see so many teachers who go through absolute hell and back to deal with shits like me and all the other little shits that I know – but like seriously, they don't get that much out of it. I don't think they do.*
- S: *The stress that they get, I don't think is worth it. (Year 10 Females – Middle SES QLD)*
- S: *Probably one thing that would stop me is most of the time teachers get a lot of crap from students (Year 10 Male – Lower SES WA)*
- S: *Well, just look at us. I would hate to have to control us. (Year 12 Non-Academic Females – Rural NSW)*

Parents also expressed concern about the level of troublesome behaviour that teachers faced and their concern appeared to feed into a negative view of teaching as a career:

- P: *I mean you hear people saying they get 'x' amount of holidays and every term and every Christmas, but I said, 'God! You wouldn't be a teacher for quids at times. They put up with so much.' (Parent of Year 12 Male – Middle SES NSW)*
- P: *Yeah, the way they speak to the teachers and ... it's a very hard job.*
- P: *Yeah, it would be a hard job ... It's the case nowadays that kids run, pretty much run the school.*
- ...
- P: *Yeah, but nowadays there's just no discipline there because you can sue the crap out of the school ... (Year 10 Parents – Lower SES NSW)*
- P: *Because kids just don't respect teachers anymore.*
- P: *...respect? I mean the whole discipline things just skyrocketed. Like you know when I was at school you sat straight, and if the Principal came to the door you said, 'Oh shit, the Principal! Sit up straight.' You know. It was all like you really had a lot of respect for your teachers. But kids just don't have respect for anybody today, including teachers. (Parents of Year 12 Males – Rural NSW)*

Staff too were sometimes concerned that difficult student behaviours that teachers encountered on a daily basis served as a disincentive to students' aspirations ever to teach:

- CA1: *I think the problem with the kids – they look at us and they look at what we put up with. They look at how kids behave towards teachers and I think they think we're nuts. I think some of them think 'Ooh, my God! Why are you doing this? Why did you want to do this because we're just pains and drive you mad'.*
- CA2: *It's been in this school, this year, and there's been a move to not suspending kids and to say we are a wonderful school – we've got no kids – like our suspension has dropped and so our teachers have been forced to accept a completely different standard of behaviour and I think that is going to have a very negative effect on people choosing teaching as a career. Why go into something where you know you are going to be abused by some naughty kids and then you're never going to be made to feel as though it's been fixed up properly. (Career Advisers – Lower SES WA)*

### 6.2.3.2 Teaching as Monotonous

Some students' perception of teaching as repetitive and boring dissuaded them from considering teaching as a career. As these students explained:

- S: *No offence to anyone that does jobs like this, but I'm seriously not into coming into the same place every day. I want to get around and have a job that's interesting and creative and ...*
- S: *It doesn't interest me, I mean I don't want to stand up, like if you have three year 10 classes, have to go teach the same thing over and over again, and then, having to repeat yourself. You'd just get sick and tired of it. It's everyday!*
- S: *Teaching doesn't really interest me. I don't really know what I want to do.*
- S: *I think a lot of students get the picture that teachers work basically 24/7 sort of, like they'll go home and then they'll come to school the next day going, 'I don't feel like teaching 'cause I've been up all night marking these exams' or 'I prepared all this stuff until 8.00 last night'. (Year 10 Non-Academic Males – Upper SES NSW)*
- S: *I want a job that's really going to challenge me and give me opportunities to move on – and then you see some of the teachers and they might teach at the same school for 20 years or something like that...*
- S: *...yeah, because I want to do different things. (Year 10 Females – Upper SES QLD)*
- S: *And you know other people are saying you're just teaching the same thing over and over and it doesn't appear to be something really interesting. (Year 12 Academic Male – Rural NSW)*

As they explained why teaching was not an attractive career option for their children to pursue, some parents also drew images of teaching as a repetitive set of work practices:

- P: *...you become a maths teacher, you become a science teacher, you become any other sort of teacher, and you know that apart from a little few changes in curriculum, you are going to be teaching exactly the same stuff year, after year, and the only thing that changes is the names on the roll that you call out every day ... (Year 12 Parent – Middle SES NSW)*

Career Advisers, Principals and other staff who were interviewed did not comment on this feature of teaching at all.

### 6.2.3.3 School Resources

A Principal at an upper SES school and a Deputy Principal at a middle SES school spoke at length about the level of resourcing of schools and its impact on aspirations to teach. Students and parents did not mention the physical environment of the school, or the physical conditions under which teachers laboured. Nevertheless, the comments of these two senior staff provide another perspective on how community perceptions about teaching as a career may be formed, at a latent level at least, and how such perceptions may influence bigger picture views of what it means to work in schools as a teacher.

At interview, one Principal argued strongly that the physical resourcing of the school was as an important factor that impacted on community perceptions of teaching as a career and, subsequently, on the quality of applicants that the career could sustain. The Principal



expressed deep regret and frustration that his teachers were required to work in shabby and antiquated conditions:

*Pr: You could improve the conditions of teaching by resourcing the schools better. I'm running around at the moment trying to improve the quality of life of some of my teaching colleagues by getting them some new desks – desks that aren't thirty years old. The best I could do was to get four used desks – second-hand desks ... They're all crammed in up there with poor lighting, linoleum on the floor, tea urns balanced on stools – balanced on shelves ... It's just an appalling physical environment for people to work in. There are six men crowded into a narrow room that's no wider than this, and not much bigger, in fact it's narrower. And you go to the History staffroom over here – there are six people over here – God, they're all women ... crammed into a storeroom, with metal bars on the outside that I'm having removed, because that aspect isn't lovely. And they're next to the boys' toilets. Oh, whoopy-do. Spend all your life living next to the boys' toilets in a storeroom – converted storeroom. Not very enticing!... I would like better conditions and facilities for staff. How could I entice staff to come to this school if I ask them to go and operate in the corner of a storeroom? Not good! (Principal – Upper SES NSW)*

According to this Principal, as an added burden, teachers were required to streamline their work practices through electronic communication with insufficient technology to do so. They were encouraged to adopt 21<sup>st</sup> century work practices without the appropriate level of resources. For this Principal, features of school life like these, on daily display for students and parents to witness, explained why the 'best and the brightest' young students rejected the prospect of teaching and why their parents might not encourage their children to think of teaching as a career:

*Pr: They don't even have their own – they have their own desks – but they don't have their own computers, so ... we've got a magnificent network here and we try to distribute information electronically, and get access for staff. But if you've got two computers for eight teachers, and you're teaching most of the time, it's pretty hard to get on. We're trying to do electronic report generation, progress reports, and we're operating under those conditions. So we're trying to increase the number of computers so that we've got one between two. Well, isn't that a remarkable thing in the twenty-first century? One computer between two teachers in an environment where a work station for somebody in Bridge Street, in our head office, they've got a lovely work station, with their own computer, nice air conditioned offices. There's no air conditioning in any of our staff rooms. So! We're still in the nineteenth century as far as teaching technology's concerned. (Principal – Upper SES NSW)*

And, at another school, the Deputy Principal made a similar case drawing on the relativities of physical work environments and systems treatment of employees to explain why it was so difficult to attract quality staff to specialist teaching areas that were experiencing acute shortages:

*DP: And, the other area of shortage is I.T. If you come out of Uni with that sort of a degree, you'd be snapped up by any number of companies that are going to pay you sixty thousand dollars to walk in the door – plus a package – let*

*alone the forty-one thousand or, I think it's thirty-nine or something, that you come out with as a probationary teacher. Are you joking! Would you do it? And you have your own office and you have your own phone and you don't have to go and beg for paper from the print room and you don't have to ... And because we deal with young people, sometimes I think that the mentality of the way that we – not so much we treat teachers – but the way the system sometimes interacts with teachers, is not that professional, is not that... There's not a valuing, and I hear teachers complain that they've got to go and beg for a pen or beg for a bit of chalk ... It's not something that people are going to put their hand up to do. (Deputy Principal – Middle SES NSW)*

### **6.3 Perceived Reasons for the Gender Imbalance in the Teaching Workforce**

At interview, students, parents and school staff were faced with the challenge of explaining why approximately 75% of newly qualified teachers are female. Participants generally recognised that the odds were skewed by the under-representation of male teachers in the early childhood and primary years, and that the odds approached even at secondary level. The statistics did not surprise participants and few were prepared to problematise the statistics as being anything other than 'natural' given the nature of teaching and social understandings about the bond between women and children: the younger the child the stronger the presumed bond with women. In fact, as detailed in section 6.5, some participants unexpectedly argued that questions about gender and the teaching workforce were wrong headed and that other more productive questions might be asked about the quality of teaching.

Within the transcript data there seemed to be three strong lines of argument as to why only about 25% of newly qualified teachers were male. The first was that the salary was inadequate given that many men still assumed prime financial responsibility for families. The second reason revolved around the force of biology and the continuing acculturation of boys and girls into sex-segregated occupations, with teaching being identified as a female profession. The third focussed on suspicion associated with men working with children because of heightened public awareness of sexual harassment and abuse, and of paedophilia. Each of these issues is discussed in turn below.

#### **6.3.1 Salary**

When it came to questions about why men were under-represented in the teaching workforce and how their representation might be improved, many of the participants responded with certainty that the problem and the solution rested in the salary. Male and female students appeared to agree that salary was critical to understanding the gender imbalance in teaching. In further exploring the topic, they also noted some of the material realities that surrounded women's and men's lives: that for women, teaching paid more and was more rewarding than housework; that teaching hours suited women with families; that men generally had more career options available to them than did women; and that teaching salaries did not appeal to young men who might, at sometime during their career, assume responsibility for supporting a family:

S: *I think guys look more for the money. I think their mind is more on money than career.*

S: *You know how like the men have to earn more than the women. (Year 12 Non-Academic Females – Lower SES NSW)*

S: ... women think how – you know – getting paid this much is better than being a housewife and getting paid nothing – but men think ‘When I can do an equal amount of hours and get higher pay, why should I teach?’ (Year 12 Academic Females – Lower SES NSW)

S: I think it’s money as well. Because it’s [i.e. teaching] not that high a paying profession.

S: Yes, I think that most of the women that work are married and their husbands also do another job so, it’s like a second income. If a man does teaching, the income isn’t that high and he has to support the family – that stereotype is still there. Like, the man kind of brings home the dough. (Year 10 Academic Males – Middle SES NSW)

S: You know how we talked about, like in North Shore societies, like there’s like ... men are the ones who get out there and earn the money ... and I think the males, they have that sort of responsibility in their minds and I think they’d think that teaching professions aren’t as highly paid as other professional occupations, so I think they just sort of rule it out, teaching. (Year 12 Academic Females – Upper SES NSW)

Many male students who had rejected teaching as a career option claimed that an improved salary would be necessary to bring them into the field:

I: What would it take to convince you that teaching might be a good career option for you?

S: More money. (Year 10 Male – Middle SES WA)

I: What would it take to make you feel that teaching was an attractive career? What would have to happen before you would think that?

S: Lots and lots of money.

I: Much more pay?

S: Yeah, more pay. (Year 12 Males – Middle SES WA)

S: It’s all about money. (Year 12 Males – Lower SES QLD)

Staff, too, believed that there would have to be an upward shift in salaries if more men were to be recruited into the profession:

CA: I think it’s a pay issue. We increasingly live in a world now where the first question students ask you is, ‘What’s it worth?’ (Career Adviser – Middle SES WA)

At times, the idea that salary was central to recruiting males into teaching was offered with such assurance as to make the answer seem self-evident to anyone who had contemplated the question at all:

Pr: You pay more.

I: Simple as that?

Pr: Yeah. (Principal – Upper SES NSW)

Pr: ...the long and the short of it is the income – I mean the salary. (Principal – Upper SES QLD)

Like the students we interviewed, some staff thought that teaching was a good ‘second’ salary, one that would supplement but not sustain a family. The argument was used to explain why men in particular were less willing to pursue teaching as a career:

CA: *People have said that teaching’s well paid if it’s your second income but not if it’s your first income. So if you’re a spouse and your family’s dependent on you, it’s not a huge amount of money to keep the household going. (Career Adviser – Lower SES WA)*

At another school, another Career Adviser explained why men in high-cost metropolitan areas might be even less willing to contemplate the prospect of teaching than those living elsewhere. Teaching was not an ideal career option for men who chose to support a family or for those who wanted to live in a metropolitan area. According to this Career Adviser, his male students were telling him ‘straight up’ that there was not enough money in teaching:

I: *What do you think would make teaching a more attractive career for students, but in particular, more attractive for male students?*

CA: *Directly? Money!  
... The reason for that is that most males, rightly or wrongly, perceive that they are going to be the income earner in the family and if their income does not happen to go anywhere near buying a house in Sydney, forget it, it’s not on.*

I: *...  
So you think if we have an increase in wages, we’ll have more men attracted to it?*

CA: *Absolutely. Bottom line. My union has researched it significantly.*

I: *What are the students telling you about their opinion of teaching as a career choice? Is that what you’re getting from the males, that there’s not enough money, or ...*

CA: *Yeah. Straight-up. Not enough money in it. (Career Adviser – Lower SES NSW)*

While most parents agreed that teaching was a difficult job with low social status, there was some discussion as to whether teaching was well enough paid. It seemed from the tenor of conversations that parents, like so many students and staff, believed that young men were less likely to choose teaching as a career when salary was at issue:

P: *It’s a low-status, low-paid job.*

P: *But it’s not low-paid compared to a lot of other jobs.*

P: *It is for men. (Parents of Year 10 Males – Upper SES NSW)*

Interestingly, while rural students in the study were generally more positive about teaching, about the prospective salary and the holidays that it attracted, some rural parents expressed concerns similar to those expressed by metropolitan parents. Some of these parents reasoned that while their daughters might be content to choose their careers on the basis of family responsibilities, their sons might pursue something ‘more fulfilling’ – something with ‘better opportunities’<sup>4</sup>:

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<sup>4</sup> Female and male students generally rejected the idea that they might map out their careers with a view to accommodating later family life (See Chapter 2 for discussion). While their parents imagined otherwise, female students’ career aspirations were not constrained or driven by thoughts of family responsibilities, at this point in time at least.

- P: *Yeah and there's no great area for advancement. Once you get to say your Head Teacher, unless you want to go to a Deputy or a Principal, there's not a lot of places to go. Or if you just want to stay as a teacher, you know, you're not earning great money. And then you've got three or four kids or whatever, you know it's not a big wage and there's no place to go above that I suppose. And for females, I mean it's pretty ideal for us to be able to come in part-time and do casual work and go off to have family and stuff like that. So probably, it's very appealing for females.*
- P: *And they're having those School holidays so you know you're at home with the kids after School. And that's a very high priority for a female, whereas a male can sort of, well say, I want something more fulfilling.*
- P: *I think that's probably why... it's always been a fairly good job for females... (Parents of Year 10 Females – Rural NSW)*
- P: *I think, you know, there's a lot of things in teaching that just aren't appealing. One is the opportunity to make more money than your wage, so there's no overtime facilities ... And I just think that the boys sort of... yeah, they like to see that there's more... better opportunities to earn money. (Parent of Year 12 Male – Rural NSW)*

### **6.3.2 Teaching as a 'Female' Profession**

Along with claims about salaries, students in particular made frequent and repeated reference to teaching as a female profession – one that was more suitable to women than men because of a 'natural' link between women and children. According to students, children were, by and large, women's work. In arguing this case, students at every school could be cited for their various claims that women were more patient, more caring and nurturing, more generous of spirit, more compassionate, more tolerant, less abusive – in short – more in tune with the emotional needs of young people. This view was held in all 3 States and was maintained across socio-economic levels and geographical locations. In mounting their case for the naturalness of the gender imbalance in teaching, students drew on discourses based in psychology (women are more psychologically suited), sociology (males and females have been enculturated into these ways), biology (women are more intelligent), and theology (it's the way God made us). Whatever the preferred variation of the discourse, students considered the gender imbalance in teaching to be normal, natural and consistent with the demands of the job. The following quotes sample from a much broader range of student explanations as to why men are underrepresented in the field of teaching.

To begin, many students essentialised personality differences between males and females, explaining that women had a psychological advantage when it came to working with children:

- S: *They're [ie., women] more tolerant.*
- S: *Yeah, they don't lose their temper as much.*
- S: *Chicks and little kids – it's their type of thing.*
- S: *Yeah, especially like in primary and with really young people. It's just better. It just seems like – more normal. (Year 12 Males- Lower SES QLD)*
- S: *Women can cope.*
- S: *They like kids.*
- S: *They're more generous.*

- S: *They care about more people than –*  
 I: *They're more caring. They're more generous.*  
 S: *If I was in class, I'd just go, 'Oi, look, you don't have to do it – don't do it, you're going to fail – I don't care'. (Year 10 Non-Academic Males – Upper SES NSW)*

Students also appeared to understand the socially constructed nature of what counted in their geographical location as appropriate male and female work, what was equated with 'girly', and what might evoke derisive comments about being 'gay':

- I: *Alright, well my question is, 'Why do you think that men don't go into teaching as a career?'*  
 S: *It sounds 'girlie'.*  
 I: *It sounds 'girlie' you think?*  
 S: *What, what they are kind of taught in school – taught that what the other kids think, like if you go into that profession and you're a guy, you'd be gay. Well, not only that ...*  
 S: *It would be like, 'Why do you want to be a teacher?' kind of thing. (Year 10 Academic Females – Lower SES NSW)*
- S: *Maybe at this age with boys still being quite immature, if someone said 'Ooh, I want to be a teacher' they might get ridiculed and people might try to hide the fact that's really what they want to do ... They'd say 'That's a girl's job. Leave that up to the girls' – or something like that – which is wrong I think but it does happen. (Year 10 Female – Lower SES WA)*
- S: *It's just one of those things. I'll just say it's not a very masculine job, is it! (Year 12 Male – Middle SES WA)*
- S: *The man is sort of thought to go out and do the hard yards, throw the wood over the shoulder, fix the car, stuff like that. That is what it is like around here still.*  
 S: *It's [i.e., teaching] very much a motherly role. It is sort of more natural. (Year 10 Academic Males – Rural NSW)*

Students also argued that it was natural for women to dominate positions that involved working with young children because of gendered differences in biology: females were intellectually superior and developmentally advanced from an earlier age making their choice as teachers an obvious one:

- S: *People are more likely to hire me as a baby-sitter than some guy.*  
 I: *Why?*  
 S: *[We're] more mature, like we are more mature than guys at this age. And we're more intelligent as well! ...*  
 S: *But it's true. It's not just at this age though – they're very immature. (Year 10 Academic Females – Upper SES NSW)*

Whether inspired by a sense of levity or not, there was a message in student focus group data that girls were superior performers on many counts:

- S: *Because it's been scientifically proven that women are smarter than men (Year 10 Female – Middle SES QLD)*

- S: *I'm not counting them [i.e., girls] better than us but they're –*  
 S: *Not all of them – but they've got better brains.*  
 S: *... there was this guy that came to our school and talked to us about that and he goes, 'At the Girls' Grammar School, most of them got into university and most people at the Boys' Grammar School, hardly any of them go'. (Year 10 Males – Lower SES QLD)*

After much discussion in a focus group about profound and abiding difference in the ways that males and females interacted with children and, consequently, about the 'naturalness' of the status quo in staffing profiles, one student eventually drew on theology explaining that God was really responsible for the gender imbalance in teaching:

- S: *Guys don't see themselves as taking care of toddlers all day. It's going back to the mother instinct thing.*  
 S: *It's female intuition. It's the way God made us.*  
 S: *Guys would be like, 'Shut up if your knee hurts!' (Year 10 Academic Female – Upper SES NSW)*

At a more concrete level, some students suggested that men simply have more career options to choose from than do women: Men were not missing out, they were choosing from a wider range of desirable options than were readily available to women:

- S: *I mean, there are more female teachers – females then think 'Alright, well maybe I'll end up in the teaching force. And there are other, more options for men, I guess, and so men have more options to choose from.*  
 ...  
 S: *More males are interested in other things rather than teaching. (Year 12 Non-Academic Females – Middle SES NSW)*

What men were patently uninterested in – given their presumed lack of fit for the job – was working with younger children. The older the student, the more palatable the task of teaching for men, so it was argued:

- S: *There's a lot more male teachers in high school than there are in primary, and I think that's mainly because it's seen as the female role to be bringing children up. (Year 12 Non-Academic Female – Rural NSW)*

Where male students did express an interest in teaching it was more often at secondary level. Even then, the gender divide persisted in their choice of what they perceived to be more 'manly subjects' like Physical Education and Manual Arts, after all, the last thing that they wanted to do was to risk looking 'gay'. This sentiment was expressed most strongly amongst rural male students:

- I: *There are a couple of people here that are thinking about teaching.*  
 S: *But notice how they are decent subjects – not like English or Maths.*  
 S: *They are gay.*  
 S: *They do stuff that they like. Like chicks do the stuff like Maths and English. Blokes do industrial arts. (Year 10 Non-Academic Males – Rural NSW)*

### **6.3.3 Male teachers - The threat of being suspected of child sex abuse**

Male and female students, parents, Career Advisers and Principals across locations claimed men who worked with young children attracted suspicion – sometimes based on real events and at other times based on vexatious claims. The public nature of child sexual abuse cases, harassment charges and the spectre of paedophilia further fed into public

belief in the ‘naturalness’ of women working with young children and acted as deterrents to young men who might otherwise consider teaching as a career. While women were not entirely immune from like charges, students believed that the public perception was that men were more likely than women to be the perpetrators of child sexual abuse:

S: ... *I think maybe parents trust their kids more with women than they do with men. I suppose, I mean, that’s just one point of view.*

...

S: *I just think they’re probably worried about sometimes, the ulterior motives of male teachers. I mean, I’m not sure myself, but I mean – I just think as a community, I think probably as a whole, see women to be more trustworthy, or have less ulterior motives to teaching. (Year 12 Non Academic Males – Upper SES NSW)*

S: ... *like in the media all the paedophiles and that are all males. (Year 12 Academic Male – Middle SES NSW)*

S: *I just think you would be a bit worried. You are going into a little kid’s school – people might think ‘What is he going into there for?’ Like Catholic priests. (Year 10 Academic Female – Rural NSW)*

Given the suspicion that surrounded male teachers, some students thought that there were real consequences for young men who might choose teaching as a career, particularly those who chose to teach younger children:

S: *And guys as teachers these days, with all the laws and stuff, can get looked down upon – paedophiles and all that sort of stuff. (Year 12 Male – Lower SES QLD)*

S: *There are so many, so many guidelines, and when male teachers – especially in primary school or early childhood years – are accused of child abuse, the likelihood of them losing reputation, losing credibility, losing their jobs, and being isolated, it’s so high, that it is a very strong deterrent, and also the fact that as we mentioned, female teachers play a more motherly role, less intimidating to young children.*

S: *Yeah, sexual harassment and stuff like that. (Year 12 Academic Males – Upper SES NSW)*

S: ... *all those new laws with sexual conduct or whatever ...*

S: *Yeah.*

S: ... *that would put a lot of men off teaching ... males are more susceptible ... they get targeted a lot quicker than what female teachers are.*

S: *Yeah, if a female’s alone in a classroom with another student, she could be helping out, but if a male teacher and a female student –*

S: *Yeah, he would be taking advantage.*

S: *They could be more susceptible to allegations. (Year 12 Non-Academic Females – Rural NSW)*

Parents, too, reported that the suspicion that surrounded men who worked with children was a serious consideration for young men who might aspire to teach:

P: ... *men are leaving in droves because if they cuddle a kid they can be held up for molestation.*



*P: Yeah, but a woman can too.*

*P: But not as much as men. (Year 10 Parents – Lower SES NSW)*

*P: I mean you can't even touch a child without 'He's a deviate.' (Year 12 Parent – Middle SES NSW)*

*P: ...and just all those other hassles that have come into it. You know – the Child Protection. You just don't want to go there and I consider it very ugly. (Parent of Year 10 Females – Rural NSW)*

Likewise, some of the Career Advisers, Principals and their Deputies believed that the spectre of paedophilia – even though technically it applied to women as well – was sufficient to deter young men from seriously contemplating teaching as a genuine career option:

*CA: I don't know if I'm right about it. I think the issue of being at risk in this job in terms of those child abuse kind of issues is on people's minds a little bit. (Career Adviser – Middle SES NSW)*

*DP: Initially anyway, particularly with younger kids, and I think there's also concerns about, perhaps, the perceptions of men working with children and that's going back to paedophilia. (Deputy Principal – Middle SES NSW)*

*PR: ... you know, I mean people raise the question about child abuse and – you know – paedophilia and all the issues. But, you know, I mean, you know I actually think women are as susceptible to those allegations in this day and age as men, maybe not quite as much, but it is still an issue for them. (Principal – Upper SES QLD)*

## **6.4 Inducements to Teach**

Drawing together the findings from the focus groups, a number of insights emerge as to how students might be induced to take up teaching as a career and where recruitment efforts might best be located.

Students from middle and higher socio-economic schools in metropolitan areas were less likely to aspire to teach than were their peers who attended schools in rural and lower socio-economic catchment areas. Therefore, if the issue is teacher shortage, inducements to teach might be carefully crafted with knowledge of these demographic patterns in mind.

On the other hand, if the aim is to attract quality candidates from a range of demographics then the prime considerations are likely to be salary, promotional pathways, social status, the associated matter of university admission requirements for teaching, and the conditions under which teachers work. These themes (detailed in 6.2) point to the kinds of efforts that need to be made to re-shape teaching as a more attractive career option to high quality candidates. High achieving students – those who did not need teaching as a 'fall-back' position – knew that they could find other careers with higher salaries, higher status, better-articulated promotional pathways and better conditions of work.

Recruiting more men into teaching is a more complex issue. The focus groups tell us that there is an even greater need to improve salaries, promotional pathways and the status of teaching; stereotyped perceptions of teaching as a feminised profession need to be challenged on all fronts; and suspicion surrounding men who choose to work with young children needs to be put into a rational perspective. Many of the informants to the study made recommendations to this effect:

*S: Get rid of years and years of social expectation. The stereotype – then the wages. (Year 12 Academic Female – Rural NSW)*

Sometimes participants in the focus groups expressed a profound sense of how important some of these features might be to those who choose to teach. In this respect, one Career Adviser's reflection on his own progression in teaching is worth noting at length. It provides an insightful account of the way that the system can acknowledge and reward talent. Most importantly, it reveals how the system can elevate staff morale to the point where they believe that they have moved beyond 'Joe Blow' status – a humbling reflection on what it means to be denied career progression when it is due:

*CA: I like teaching, and I like kids, and these are all things that I weighed up, and I actually made an analysis of what I liked and disliked about the job, and there is a lack of progress – there are not many steps that you can make in teaching.*

*I: There's no progression?*

*CA: There's no progression ... I think I can remember reading some psych thing, in a career journal, and they said that males like to feel they are going somewhere in the job, where in ten years time, when people say 'What are you doing now?' 'Well, I've now actually made some steps forward', whereas in teaching, unless you want to get into administration, there really isn't much reward for teachers who are good at teaching and they continue in the classroom. The closest thing they got to, that was when they had that Advanced Skills 1 and 2 I think. I'd never really sought promotion as I didn't have any interest – I liked teaching because I liked the kids. There was administration but I didn't like that all that much, and as soon as that advanced skill thing came out, I naturally went and got it straight away...*

*I: So you didn't have to leave the classroom?*

*CA: From a male's point of view, I suppose from what I was saying before, I guess if you want to say what you are doing, the fact that I was classified as an Advanced Skills Teacher or something. I guess some people find some value in that – being able to say that they are not just seen as an ordinary classroom teacher but somebody who is a senior teacher or some classifications system that recognises that you are not just an average Joe Blow teacher. (Career Adviser – Middle SES NSW)*

In conclusion, one parent group suggested that if the aim was to induce people to take up teaching as a career, 'in the era of the spin doctor' it may be necessary to 'give it a good spin.' (*Parents of Year 12 Females – Upper SES NSW*)

## **6.5 De-gendering the Teaching Body – student views about male and female teachers**

In exploring the gender imbalance in teaching, interviewers presented focus group participants with ABS-based information, namely: 'Nationally, approximately 75% of newly qualified teachers are women'. The assertion of fact was followed by two critical

questions: 'Why do you think that this is the case?' 'What do you think would make teaching more attractive for boys?'

Some students appeared puzzled by questions relating to how to attract more men into the teaching workforce and added an unanticipated twist to the discussion by interrogating the legitimacy of the question itself. Given that most groups argued on the basis of women's superior fit for the job, the question about making teaching more attractive to males must have appeared strange, provocative even to some who turned the focus onto a question about the question. Discussion of this kind was opened out by students in eight focus groups, in five schools, crossing three States. As evidenced below, the issue was most pointedly contested by males and females in the upper SES NSW school where evidence-based, performance-driven, individualist thinking appeared to dominate their commitment to who should teach:

S: *Would you want a male to do something that a female can apparently do a lot better? (Year 10 Academic Female – Upper SES NSW)*

S: *Why do they want more males anyway, to teach primary school? That's what I'm thinking! (Year 12 Non-Academic Female – Upper SES NSW)*

While students acknowledged that they had few male teachers at primary level, they did not express concern at the situation or describe their experiences in terms of 'lack' on any dimension. Students did not support a deficit explanation of their experiences neither did they support an equity push to recruit male teachers as a way of correcting the under-representation of men in the teaching workforce. Instead they expressed strong concern about having competent teachers regardless of whether those teachers were male or female. As a group of boys insisted, 'If they can teach, it's all good.' On the absence of male teachers in their lives, male students explained:

S: *You don't think, 'I missed out'.*

S: *Didn't make a difference.*

S: *We don't think about that. We don't see a guy and a girl and go, 'This is a guy.'*

I: *So you think of them as teachers?*

S: *Yeah, just a teacher. Whether they're a good teacher or a bad teacher.*

I: *A good teacher or a bad teacher? ... Just going back over that, does it make any difference if it's male or a female teacher?*

S: *No, I don't think I've ever thought about that. It's whether it's a good teacher or a bad teacher.*

S: *If they can teach, it's all good.*

S: *And even if they're just really smart, it's whether they can get the message through. (Year 10 Non-Academic Males – Upper SES NSW)*

S: *I don't think it's necessary [to have more male teachers]... I mean, there's always male teachers – about 25% are still males. If they need someone to talk to like a Counsellor, but I don't think it's necessary. I mean we're all surviving with female teachers at the moment. It would be good to see more male teachers but it's not really necessary. I wouldn't necessarily worry about it.*

...  
S: *Yeah. Because all my teachers now that I'm in Year 12 are all female teachers. I've got no male teachers this year and I don't see it as being*

*deprived or less fortunate. It doesn't make a difference. (Year 12 Academic Males – Middle SES NSW)*

As they elaborated on this line of argument, students drew on personal experience to provide examples of how being a male did not ensure higher quality teaching or provide students with a richer learning environment. In some groups the emphasis on teaching competence was expressed strongly. By way of argument, both male and female students provided examples of the insufficiency of the proposal to recruit more men into teaching. As a group of boys explained, having a male teacher was not enough to satisfy their desire to have a 'good' teacher:

S: *I had a guy teacher and he was an idiot. He just buggered it up completely.*

I: *He what?*

S: *This guy was a complete idiot. He just didn't know ... he loved Maths and he couldn't teach, so all he did was teach Maths, and he couldn't teach it so we didn't absorb anything and now ...*

...

S: *He just couldn't teach. I think that's what's buggered me up in my Maths 'cause before I was good at it.*

S: *We had a teacher in year 6 and he was a loser ...*

S: *It was because he was a complete idiot. (Year 10 Non-Academic Males – Upper SES NSW)*

For girls who viewed women teachers as amongst the best they had experienced, the thought of recruiting staff into teaching on the basis of gender rather than capacity and desire to teach was problematic:

S: *There are some teachers who can just control any class without even raising their voice, and all those teachers that I've known have been women. I don't know a single male, like ... males are better at yelling at people than females. (Year 10 Academic Female – Upper SES NSW)*

S: *Going through primary school until high school it was mainly the male teachers that were pulling out their hair, screaming out their chin.*

S: *Female teachers have patience.*

S: *Females are more maternal they can handle kids. (Year 12 Females – Middle SES QLD)*

Ultimately, students like these drew on discourses that were deeply grounded in notions of individual performance. They cared little about the gender of the teacher, or the equity issues that were implied: it was the performance of individual teachers in facilitating student learning that clearly mattered to them:

S: *It doesn't matter if it's a male teacher or a female teacher – they just have to be good. (Year 12 Academic Female – Lower SES NSW)*

S: *I suppose all you can say about teachers is that, you'd have to say, even though some of them don't look like it, teachers are doing it because they want to do it, and they like the job. So I suppose it comes back to the type of person you are – not really if you're a male or female – at the end of the day. (Year 12 Non-Academic Male – Upper SES NSW)*

- S: *I don't think it's really a big deal, having male or female [teachers]. Whoever likes it does the job. If it's interesting and they want to make sure that kids learn ... If you don't want to do it, don't do it.*
- S: *Basically a teacher is a teacher and it doesn't matter to me whether they're male or female, as long as I'm learning something. (Year 12 Females – Middle SES WA)*

Exemplary teachers – individual males and females – were foregrounded in students' discussions about quality teaching that sometimes served to inspire students to teach. And amongst student reflections, individual teachers were sometimes elevated to legendary status:

- S: *I want to be a sport and recreation kind of teacher just because of Mr Mill's class – outdoor education – it is just the satisfaction that he would get off us kids because we enjoy it so much.*
- ...
- S: *That's like Mr Martin. You can tell he enjoys Media and if you got someone like him to promote it [i.e., teaching] it would be great. (Year 12 Females – Lower SES WA)*
- S: *I've got a really nice teacher and everyone just wants to be good, because she's so nice ... and everyone just ... because she's such a legend, no one wants to misbehave in her class because she doesn't deserve it. She's never unfair to us, or anything like that. (Year 10 Academic Females – Upper SES NSW)*

Parents were also aware that individual teachers make a difference and they claimed that subject choices were sometimes driven by students' knowledge of who the teacher would be:

- P: *I was driving six kids back from Kung Fu, and you wouldn't believe it, but they started talking about who, what teachers they would maybe get next year, and they went blood-red about this particular teacher, and they all wanted this other teacher, and 'Oh, she was so great.'*
- ...
- P: *...and they all were singing the praise of this particular History teacher, and it was quite interesting, the things that they were saying about how good she is and how enthusiastic she is, and how great it is to be in her class. These are these Kung Fu kids who don't even mention school normally!*
- P: *My son's actually going to change his course. If he gets a particular teacher next year, he's going to change his course (Parents of Year 10 Males – Upper SES NSW)*

The argument for de-gendering the teaching body was mounted entirely by students. Nevertheless, like the students, parents, principals and career advisers provided numerous examples of the power of individual teachers. In so doing, they paid testimony to the value of good teaching and the difference it made to students' views of education and the career opportunities that became available to them.

## 6.6 Key Findings

**Key Finding 1:** Students attending the low SES metropolitan schools and the rural school expressed greater interest in teaching as a career than those attending the middle and

upper SES metropolitan schools. In low SES schools and in the rural school teaching appeared as a relatively attractive career option. By comparison, in the middle and upper SES metropolitan schools, teaching was often dismissed on the basis that a teaching salary could not support their life style.

**Key Finding 2:** There was a strong sense of consensus amongst students, parents and staff that teaching salaries were too low, promotional pathways too few, that the status of teaching was depressed and that university entry levels to teaching programs were declining inappropriately. They also expressed varying concerns about the conditions of working in schools that centred on the difficulties of managing student behaviour – teaching as a repetitive and uninspiring set of work practices – and the inadequate resourcing of schools – all of which served to detract top candidates from aspiring to a career in teaching.

**Key Finding 3:** The under-representation of men in the teaching workforce was generally attributed to teaching salaries. While there were some dissenting voices, many students, parents and staff argued that many men still assumed prime financial responsibility for their families and that a teaching salary was inadequate in this event. The very low percentage of men who choose to teach in the primary and early childhood sector was attributed to the force of biology and the continuing acculturation of boys and girls into sex-segregated occupations, with teaching being identified as a female profession and the nexus between women and young children identified as ‘natural’. Suspicion associated with men’s (sexual) motives for working with young children was also widely cited as a deterrent to male uptake of teaching as a career.

**Key Finding 4:** Informants generally agreed that in order to induce high quality candidates to teach, teaching salaries need to be improved, promotional pathways augmented, the social status of teaching enhanced, and university admission requirements raised. In order to recruit more men into teaching, stereotyped perceptions of teaching as a feminised profession need to be challenged on all fronts and suspicion surrounding men who choose to work with young children needs to be put into a rational perspective.

**Key Finding 5:** Students at five schools challenged the interviewers when it came to questions about the recruitment of males into the teaching workforce. For them, the issue of who should teach was firmly located in performance-driven criteria rather than in issues related to the gender of the teacher. Students spoke spiritedly about ‘good’ teachers and ‘bad’ teachers, some of them male, some of the female. The message was clear – these students wanted ‘good’ teachers, whether they were male or female was of little consequence.

## CHAPTER 7

### Conclusions

#### 7.1 Introduction

The sheer volume and richness of data generated from the five themes of this study allow for any number of informed conclusions. However, this chapter limits itself by focussing on one logical generic conclusion that transverses three of the themes, and on a limited number of theme-specific conclusions.

#### 7.2 Conclusions

Even though informants offered in-principle support for progressive movements within schools – for offering more students more opportunities to learn by broadening the curriculum base – it appeared that traditional practices of schooling often inadvertently impeded progress. This was often the case when informants spoke about the operation of career information services within the school, the accommodation of Vocational Education and Training (VET) within the school curriculum, and the opportunities for students to take up traineeships or apprenticeships while still at school. Old practices, including inflexible timetabling and the prioritising of resources, seriously impacted on choice: choice, for instance, of how schools could vary their practices of career counselling, of when career counselling could, viably, be introduced to students; of how students could exercise choice about accessing interesting VET programs, without jeopardising their other studies, when the VET subjects were not available on the school campus; of how students could take up a school-based New Apprenticeship and maintain a program of school study without experiencing unnecessary inconvenience. In these instances, students would benefit if schools were re-configured into more flexible structures.

**Conclusion 1: The practices of schooling need to be made more flexible – creative solutions sought – to provide un-impeded, diversified learning opportunities for students and to allow schools to operationalise ideas that they support.**

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Schools demonstrated a high level of recognition of the changing environment of work and education. Many teachers and education leaders are aware of the projected growth in particular industries and of shortages in others. They know of the requirements in some workplaces for flexibility and the trend in some industries towards ‘portfolio careers’. The challenge is to develop strategies for incorporating this knowledge in productive ways within the schooling process.

**Conclusion 2: Schools require support to engage with current models of work by incorporating industry advisory bodies into the curriculum planning cycle and by keeping up to date with the employment and education trends and work patterns of their graduates (for example, establishing and maintaining reliable databases – destination surveys and alumni).**

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Generally, schools tended to focus on the provision of career information for students in Year 10 and beyond. Many young people and their parents indicated that career discussions needed to commence at an earlier stage in the schooling process. The practice

of leaving career advice to Year 10 when important subject decisions were being made limited some students' options. Schools that recognized that an early start was required offered young people the benefits of long-term planning for informed subject selection. These schools also developed in young people the habit of thinking about and discussing possible career paths.

**Conclusion 3: Provision needs to be made for the introduction of career planning and advice in schools prior to Year 10.**

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The approach to career advising in schools was identified as being a significant factor in the effectiveness of career planning with students. Two approaches to career advising were identifiable: a student-centred and an information-centred approach. Students and parents acknowledged the student-centred approach as being formative, empowering and highly valued. Students from schools that had adopted an information-centred approach to career advising often expressed confusion and uncertainty about their career planning and decision-making.

**Conclusion 4: If a high quality of career advising in schools is to be the experience for all students further enquiry into effective school-based approaches to career advising and the development of models of best practice are necessary. Of particular interest is the student-centred approach to career advising.**

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Professional training for the position of Career Adviser, and opportunities for professional development on the job varied widely amongst school sites. Some Advisers entered the position with formal study of the field while others were recruited straight from the teaching pool with no formal induction, work-shadowing, or prior experience.

**Conclusion 5: If standards of best practice are to be implemented, then professional preparation and on-going development of Career Advisers must be provided otherwise the system will continue to operate in an ad hoc fashion in terms of the approach taken and the quality of services delivered to students and their families.**

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While the merits of VET were espoused and it received in-principle support by those involved in the study, VET nonetheless suffers from an 'image problem', in part because of the low take up by the more academic students. As a result, VET is – and those who do it are – viewed with suspicion and often spoken of in a derogatory manner. The stigma surrounding VET and VET students, it appears, remains.

**Conclusion 6: VET needs to be more actively – and positively – promoted in schools and the wider community and its image improved.**

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Many interviewees commented on the lack of support for – or resourcing of – VET teachers and programs. Students and school staff alike indicated that this inadequacy had a negative impact upon the quality of the delivery of, and indeed the capacity to offer, VET in schools.



**Conclusion 7: Quality VET programs need to be offered in schools and teachers provided with adequate professional development and resources to effectively implement these programs.**

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Most students knew very little about traditional trades. This was not surprising given that in the schools we visited, few apprenticeships, as opposed to traineeships, were available through the operation of school-based New Apprenticeships. School staff and parents were concerned that service and retail traineeships were more readily available, far easier to negotiate, with outlets like McDonald's and Big W than were apprenticeships to traditional trades. The reality is that students who aspire to take up a trade while still at school, and schools that want to support such aspirations, are finding apprenticeships extremely difficult to come by.

**Conclusion 8: The operation of School-based New Apprenticeships should be investigated to ensure that apprenticeships, along with service and retail traineeships, are available to students who aspire to pursue a trade pathway while still at school. The practice should match the rhetoric of inclusion.**

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Many students thought of traditional trades as being uninformed by new knowledge or new technologies. While traditional trades continue to be associated with unchanged practices of the past, they are likely to lose their appeal to many students who want their chosen careers to be driven by new knowledge and cutting-edged technologies. In gaining young adult's attention and interest, an important feature may be the appropriate renaming of trades signalling shifts that have been made in up-skilling, technologising, and embracing the demands of a new economic base.

**Conclusion 9: Where appropriate, trades should be renamed to reflect the merging of new knowledge and new technologies and to signal their sustained location within a knowledge and technology driven economy.**

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Interest in teaching as a career was buoyant amongst students in low SES schools and in the rural school, relative to other schools that we visited. However, there was a strong sense amongst many students, parents and staff that teaching salaries were too low, promotional pathways were too few, and that the status of teaching – as reflected in university admission scores for Education programs – was on the decline. Principals were also concerned about attracting high quality candidates where teachers shared inadequate and under-technologised work-spaces that made communication, networking and modes of delivery difficult to transform into 21<sup>st</sup> century practices. Most of the informants thought that each of these issues was of particular concern in recruiting males to the field.

**Conclusion 10: If high quality candidates are to be attracted to teaching as a career, it will be necessary to consider issues of salary, promotional pathways, social status and physical working conditions. These issues are likely to be particularly important in attracting high quality male teachers.**

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Amongst students there was a strong belief that males were less suited to teaching than were females. Explanations were couched in terms of the force of biology and the continuing acculturation of boys and girls into sex-segregated occupations, with teaching – particularly teaching younger children – being identified as a female profession. Even at secondary level, students thought it more appropriate for males to work in more masculine fields like physical education and manual arts. Another abiding concern was the suspicion of sexual impropriety that surrounded males who choose to teach at school, particularly those who choose to teach young children.

**Conclusion 11: If males are to be recruited into the teaching workforce, it will be necessary to challenge the socially robust image of teaching as a feminised profession. It will also be necessary to ensure that men feel free to join the ranks of early childhood and primary teachers without suffering unfounded or vexatious suspicion.**

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An unexpected outcome of interviewing students was that so many critiqued the question related to the recruitment of males into the teaching profession. These students were adamant that what they wanted most was ‘good’ teachers, a factor that transcended any consideration of gender, or of social equity. Performance management of individual teachers – so that the teaching quality they experienced was consistent, and not a lottery – was higher on their list of priorities than was having male teachers. As such, these student claims run counter to current talk about the importance of redressing the gender imbalance in teaching by encouraging more male teachers into the workforce.

**Conclusion 12: Further research should be carried out into student perspectives on what it is that they need – not what adults think that they need – to improve their quality of life at school.**

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **DETAIL OF METHODOLOGY**

**Section 1: Site Selection**

**Section 2: Interviews in QLD and WA Schools**

**Section 3: Interviews in NSW Schools**

**Section 4: Appointment of School-Based Project Liaison Officers**

**Section 5: Effectiveness of Data Collection**

## Section 1: Site-Selection

In each instance, selection of schools by SES was greatly assisted by the respective State Education departments. In the case of Queensland, the Office of Strategic and Executive Services in Education Queensland provided full data sets of schools categorised according to what the department refers to as *Broad Socio-economic Groupings* that allowed for easy selection of schools for the study. The groupings are derived from the ABS Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage (IRSED). According to Education Queensland:

*[the IRSED] is constructed from 20 variables collected at the 1996 Census of Population and Housing. These variables describe the population of each Census Collection District predominantly in terms of employment/unemployment, income, education, family structure, housing characteristics, Aboriginality, and English language fluency. It is important to note that the school score refers to the Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage for Census Collection Districts comprising the school's catchment area. The school score is an average of the index weighted by enrolments taking account of the geographical location of the student population (Education Queensland, 2003<sup>5</sup>).*

Likewise, Information Services in the Education Department of Western Australia provided full data sets of its schools categorised into decile ranks: that is, a decile rank of 1 included the most advantaged 10% of schools in the State through to a decile rank of 10 that included the most disadvantaged 10% of schools in the State. Eventually, two schools, one with a decile rank of 9, the other with a decile rank of 6, respectively represented lower and middle SES bands of schools in Western Australia.

As for the selection of New South Wales schools, the DEST steering committee provided a list of upper, middle and lower SES schools that might participate in the study after checking that the schools were not already participating in other DEST projects or in the Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth. The list was augmented by staff in Strategic Research in the New South Wales Department of Education and Training who offered guidance on the appropriateness and suitability of schools for the project.

It should be acknowledged here that only one rural school was included in the study. The school was located in a town with a population of 10,000. In terms of SES, the rural school ranked within the middle band. While the school is used as a reference point, comparative claims about rural and metropolitan school communities should be gauged within the context of there being only one comparator rural school.

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<sup>5</sup> See Education Queensland website <http://education.qld.gov.au/schools/statistics/glossary.html>

## Section 2: Interviews in Queensland and West Australian Schools

In Queensland and in Western Australia students were selected according to year level and to gender. Each participating school was asked to identify 6 to 8 female students and the same number of male students from Year 10 and from Year 12 who, with their parents' consent, would be likely to agree to participate in the project. Each group was to represent a mix of students in relation to their program of studies and achievement.

Due to time and financial constraints, parents were not interviewed in either of these States. In Western Australia the only staff to be interviewed were the Career Advisers whereas in Queensland, interviews were conducted with Principals as well as Career Advisers. This meant that there was a minimum of four student focus group interviews plus one individual or focus group interview with the Career Adviser(s) in each of the two schools in Western Australia, bringing the total number of interviews at each school to five, and the total for the State to ten. In Queensland, given that the Principal was also interviewed, the number of focus group and individual interviews totalled six for each of the three schools, a total of eighteen for the State.

### School Sites, Focus Group and Other Interviews in Western Australia

School Sites	No. of FG <sup>6</sup> interviews	Males	Females	Other interviews
1 Middle SES school	1	Year 10	Year 10	Career Adviser(s)
1 Lower SES school	1	Year 12	Year 12	

### School Sites, Focus Group and Other Interviews in Queensland

School Sites	No. of FG interviews	Males	Females	Other interviews
1 Upper SES school	1	Year 10	Year 10	Career Adviser(s)
1 Middle SES school				
1 Lower SES school	1	Year 12	Year 12	Principal

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<sup>6</sup> FG refers to Focus Group

### Section 3: Interviews in New South Wales Schools

In New South Wales, students were grouped in relation to gender, year level and – in response to an additional DEST requirement – in relation to whether they were considered to be ‘academic’ or ‘non-academic’.

In introductory information to New South Wales schools, staff were informed that the request for academic/non-academic groupings of students did not mean that they were to select student groups on the basis of achievement. That is, students’ inclusion in the groups did not have to correlate with their report cards. Rather, the groups that were named as **academic** were to be comprised of students who generally had chosen subjects that supported an academic/tertiary/professional career pathway. They might include, for instance, students who were attempting advanced or extension levels of Mathematics or English. Some of the students included in this group might well be straight A students, but it might also include students who had chosen an academic subject stream but found it to be a struggle. Students who had adopted this stream might also have included other studies including VETiS.

The groups that were named as **non-academic** would be comprised of students who had generally chosen subjects that supported a clearer pathway to a career through TAFE, vocational training, or a trade. Again, a correlation with low or poor achievement was not to be the guide for inclusion in the focus group. The group might include students who were quite capable of success in academic courses but chose more vocationally oriented subject streams because of the interests that they held and the outcomes to which they aspired. It might also include students who were known to have struggled with more challenging academic studies.

#### School Sites, Focus Group (FG) and Other Interviews in New South Wales

School Sites	No. of FG interviews	Males	Females	Other interviews
1 Upper SES school 1 Middle SES school	1	Year 10 academic males	Year 10 academic females	Parents of Year 10 female students
	1	Year 10 non-academic males	Year 10 non-academic females	Parents of Year 10 male students
1 Lower SES school 1 Rural school	2	Year 12 academic males	Year 12 academic females	Parents of Year 12 female students Parents of Year 12 male students
	2	Year 12 non-academic males	Year 12 non-academic females	Career Adviser(s) Principal

One focus group interview covering all of the topics was conducted with each of the Year 10 groups while each of the Year 12 student groups was interviewed twice allowing for a more in-depth coverage of the topics under investigation. This meant that four focus group interviews were conducted with Year 10 students, and eight with Year 12 students,

providing a total of 12 focus group interviews with students at each school in New South Wales.

At each New South Wales site, it was planned to interview four groups of parents – parents of female Year 10 and Year 12 students, and parents of male Year 10 and Year 12 students. It was also planned to interview the Principal and the Career Adviser(s). Counting the 12 student focus group interviews, the additional six interviews with parents and staff brought the expected total to 18 interviews for each site.

While schools extended invitations to parents to participate in focus group discussions, some were more successful than others in gaining their support. At the upper SES school, parents reported flexing off work to participate in the study and the four groups were well subscribed. At the rural school also, four focus groups eventuated. At the lower SES school, given lower levels of response from parents, the focus groups were collapsed into two, one for parents of Year 10 students and one for parents of Year 12 students. At the middle SES school, individual interviews were conducted as only a few parents turned up, one at a time. Numbers are provided in Appendix A of students, parents, Career Advisers, Principals and others who participated in focus group and individual interviews at each site.

## **Section 4: Appointment of School-Based Project Liaison Officers**

With the demands of the project in mind, each school was asked to nominate a school-based Project Liaison Officer with whom the research team could liaise in the lead up to the school visit. For instance, the Project Liaison Officer was to:

- Timetable our overall visits to the school paying particular attention to other school commitments that might disrupt the progression of the project.
- Schedule exact times for interviews with students, Career Adviser(s) and/or staff members responsible for like duties, and the Principal.
- Liaise with class teachers to formulate student focus groups that met the criteria.
- Distribute parent consent forms to students who, having met the criteria, were interested in being involved.
- Collect signed parent consent forms from students.
- Pre-book a suitable room for each of the interviews.
- Contact parents who were likely to be available and willing to participate in a focus group interview session and invite them to attend.
- Follow-up with parents to encourage their participation.
- Purchase refreshments for any of the groups where interviews were scheduled to run through lunch or morning tea breaks, or after school hours.

According to our specifications, the Project Liaison Officer could be any staff member who had the skills to complete the tasks and was willing to undertake the duties. Project Liaison Officers in Queensland and Western Australia were paid \$500 for their efforts at enabling our smooth progression through their schools. Those in New South Wales were paid \$1,200 considering the extra effort involved in overseeing the selection of students according to the more complex criteria; scheduling 12 focus group interviews with students instead of four; and organising parent groups as well as staff for interview. The appointment of a Project Liaison Officer was considered to be particularly important with respect to organising the parent focus groups. Past experience in projects like this suggested that parent groups would be more difficult to muster from the outside.

The decision to appoint and to pay school-based Project Liaison Officers was considered significant within the framework of a study that spanned three States; required careful selection of student groups; demanded a compressed timeframe for data gathering; and encountered sensitivities associated with withdrawing final year 'exam-anxious' students from class for interview – a case in point that was exacerbated where teachers and parents shared the anxiety about time lost for curriculum review and for final examination preparation. In each of these events, it was the Project Liaison officer who could promote the value of the project, smooth our passage, and ensure that data were collected before the opportunities for working with the Year 12 students were lost to the pressures of final examinations.



## **Section 5: Effectiveness of Data Collection**

Data collection at each site in each State generally advanced smoothly, an outcome that was largely attributable to the efforts of the school-based Project Liaison Officers.

Visits to the schools were carefully negotiated and interview times were scheduled to generate the least disruption possible to students' studies. Student focus groups appeared to be appropriately selected and most students engaged actively with the issues within their groups. Career Advisers and Principals gave willingly of their time, some spending well in excess of the requested hour for interview. At some schools, additional staff volunteered to contribute to the study. In all, over one hundred hours of interviews were collected from willing and cooperative informants.

The only shortcoming in operationalising the project plan related to the recruitment of parents for interview. At each of the four New South Wales schools we expected to conduct four focus group interviews with parents. However, as reported in 1.4.2 above, the outcome was uneven across these schools. At the upper SES school and at the rural school, four parent focus group interviews were conducted as anticipated; at the lower SES school only two focus groups eventuated, one for each year level. At the middle SES school, only a few parents committed to an interview and turned up individually. This happened despite the fact that the researcher made it known that she would be available before or after schools hours to conduct focus groups and that she was totally flexible in tailoring times to suit parents' needs. In this case, where parent focus groups were not consolidated, individual interviews were conducted with three parents who appeared separately at times convenient to them. The Project Liaison Officer was apologetic and reported that she had attempted unsuccessfully to generate the parent focus groups as required.

In conducting this study within its tight timeframe, there was little doubt that the school-based Project Liaison Officers were important in securing its success. The one aspect that could have been improved was the engagement of more parents at interview. In this respect, the upper SES school was more successful than any other, in that it managed to secure the cooperation of 30 parents for the focus group interviews. There are two important features that might explain this success. Firstly, the Liaison Officer reported that she had made in excess of 200 phone calls initiating contact with parents, explaining the purpose of the study, establishing times for the interviews and following-up on those who had made tentative commitments to participate. The extent of her work may be a sobering indication of what is required to successfully recruit parents to participate in research projects of this kind. Secondly, the parents at this school reported at interview that they were either readily available or that they had been able to flex off work or to make alternative arrangements. The rural school was the next most successful at recruiting parents to interview.

It is possible to speculate that parents of students attending the middle and lower SES metropolitan schools may have had less flexible work conditions than those in the upper SES school – or that they may have found the additional travel time involved in attending an interview more difficult to manage than those living in the rural town – or that they were less convinced of the immediate value of the research in terms of pay-off for their children. It is also worth speculating whether the Project Liaison Officers need to be made aware of the likely input necessary to garner parent support – a factor that the Liaison Officer at the upper SES school had anticipated well in advance of her acceptance

of the position. Each of these speculations is worth considering in future attempts to record as diverse a range of parent voices as is possible. Indeed, the issue needs to be squarely addressed lest the voice of parents be dominated by those who are likely to have experienced social and/or economic success of the kind indicated by the socio-economic status of the catchment area of the school that their children attend.

In terms of future projects, the research team commends the practice of appointing and paying a school-based Project Liaison Officer who can orchestrate the timing of visits and the scheduling of interviews, and who can oversee the detail that goes into optimising the quality of data collection. In our judgment, it is appropriate that staff who assume responsibility for school-end management of outside projects should be recognised and recompensed for their input. This appears to us to be an equitable and respectful way of dealing with schools that make their facilities and their services available to researchers, oftentimes at considerable cost to school staff involved.

## **APPENDIX B**

NUMBER OF STUDENTS X LOCATION, YEAR LEVEL AND GENDER

**Western Australian School Sites:**

**Middle SES Metropolitan School**

**Lower SES Metropolitan School**

## Western Australian School Sites:

### WA: Middle SES School - Students

Year Level	Boys	Girls
10	5	5
12	3	4

### WA: Middle SES School - Staff

Principal	1
Career Advisor	1

### WA: Lower SES School - Students

Year Level	Boys	Girls
10	8	7
12	7	8

### WA: Lower SES School - Staff

Principal	1
Career Advisors	2

## **Queensland School Sites:**

**Upper SES Metropolitan School**

**Middle Metropolitan SES School**

**Lower Metropolitan SES School**

## Queensland School Sites:

### Qld: Upper SES School - Students

Year Level	Boys	Girls
10	6	7
12	6	4

### Qld: Upper SES School - Staff

Principal	1
Career Advisor	1

### Qld: Middle SES School - Students

Year Level	Boys	Girls
10	6	6
12	6	6

### Qld: Middle SES School - Staff

Principal	1
Career Advisor	1

## Queensland School Sites (cont.)

### Qld: Lower SES School - Students

<b>Year Level</b>	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>

### Qld: Lower SES School - Staff

<b>Principal</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Career Advisor</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Others: DPs</b>	<b>2</b>



## **New South Wales School Sites:**

**Lower SES Metropolitan**

**Middle SES Metropolitan**

**Upper SES Metropolitan**

**Rural School**

## New South Wales School Site:

### NSW: Lower SES School - Students

<b>Year Level</b>	<b>Academic Boys</b>	<b>Non-Academic Boys</b>	<b>Academic Girls</b>	<b>Non-Academic Girls</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>

### NSW: Lower SES School - Parents

<b>Year Level</b>	<b>Parents</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>5</b>

### NSW: Lower SES School - Staff

<b>Principal</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Career Advisor</b>	<b>1</b>

## New South Wales School Site:

### NSW: Middle SES School - Students

<b>Year Level</b>	<b>Academic Boys</b>	<b>Non-Academic Boys</b>	<b>Academic Girls</b>	<b>Non-Academic Girls</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>

### NSW: Middle SES School - Parents

<b>Year Level</b>	<b>Boys' Parents</b>	<b>Girls' Parents</b>
<b>10</b>		<b>2</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>

### NSW: Middle SES School - Staff

<b>Principal</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Career Advisors/ Teachers</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Others: 1 Counsellor and 2 DPs</b>	<b>3</b>

## New South Wales School Site:

### NSW: Upper SES School - Students

<b>Year Level</b>	<b>Academic Boys</b>	<b>Non-Academic Boys</b>	<b>Academic Girls</b>	<b>Non-Academic Girls</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>

### NSW: Upper SES School - Parents

<b>Year Level</b>	<b>Boys' Parents</b>	<b>Girls' Parents</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>

### NSW: Upper SES School - Staff

<b>Principal</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Career Advisors</b>	<b>2</b>

## New South Wales School Site:

### NSW: Rural School - Students

<b>Year Level</b>	<b>Academic Boys</b>	<b>Non-Academic Boys</b>	<b>Academic Girls</b>	<b>Non-Academic Girls</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>

### NSW: Rural School - Parents

<b>Year Level</b>	<b>Boys' Parents</b>	<b>Girls' Parents</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>

### NSW: Rural School - Staff

<b>Principal</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Career Advisors</b>	<b>2</b>

## **APPENDIX C**

### **INDIVIDUAL AND FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOLS**

**Focus Group Protocol:**

**New South Wales:      Year 10 Students**

**Queensland:              Year 10 and Year 12 Students**

**Western Australia:      Year 10 and Year 12 Students**

## **Decision Making**

At this point in time, what kinds of careers are you planning? What are you hoping to do after you leave school?

Do your plans for the future involve further education and training or not? What do you think of the options that are available to you? (eg. university/ TAFE/ on-the-job training/ work with no training/ taking a break)

On a scale of zero to five, (Zero = no idea; 5 = utterly determined) how firm are your ideas about what you will do next year, and what you will do as a career?

How do you know that your subject choices will help you to achieve your career goals? How well informed do you think you are about your choices?

What have been the key influences on your career choices?

When do you think you started to shape up your ideas about a future career?

Do you plan to have children? Does this impact on the way you are planning for the future?

**How do you think that your academic achievement at school has impacted on your decisions about courses and careers?**

### **The role of career information and school career advisors**

Does your school have a career advisor?

How important has the career officer been in helping you plan your career?

What kind of information do you need from a career officer?

Do career advisors actively discuss career and study options with you?

Who else in the school helps you with your career decisions?

How could career advice to students be improved within the school?

### **Subjects studied and VET in schools**

Over the past few years, many schools across Australia have introduced vocational education and training into the school curriculum. What do you know about studying VET subjects at school?

What do you know about studying VET subjects at school?

Have you decided to include any VET subjects in your course of study next year? Why? Why not?

When students choose VET subjects, what are they trying to achieve?



What do other students at this school think about studying VET subjects at school?

Would you consider applying for a school-based apprenticeship? Why? Why not?

### **Traditional trades and teaching as careers**

What do you know about apprenticeships and traineeships? Could you explain the difference between them?

Would you consider taking up a traditional trade as a career? Why? Why not?

What do you see as the dis/advantages of choosing a traditional trade?

What do you think of teaching as a career option? Why?

Nationally, 75% of newly qualified teachers are women. Why do you think this is the case? What do you think would make teaching more attractive for boys?

## **Focus Group Protocol:**

**New South Wales: Year 12 Students**

## **Decision Making**

What does 'career' mean to you? What is the difference between having a career and having a job?

What do you plan to do next year? And five years later?

Do your plans for the future require further education and training or not? What do you think of the options that are available to you? (eg. apprenticeship/ traineeship/ university/ TAFE/ on-the-job training/ work with no training/ taking a break)

On a scale of zero to five, (Zero = no idea; 5 = utterly determined) how firm are your ideas about what you will do next year, and what you will do as a career?

What drives your decision to do a university degree, vocational education and training, or to go to work?

When do you think you started to shape up your ideas about a future career?

What have been the key influences on your career choices? (parents, teachers, peer group, television, school results, work experience, part-time work etc)

How have your current plans changed over time?

What kinds of pressures do students face in making career decisions?

What do you think your parents want for you? Has this made a difference to the way you have thought about your future career?

Do you plan to have children? Does this impact on the way you are planning for the future?

How do you think that your academic achievement at school has impacted on your decisions about courses and careers?

## **The role of career information and school career advisors**

How well informed do you think you are about the education and career options and pathways available to you?

Does your school have a career advisor?

How important has the career advisor been in helping you plan your career? Have you had sufficient access to the career advisor?

What kind of information do you need from a career officer?

Do career advisors actively discuss career and study options with you?

Who else in the school helps you with your career decisions?

How could career advice to students be improved within the school?

### **Subjects studied and VET in schools**

Over the past few years, many schools across Australia have introduced vocational education and training into the school curriculum. What do you know about studying VET subjects at school?

What do you know about studying VET subjects at school?

When students choose VET subjects, what are they trying to achieve?

What do other students at this school think about studying VET subjects at school?

Why did you choose the subjects that you did? Were any of these subjects VET subjects either last year or this?

*For students enrolled in VET:*

- *Is it a major focus of your study?*
- *If it is, did you consider going straight to TAFE? Why/Why not?*
- *If it isn't, what was your reason for choosing a VET subject?*
- *Would you have left school by now if you didn't have the option of VET studies?*
- *What do you expect to achieve through your VET studies?*
- *What do your friends think about VET in the school program?*
- *Do you think VET studies will assist you in getting a career?*
- *Are you satisfied with the quality of VET subjects?*
- *Would you recommend VET to others?*

*For students not enrolled in VET:*

- *Did you consider enrolling in VET in school courses? Why (not)?*
- *What do you think of VET in schools? Do you see value in VET studies for yourself?*
- *What do your friends think about VET studies? What do you and your friends think of those who choose VET courses at school?*
- *Who or what influenced your decision not to enrol in VET at school?*

Did you consider enrolling in a school-based apprenticeship? Why (not)?

### **Traditional trades as a career**

What do you know about apprenticeships and traineeships? Could you explain the difference between them?

Would you consider taking up a traditional trade as a career? Why? Why not?

What do you see as the dis/advantages of choosing a traditional trade?

Are the ways that traditional trades are offered acceptable to young people

### **Teaching as a career:**

What do you think of teaching as a career option?

(If negative) What would it take to convince you that teaching was a good career choice?

(If positive) What makes teaching attractive as a career? Would you choose early childhood, primary or secondary and why?

What would it take to convince you that teaching in the primary years was a good career choice?

Who influences your views about teaching as a career? What do your parents think about teaching? And your friends?

If you are thinking of a career in the maths/science field would you consider teaching as a career? Why (not)?

Nationally, 75% of newly qualified teachers are women. Why do you think this is the case? What do you think would make teaching more attractive for boys?

**Focus Group Protocol:**

**Parents/Guardians of Year 10 Students**

### **Decision making**

What are your sons/ daughters thinking about in terms of future careers?

When did they begin to shape up their ideas about what they wanted to do? Have their ideas changed much over time?

What have been the key influences on your sons'/daughters' thinking about careers?

- How significant do you think you have been in influencing the way your sons/daughters are thinking about career options?
- Do you have a view about the merits of studying at university or pursuing vocational education- apprenticeships/traineeships or other VET courses?
- What advice are you giving them?
- What has influenced your thinking?

How firm do you think your sons'/daughters' decisions are about their careers? How aware are they of what they have to do to work towards their career goals? How well informed do you think they are about their choices?

How do you think that your sons'/daughters' academic achievements at school have impacted on their decisions about courses and careers?

What are your feelings/thoughts about the choices that your sons/ daughters are making at this point in time? Is there anything you would like them to change? Why?

### **The role of career information and school career advisors**

How are your sons/ daughters accessing information about careers and finding out what they need to do to achieve their career goals?

How important have the school and the school career advisor been in helping your children plan their careers? Have teachers been important as well?

How well informed do you feel that you are to give career advice to your sons/ daughters? What resources do you draw on when your sons/daughters ask you for help?

Who, or what, do you think is the key to helping young people decide on career options? Can you advise how the process might be improved?

### **Subjects studied and VET in schools**

How important do you think that you have been in influencing your son's/daughter's choice of subjects for next year?

The movement of VET courses into schools is fairly new.

- What do you know about VET in schools?
- Who do you think these subjects/courses are aimed at?

- What are schools trying to achieve by making these options available within the school curriculum? Are they headed in the right direction by including VET in the curriculum?

Is your son/daughter planning to enrol in any VET subjects?

*If yes:*

- *Did you attempt to persuade/dissuade your child from enrolling in VET subjects? Why?*
- *Do you think this choice will have an impact on his/her future career plans?*

*If no:*

- *Did you attempt to persuade/dissuade your child from enrolling in VET subjects? Why?*
- *Do you think this choice will have an impact on his/her future career plans?*

### **Traditional trades as a career**

What do you know about apprenticeships and traineeships? Could you explain the difference between them?

Would you want your son/daughter to consider a traditional trade as a future career? Why (not)?

What do you see as the dis/advantages of choosing a traditional trade?

Do you think that the ways that traditional trades are offered and the time taken to complete them are attractive to your sons/ daughters?

### **Teaching as a career**

What do you think of teaching as a career option for your son/daughter?

How would you rank teaching amongst other careers?

Do you think that the status of teaching has changed since you were at school? In what way?

Would you advise (or have you advised) your son/daughter to take up teaching as a career? Why (not)?

If you wouldn't, what would encourage you to hold a more positive view of teaching as a career for your son/daughter?

In particular, what do you think would make it more attractive for boys?



**Focus Group Protocol:**

**Parents/Guardians of Year 12 Students**

## **Decision making**

What are your sons/ daughters thinking about in terms of future careers?

When did they begin to shape up their ideas about what they wanted to do? Have their ideas changed much over time?

What have been the key influences on your sons'/daughters' thinking about careers?

- How significant do you think you have been in influencing the way your sons/daughters are thinking about career options?
- Do you have a view about the merits of studying at university or pursuing vocational education- apprenticeships/traineeships or other VET courses?
- What advice are you giving them?
- What has influenced your thinking?

Do you think that your sons/daughters have really decided yet what they want to be? How aware are they of what they have to do to work towards their career goals? How well informed do you think they are about their choices?

How do you think that your sons'/daughters' academic achievements at school have impacted on their decisions about courses and careers?

Are you happy with the choices that your sons/ daughters are making at this point in time?

## **The role of career information and school career advisors**

What resources are your sons/ daughters using to access information about careers and to find out what they need to do to achieve their career goals?

How important have the school and the school career advisor been in helping your children plan their careers? Have teachers been important as well?

How well informed do you feel that you are to give career advice to your sons/ daughters? What resources do you draw on when your sons/daughters ask you for help?

Who, or what, do you think is the key to helping young people make decisions about career options? Can you advise how the process might be improved?

## **Subjects studied and VET in schools**

How important do you think that you have been in influencing your son's/daughter's choice of subjects during the last two years?

The movement of VET courses into schools is fairly new.

- What do you know about VET in schools?
- Who do you think these subjects/courses are aimed at?
- What are schools trying to achieve by making these options available within the school curriculum? Are they headed in the right direction by including VET in the curriculum?
- Have your views about VET changed over time? Please elaborate.

Is your son/daughter planning to enrol in any VET subjects?

*If yes:*

- *Did you attempt to persuade/dissuade your child from enrolling in VET subjects? Why?*
- *Do you think this choice will have an impact on his/her future career plans?*

*If no:*

- *Did you attempt to persuade/dissuade your child from enrolling in VET subjects? Why?*
- *Do you think this choice will have an impact on his/her future career plans?*

### **Traditional trades as a career**

What do you know about apprenticeships and traineeships? Could you explain the difference between them?

Would you want your son/daughter to consider a traditional trade as a future career? Why (not)?

What do you see as the dis/advantages of choosing a traditional trade?

Do you think that the ways that traditional trades are offered and the time taken to complete them are attractive to you sons/ daughters?

### **Teaching as a career**

What do you think of teaching as a career option for your son/daughter?

How would you rank teaching amongst other careers?

Do you think that the status of teaching has changed since you were at school? In what way?

Would you advise (or have you advised) your son/daughter to take up teaching as a career? Why (not)?

If you wouldn't, what would encourage you to hold a more positive view of teaching as a career for your son/daughter?

In particular, what do you think would make it more attractive for boys?

## **Focus Group Protocol:**

### **Career Advisors**

### **Career guidance services within the school**

How did you come to be a career advisor at this school?

How well prepared do you think that you are for the position? What kind of training do you think is appropriate for someone in this position?

What kind of support do you receive from the school?

- How adequately are you resourced?
- How current do you think your career information is? How do you keep up-to date?

How important is it for a career advisor to draw on a wide range of resources and services?

- What kinds of resources/ services do you draw from?
- Do you use the internet as a resource for career advice?
- If yes, what kinds of sites do you find most useful?
- Have you used sites like Myfuture? the New Apprenticeship website?
- Do you draw on resources that exist outside of the school?
- If yes, which ones do you draw on?
- Have you used resources like Career Information Centres? Any others?

In this school, is career education integrated throughout the curriculum or is it a completely separate function?

At what year level do students begin accessing career advice and services? Do you think that students should access services earlier or later? Why?

How could the flow of career advice and information services be improved within the school?

### **Decision making**

When do students start shaping up their ideas about what they want to do?

- Do their ideas change much between Year 10 and Year 12?
- When do you think students really decide on what they want to do?

What are the key influences on students' thinking about careers? How do they arrive at their decisions?

How significant do you think career advisors are in shaping students' career plans?

What influences the kind of advice that you give to students? Are there any particular considerations that you take into account now?

Do you have a view about the merits of studying at university or pursuing vocational education- apprenticeships/traineeships or other VET courses?

- What advice are you giving students about these pathways?

### **Role of career information and school career advisors**

How aware do you think students are about career information that is available within the school?

Who, or what, do you think is the key to helping young people decide on career options?

Do you think that the school plays an effective role in helping students explore career options? Can you elaborate on this? Can you advise how the process might be improved?

### **Subjects studied and VET in schools**

Do you advise students to enrol in VET subjects while they are at school? Why (not)?

Have your views about enrolling in VET at school changed over time? Why (not)?

### **Traditional trades as a career**

How do apprenticeships and traineeships operate within the school? Do they offer different pathways and outcomes for students?

Would you encourage a student to take up a traditional trade as a career? Why? Why not? On what basis would you encourage a student to do so?

What do you see as the dis/advantages of choosing a traditional trade?

Are the ways that traditional trades are offered and the time taken to complete them acceptable to students?

### **Teaching as a career:**

What do you think of teaching as a career option for students?

Do you actively advise students to consider teaching as a career?

- What is the basis of your advice? (gender/ life style/ personality/ ability/ achievement/ life style/ availability of other choices/?)
- what would encourage you to advise teaching as a career for your students? In particular, what do you think would make it more attractive for boys?

How would you rank teaching amongst other careers?

Do you think that the status of teaching has changed since you trained? In what way?

What do you think would make teaching a more attractive career for students? In particular, what do you think would make it more attractive for male students?

What are the students telling you about their opinion of teaching as a career choice?

**Additional information**

Did you have formal training and/or qualifications to become a career advisor? YES/NO

Is the role of the career advisor full-time or part-time? YES/NO

Can you do further study/training for this position? YES/NO

Would you participate in further study/ training if it were available to you? YES/NO

Are you a member of a professional association that deals in career advice? YES/NO

Do you use aptitude or psychological tests to assist in your advising role? YES/NO

## **Focus Group Protocol:**

### **Principals**



### **School demographics**

Could you describe the demographics of the school population?

### **Decision making**

When do students start shaping up their ideas about what they want to do?

- Do their ideas change much between Year 10 and Year 12?
- When do you think students really decide on what they want to do?

What are the key influences on students' thinking about careers? How do they arrive at their decisions?

How significant do you think career advisors are in shaping students' career plans?

What influences the kind of advice that you give to students? Are there any particular considerations that you take into account?

Do you have a view about the merits of studying at university or pursuing vocational education- apprenticeships/traineeships or other VET courses?

- What advice are you giving students about these pathways?

### **Role of career information and school career advisors**

How aware do you think students are about career information that is available within the school?

Who, or what, do you think is the key to helping young people decide on career options?

Do you think that the school plays an effective role in helping students explore career options? Can you elaborate on this? Can you advise how the process might be improved?

### **Subjects studied and VET in schools**

Do you advise students to enrol in VET subjects while they are at school? Why (not)?

Have your views about enrolling in VET at school changed over time? Why (not)?

### **Traditional trades as a career**

How do apprenticeships and traineeships operate within the school? Do they offer different pathways and outcomes for students?

Would you encourage a student to take up a traditional trade as a career? Why? Why not? On what basis would you encourage a student to do so?

What do you see as the dis/advantages of choosing a traditional trade?

Are the ways that traditional trades are offered and the time taken to complete them acceptable to students?

**Teaching as a career:**

What do you think of teaching as a career option for students?

Do you actively advise students to consider teaching as a career?

- What is the basis of your advice? (gender/ life style/ personality/ ability/ achievement/ life style/ availability of other choices/?)
- what would encourage you to advise teaching as a career for your students? In particular, what do you think would make it more attractive for boys?

How would you rank teaching amongst other careers?

Do you think that the status of teaching has changed since you trained? In what way?

What do you think would make teaching a more attractive career for students? In particular, what do you think would make it more attractive for male students?

What are the students telling you about their opinion of teaching as a career choice?

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