

Submission on New Models of Tertiary Education, draft report (Productivity Commission)

November 2016

This is a submission from the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER)

We have focused on Chapter three, section 3.3 Decisions and transitions into tertiary education, particularly in relation to career education. Our key messages are:

- 1. Career decision-making is not linear.** Zepke and Leach's decision-making model of Predisposition, Search, and Choice (p.56) is useful. However we would not want to see this used to suggest that decision-making is a linear process. NZCER's longitudinal study called Pathways and Prospects found its participants used four main transition-from-school approaches. These approaches did not correspond to expressed aspirations or the pathways chosen but rather to a standpoint based in life influences (see Vaughan, 2005; Vaughan, Roberts & Gardiner, 2006; Vaughan & Roberts, 2007; Vaughan, 2010). Young people do not so much follow pathways as *produce* them.
- 2. Career management competencies need to be supported.** As a society we continue to privilege the provision of career information over supporting meaning-making and information *use* (Vaughan & Gardiner, 2007; Vaughan, 2008; Vaughan, et al, 2009; Vaughan & O'Neil, 2010; Vaughan, 2011; Vaughan & Spiller 2012). We need to help young people and those within the tertiary education system itself develop capabilities – skills, attitudes, knowledge, values – to enable *lifelong* and *lifewide* management of work and learning. We think career management competencies would be most effective woven throughout the school and its activities, including subject classes (i.e. not confined to the school careers department activities) (see Vaughan, 2011; Vaughan, 2012b; Vaughan & Spiller, 2012).
- 3. Career education in schools needs to be transformed.** It is now important to maintain work capabilities over periods of time because occupations change and because each person changes occupations in life. Career brochures, expos and websites provide information, but it only becomes worthwhile when situated within a school-wide focus on developing students' long-term capabilities for managing multiple education and work commitments throughout life (see Vaughan & Spiller, 2012). We also recommend that those involved in careers education work closely with other school staff and prospective organisations to help students build explicit connections and career management capabilities.
- 4. Career management and competency development must continue beyond school.** It is clear from the Commission's Figure 3.5, pg 32 that well over half of the tertiary student population do not come directly from school. Career education must continue into the tertiary sector itself.
- 5. We concur with the statement F3.4, pg 61 of the New Models of Education – draft report.**

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Introduction

The New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) is an independent research and development organisation with its own Act of Parliament and a rich heritage of educational research. We undertake research and evaluation, and produce evidence-based products and services for the education sector. NZCER works closely with schools, education organisations and educators.

Our organisation's purpose is to improve education by providing knowledge, advice and resources. We have particular expertise in curriculum, assessment, school leadership and governance, future-focused education and tertiary and adult learning. We have drawn on this expertise to make this submission on particular parts of the draft report that are intended to improve educational provision.

Student characteristics and choices

NZCER has been researching and publishing on career education in schools since 2002 (see reference list). The New Models of Tertiary Education draft report cites two important arguments from this body of work:

- people need to develop career management competencies because information is necessary but not sufficient,
- the issues with the school career education system can be summarised in terms of inequitable access, marginalised services, and a lack of fitness-for-purpose (Vaughan, 2011; Vaughan & Spiller 2012).

We wish to advance these and other arguments, based on the available evidence.

Career decision-making is not linear

Given the complexity of career decision-making, Zepke and Leach's decision-making model of Predisposition, Search, and Choice (p.56) is useful. However we would not want to see this used to suggest that decision-making is a linear process. NZCER's Pathways and Prospects study followed 114 school leavers over five years¹ and highlights the distinctively non-linear transition styles and decision-making strategies they use. For example, they use a current pathway choice as a strategy in itself, moving deliberately towards an as-yet unknown job.

Pathways and Prospects found its participants used four main transition-from-school approaches. These approaches did not correspond to expressed aspirations or the pathways chosen but rather to a standpoint based in life influences (see Vaughan, 2005; Vaughan, Roberts & Gardiner, 2006; Vaughan & Roberts, 2007; Vaughan, 2010). Young people are deeply interested in *who* they are and might become, as much as what they might do (for a job). They do not so much follow pathways as *produce* them. This perspective makes perfect sense in a world where careers are no longer structured entities and where membership of the "precariat" is a real possibility.

¹ The school leavers were Youth Trainees, polytechnic students, university students, apprentices, university bridging students, and army soldier and officer recruits.

Career management competencies need to be supported

Career information is often touted as key to enabling good decision-making. There is certainly a case for ensuring young people can access information and for ensuring it is up-to-date and disinterested. However the way information is received, made meaningful, and used is at least as significant, if not more so. Yet we continue to privilege the provision of career information over supporting meaning-making and information *use* (Vaughan & Gardiner, 2007; Vaughan, 2008; Vaughan, et al, 2009; Vaughan & O’Neil, 2010; Vaughan, 2011; Vaughan & Spiller 2012).

We need to help young people and those within the tertiary education system itself develop capabilities – skills, attitudes, knowledge, values – to enable *lifelong* and *lifewide* management of work and learning. The three career management competencies of developing self-awareness, exploring opportunities, and deciding and acting (Ministry of Education, 2009) are designed to serve this purpose. They are very similar to the key competencies that are already embedded in the New Zealand Curriculum. We think career management competencies would be most effective woven throughout the school and its activities, including subject classes (i.e. not confined to the school careers department activities) (see Vaughan, 2011; Vaughan, 2012b; Vaughan & Spiller, 2012). Helping young people develop career management competencies would help ensure they understand and can use the information they access, and can apply it to the real-world situations being encountered - i.e. not just single decisions or entry to tertiary education.

Career education in schools needs to be transformed

The school career education system is based on a model of vocational guidance designed for a disappearing world. The crucial issues are no longer about industrial expansion and occupational diversity beyond the family, and how to plan for predictable events, as with 20th century vocational guidance. The crucial issues now are about the impact of interconnected world problems and occupation game-changers like artificial intelligence and disruptive technologies. These demand a lifelong and lifewide perspective on work and learning. They also demand an understanding that work and learning increasingly take integrated forms which rely heavily on learner-worker self-management and disposition (Vaughan, 2012a; Vaughan, Bonne & Eyre, 2015). Yes, it is still vital to identify what you are best suited to and develop a capacity to realise this in some way. However it is also now important to maintain work capabilities over periods of time because occupations change and because each person changes occupations in life. We will not be able to fix career education in schools until we understand what it is for.

We agree with the draft report statement on page 61 “By itself, transferring Careers New Zealand’s functions to TEC are unlikely to improve arrangements for career education and information, in particular in schools”. The outgoing Chief Executive for CareersNZ and the Chief Executive for the TEC have recently made public statements to the effect that career information will be, or remain, a focus. We argue the inclusion of developing long-term capabilities for managing work and ongoing professional development must sit alongside sharing information to radically improve the support for young people entering and engaging (at different times in life) with the tertiary system.

We will not fix career education in schools by continuing the preoccupation with what can be delivered and counted – e.g. tertiary pathway brochures distributed, students taken to careers expos, students

make CVs, hits on the CareersNZ website. These activities are too often isolated experiences with limited usefulness. They only become really worthwhile when situated within a school-wide focus on developing students' long-term capabilities for managing multiple education and work commitments throughout life (see Vaughan & Spiller, 2012). And, as we have argued elsewhere (Vaughan & O'Neil, 2011), that should sit alongside careers advisors undertaking professional development in careers work (and being recruited and rewarded on this basis); non-teaching transition course coordinators being included in curriculum discussions; careers and transition staff having license to maintain networks that link students with providers, ITOs, and employers; and careers staff working closely with subject teachers to help students build explicit connections and career management capabilities.

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