How young people in non-metropolitan areas in Victoria imagine their futures

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Overview

A research project 2018-19 investigating how young people in six non-metropolitan areas imagine and navigate their pathways as they leave school and make choices about their future trajectories.

Rationale: Young people in regional, rural and peri-urban communities face particular challenges in 'imagining' and navigating their post-school futures, as choices are affected by industrial and agricultural structural adjustment, distance, and community or cultural pressures. These may be compounded by individual disadvantage caused by low socio-economic status, Aboriginality or recent migrant/refugee status.

The aim of the project

The project aimed to provide a **better understanding** of the transition process and develop **good practice ideas** for wider applicability by schools, communities, employers and education providers.

Research questions:

1. How do young people imagine and navigate pathways related to post-school education, training and employment and what decisions to they make?

2. Who and what are the influencers and how do they affect the decisions?

3. What could change to provide better post-school outcomes for a larger proportion of young people?

What does the literature tell us?

- Youth transitions are less linear than they used to be - for example, more young people work part-time while at school;

- Going to university is more common (now 40%) and some take gap years;

- Careers advice comes from parents, peers, careers teachers; and choices are affected by gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, subject choice and work experience/placement;

- Schools face many challenges in providing careers advice;

- Being rural/regional significantly affects available choices (e.g. only half as likely to attain a degree by age 35 – Napthine review);

- Virtually no literature on peri-urban areas and youth transitions.

The six communities (chosen in conjunction with DET)

The rural communities

	Population 2016	Distance from Melbourne Town Hall
Horsham	14,543	299 km
Sale	13,673	212 km
Shepparton	63,837	190 km

The peri-urban communities

|	Population 2016	Distance (km) from Melbourne Town Hall
Berwick	47,674	46
Hastings	9,609	72
Werribee	40,435	33

Demographic comparison of the sites compared with the Victorian average, 2016 census

Features – with Vic average	Rural/regional sites	Peri-urban sites
Australian born (65%)	All well above average	Around the average with Hastings above *
Population growth 2006-16 (20%)	All well below average	All above average except Werribee
Proportion of people with a degree (24%)	About half the average	Slightly below in Berwick, well below in Werribee and Hastings
Unemployment 6.6%	Around or below average	Below in Berwick, above in Werribee and Hastings
Median income	A little below average	Above in Berwick, otherwise below
Main industries of employment	Hospitals in all	Berwick-hospitals; Werribee-transport; Hastings - supermarkets

* Berwick & Werribee slightly above the average for 'both parents born overseas'

Research methods
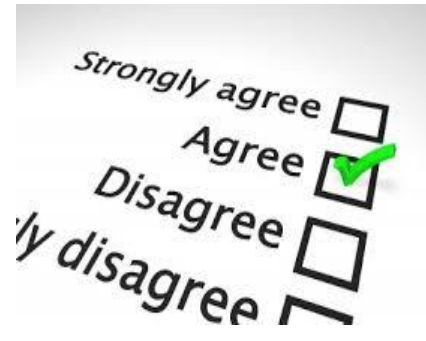
Research phases

1. **58 interviews with community stakeholders who worked with young people aged 15-24, an average of 9.5 per site.** Significant stakeholders were selected according to a defined protocol, covering LLENs, apprenticeship providers and other organisations working with young people; TAFE, RTO and higher education providers; indigenous and/or multicultural workers.

2. Interviews and focus groups at two schools at each site. At all schools, the Principal or delegate and at least one careers staff member were interviewed, **a total of 32 interviews**. At the government schools, separate focus groups of Year 11 and Year 12 were held, a total of **90 students.**

3. Interviews with **32 young people**, who had left school in 2017, in small groups or individually. Accessed with the help of local stakeholders and, in some cases, education providers at the education institutions which the young people were attending.

4. Analysis of the relevant Victorian Government 'On Track' survey reports for 2018, to garner further information and also to triangulate the qualitative findings. The **publicly available reports for the relevant LGAs** (local government areas) were analysed for key variables, e.g. destinations; views about career advice received at school.

Total: 212 people including 112 young people

Examples of questions (abridged – all available on project web site)

Phase 1 'Adult' interviewees

- How do young people go about the process of imagining their futures in rural and regional /peri-urban communities like yours? Do they see a future here?

- How do you think that young people navigate or weigh up decisions related to education, training and work?

- What sorts of things trigger the decision to stay or leave a young person's home community?

- How do communities, schools, business, training organisations help young people navigate this future? Can they do more?

- Do young people in your local area have enough support around understanding work, training and educational options?

- Are there identified skills gaps in your local area? Are young people guided towards work, training or education in these areas? How is it done?

Phase 2 Year 11/12 focus groups

- When you think about what you are going to do after leaving school- what are your plans (if any) at present? *Depending on answers:* Moving away? Staying here?

- What/who contributed to your plan? *Depending on answers:* Within school? Outside school?

- Do you have part-time jobs? How many hours? What type of work?

- When (in what year) did you decide what you wanted to do? What did you imagine prior to that (if anything)?

- If I had visited last year when you were in Year 11/Year 10, would your answers have been different? How, and what's changed since then?

- What would you like to know or have right now, to help you plan what happens after school?

The analysis process

- One page summaries of each interview written up by researcher.

- Case studies of 8-10 pages for the 'adult' Phase 1 interviews and for the 'school' Phase 2 interviews were written up by researcher.

- Cross-case analysis by the two researchers to produce consolidated findings for each of Phases 1 and 2.

- One-page summaries of each Phase 3 interview were written up and an analysis written of Phase 3 and Phase 4 ('On Track') findings.

- Consolidated case studies written of each site for the final report.

Post-school pathways

Rural/regional areas

The main question is

DO I STAY

OR

DO I GO?

Main pathways: Sheep paths or goat tracks*

• University

• Apprenticeship (or traineeship)

• Employment (meaning non-apprenticed employment)

• Unemployment

(* Names coined during pilot project in Wheat-town (Smith & Harrison 2017)

What influences decisions?

- Parents' values, knowledge, opinion and experience – of employment, of unemployment, of uni, of VET;

- Socio-economic status of family;

- Own financial resources (part-time job) and self-efficacy;

- Siblings, peers and neighbours (especially important for apprenticeships and uni study) ;

- School – careers advisors and events, and sometimes subject teachers;

- Community understandings of what young people 'like them' should do;

- Prior experience of available options (e.g. visits to campuses or work experience).

Peri-urban areas

Peri-urban areas

- Migrant areas, particularly Werribee and Berwick tended to have families that were highly aspirational, but it was said in some cases that migrants tended to have limited networks outside their own circles, limited language skills and some cultural challenges.

- Werribee was seen by some students as a long way from Melbourne and they preferred to stay in the Werribee area to work while. The Westgate bridge was mentioned as the divide between Werribee and Melbourne. One careers teacher mentioned that some students and families didn't like to venture over 'the bridge'. Others were very keen to leave Werribee and go to university in Melbourne.

- Hastings is a special case suffering from isolation due to poor public transport and inter-generational unemployment.

Some views from the field

- *We have a large population of recently arrived migrants, refugees, asylum seekers; many of those have high aspirations and it's usually in roles that they've seen along the way, whether that's through television or through refugee camps. They're talking about being doctors and lawyers and those sorts of very high profile roles. [They have]* **limited understanding, I guess, that if you're talking about working in a hospital, there are hundreds of different jobs that you could take up, but the ones that they know about are doctors and nurses.** *(LLEN worker, Berwick case study)*

- *I* ***don't think our legislators fully appreciate the difficulty of middle income and low-income families [in rural areas] trying to access tertiary education.*** *Whether it be in the local area or having to move away, there are too many people who have higher incomes that do not understand and appreciate the difficulties those families have. A lot of our young talent miss out because there aren't the incentives or the inducements for them to continue on. (School Principal, Sale).*

- ***Although young people might identify with an occupation best served through VET they are encouraged to aspire to university and if they don't go to university it's almost a failure,*** *that you end up with those NEET, not in employment, education and training because they think, "Well, I can can't do that. Therefore, I'm a failure, so I'm not going to do anything."* (TAFE, Hastings case study)

- *They can't even look you in the eye. They come in for the interviews, that many young people I see. They come in for the interviews. They're covered in tatts. They've got holes in their clothes. They don't even know they shouldn't wear runners. They don't look at you when they speak. They look down. **We will look past that and give them an opportunity, but those are the brave ones … They're the brave ones that actually come.*** (Employer, Hastings case study)

Ten key findings (*from all project data sources*)

1. Most young people experience **considerable stress** when deciding what to do after school, generally at the same time as studying hard for good Year 12 results. Decisions made under stress may be sub-optimal - hence more reassurance about fallback choices and alternative outcomes needs to be provided.

2. **A proportion of young people are clear from a young age what they want to do, those plans are usually associated with an occupation, or more broadly an industry**; and sometimes with 'going to university' or entering 'a trade' as non-specific destinations. These decisions are quite often gendered.

3. **Parents and family members are the most common influences on young people's decisions**. These may involve high or low aspirations, gendered expectations, or may result more generally from family backgrounds in terms of socioeconomic status, or employment and/or educational histories.

4. **Options are narrower for young people in rural/regional locations**, because of the financial implications of moving away; those in peri-urban areas may also experience transport disadvantage. Where the desired destination is not easily accessible, extra effort and expense is incurred by the young people and/or their families. Young people and those who work with them may feel aggrieved about this.

5. **Young people, especially males, with an interest in a career in trades are steered into VCAL and sometimes to early school-leaving,** sometimes in apprenticeships; they may experience regret not to have completed school.

Ten key findings (contd.)

6. **Gap years are a common response to financial issues and for a decision-making 'buffer'.** Gap years may be intended, a back-up plan, or unintended. Considerable change may occur between the first-year out and second-year out.

7. **The most useful careers advice to young people is personal time with a trusted adviser at school.** They want to retain this source of advice after leaving school, particularly at ATAR results time, and during the first-year out when changes in circumstances often occur.

8. **Part-time jobs while studying are fundamental parts of young people's lives**; their school-days jobs may continue well into their post-school careers. The jobs enable young people to finish school and to go away to university. Little value is ascribed to these jobs by most players.

9. While **a lot of information is available to young people, in-school or from external sources, they don't find the way in which it is presented particularly useful**. External services are piecemeal, not always trusted, and not 'joined up.' First-hand information about study and jobs is limited for some young people by distance or by lack of work experience opportunities.

10. **Young people display considerable resourcefulness, resilience and responsibility** in their planning and in their activities after leaving school.

What have we found that is new?

Old and new findings

Old

Influence of

- family background,
- socio-economic status,
- family histories,
- influence of part-time working,
- rurality,
- Aboriginality.

New

- The crucial difference that can be made by good careers advisors;
- Influence not only of distance but also of transport availability and of 'perceived distance';
- Actions of outreach activities by employers and training providers;
- High value placed on apprenticeships, especially for those 'staying put' in their home location – but lack of advice on 'other' VET;
- Huge pressures on young people to made the 'right' decision;
- The problem of 'over-aspirational' parents and careers teachers;
- Lack of comprehensible information from universities;
- Potential for formalisation of gap years

What needs to change (from the data)?

1. **Better (sometimes less) and more 'joined-up'** *careers* advice and support services;
2. More resourcing of careers advice in schools, particularly **access to individualised advice**;
3. **More liaison between schools and employers**, including but not confined to, **100% availability of work experience** opportunities;
4. **More appreciation of the role of the employers** who give jobs to young people while studying and in gap years, and validation of the work that young people do in these jobs;
5. **More focus on locational disadvantage**, with practical measures to overcome it, rather than having young people put all the work in to combat the associated challenges;
6. **Harness local individuals and institutions** who are able to assist in overcoming challenges in particular locations;
7. **Educate and support parents and grandparents** from a wide range of backgrounds to assist young people;
8. **Take the stress out of Year 12,** with a strong emphasis on young people having a Plan B and even C;
9. **Provide careers advice after school-leaving**;
10. **Avoid channelling young people** into options that close off future pathways;
11. **Recognise and normalise all of the post-school pathways** that occur.
12. **Practical solutions** such as direct bus services to nearby higher and further education providers

What else has been happening?

- The 'Dandolo' consultants' report 2017 on careers education in schools in Victoria suggested more careers advice earlier in secondary school, better ways to work with disengaged young people, more engagement with parents and with industry

- The Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry 2018 recommended more resourcing for career activities in regional schools, more work experience, a higher qualified careers workforce and more emphasis on VET.

- The Victorian government's 'Transforming career education in Victorian Government schools plan' has addressed some points we raise; and has introduced other measures including access for all students to the Morrisby profile, a online career diagnostic tool.

- Nationally, the National Careers Institute is being established by the Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business.

Project web site: https://federation.edu.au/schools/school-of-education/research/research-groups/rave-researching-adult-and-vocational-education/current-research

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