

THE HOLISTIC DELIVERY OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE *SCHOOL TO WORK* PROGRAM IN NSW SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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The NSW Department of Education and Training has demonstrated its commitment to ensuring that students are prepared to face the challenges and opportunities of the new and emerging world of work through the delivery of the School to Work Program. This program has driven significant change in schools, now delivered by a whole school, executive led approach that fosters staff confidence and empowers students to effectively manage their career and transition planning. School to Work has undergone continuous quality improvement informed by annual data collection; curriculum knowledge and understanding; feedback from workshops and teleconferences; and new research outcomes and findings. The following is a review of this highly successful program that looks back on the hurdles, highlights and achievements and looks forward to inform its future directions.

School to Work has provided the foundation for significant cultural change in NSW government schools. Over the past seven years (1999 – 2006) the manner in which *School to Work* now supports student's career development has changed from a 'just-in-time' service to a whole of school commitment.

Career development in Australia is defined as "the process of managing learning and work over the lifespan". (Patton, 2001, p.14) However it is well known that individual career pathways, particularly in the current changing world "rarely follow logical and linear paths." (Borg, T. Bright, J. & Pryor, R. 2006, p.57) Building students' resilience to manage a world that is complex, changing and often uncertain is central to *School to Work*.

In 1999 the *School to Work* pilot targeted students "at risk" focusing primarily on transition planning which centred on the work of the careers adviser. Identifying the benefits gained by students' in the pilot, *School to Work* extended its focus to all students, with responsibility being shared by the whole school community. *School to Work* incorporated the broader vocational education agenda which emphasised "vocational learning experiences and opportunities across all curriculum areas" (Bell, J. 2003, p.22) the intent being to empower all students to acquire skills and knowledge to make good career decisions that result in a successful transition from school.

NSW government schools with a secondary enrolment exhibit great variation in geographic location, school infrastructure and staffing allocation, socio-economic status and cultural diversity. *School to Work* provides schools with policy direction that encourages innovative practice and flexible delivery ensuring that schools meet the unique needs of their students; engage with their local community; and utilise staff talent and commitment. Policy for *School to Work* has maintained a strong link to identifying and supporting students 'at risk' of not making a successful transition through and from school, while upholding a commitment to all students.

Ensuring that *School to Work* remains a 'journey of reflection and transformation', continuous quality improvement has been integral to ensuring that it reflects current school and government expectations. Methods utilised for gathering data and ideas to inform continuous quality improvement include:

- Annual school and regional data collection
- Workshops, teleconferences and professional development feedback
- Feedback from schools on the usefulness and useability of resources
- Piloting of innovative ideas before implementing more broadly
- Access to business and community networks
- Establishment of internal and external critical partners
- Research to gain knowledge and understanding of international, national and state research and policy
- Commitment to state political priorities

The new phase of School to Work, which looks forward to 2010, recognises the fundamental importance of career development in laying the foundation for young people to be enterprising, engage in life-long learning and make positive career transitions. This approach will provide the basis for a more holistic, planned strategy based on a career development approach from K-12. (NSW DET, 2006)

The National Context

MCEETYA, whose membership "comprises Australian State, Territory and Australian Government and New Zealand Ministers has responsibility for the portfolios of education, employment, training and youth affairs..." (MCEETYA, accessed 13/1/07) has played a strong coordination role in career services for young people. In 1998 the MCEETYA National Careers Taskforce endorsed a set of *Principles for Career Education and Advisory Services* and in April 1999 endorsed the *National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century, (The Adelaide Declaration)*. In *The Adelaide Declaration* goals 1.5, 2.3 & 2.4, MCEETYA recognised the importance of career guidance and transition support for school students by recommending a broad vocational education program that incorporated the acquisition of employment related skills, the development of enterprise skills and programs of vocational learning. (MCEETYA, 1999)

Two documents endorsed by MCEETYA, *New Framework for Vocational Education in Schools* (MCEETYA, 2000b) and *Footprints to the Future*, the Report of the Prime Minister's Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce 2001

addressed the need to develop an effective framework that would support transition by school students from the “compulsory years of secondary school to the next stage of their lives’ at which young people’s principal activity is some recognised form of productive activity”’. (MCEETYA, 2000b, p.12) There was a strong emphasis in each of these documents regarding students ‘at risk’ of not making a successful transition.

To strengthen the focus further on young people who were disconnected or at risk of becoming disconnected from society, MCEETYA, in 2001, established a Ministerial Subcommittee on Young People's Transitions. In 2002 the endorsement of a Ministerial Declaration, *Stepping Forward – improving pathways for all young people*, demonstrated “Ministers' commitment to providing leadership and establishing a common direction in developing transition opportunities for young people, particularly those most at risk”. (MCEETYA, 2002)

Between 2002 and 2004 *The Enterprise Education Action Research Project* conducted in approximately 200 primary and secondary schools across Australia, resulted in identifying and demonstrating the key elements for successful implementation of enterprise education. Two other key national resources developed and released across Australia at this time were the *myfuture website: Australia’s career information service* and *The Real Game Series*.

School to Work: the early years

The initial *School to Work* was a four year New South Wales government election commitment announced in 1999. It was titled the *Ready for Work Plan: School to Work Program*, targeting students in years 9-12, and managed initially by the Vocational Learning Unit in Curriculum Directorate then by the Vocational Education in Schools Directorate of the NSW Department of Education and Training. It was part of a broader NSW government initiative titled the *Ready for Work Plan*, announced in the 1999 budget speech, by Honourable Michael Egan, Treasurer of NSW.

During 1999 to 2003 there was an increased focus nationally and internationally on the importance of career guidance and transition support for school students. This focus acknowledged the need to ensure young people were well prepared to successfully enter a labour market that was changing rapidly; a labour supply that was reducing; and the need to develop life-long career development strategies.

In 2002 the OECD reviewed career guidance policies in Australia. The review identified the extensive efforts being made to strengthen the vocational elements in the school curriculum. The report acknowledged that NSW had a ‘strong professionalised structure’ of key personnel to provide career and transition support in schools. It also noted that the Employment Related Skills Logbook was ‘a particularly well developed example’ of a portfolio system which enabled students to identify the work-related competences developed ‘through their various school subjects and other learning experiences and to relate these to their career planning’. (Bezanson, L. & Watts, T. 2002, p.5-7)

During 2002 and 2003 the Board of Studies NSW revised the Years 7 – 10 syllabuses. The Board of Studies NSW developed cross-curriculum content requirements to be included in the outcomes and content of these syllabuses. The inclusion of *Key Competencies* and the *Work, Employment and Enterprise* cross-curriculum statements integrated vocational learning into curriculum delivery. (Board of Studies NSW, 2002, p.26)

Consistent with this backdrop of national and international research and policy direction in career guidance, transition support and vocational education, *School to Work* evolved. *School to Work* 1999 – 2003 initiated through a pilot, set the groundwork for broad-scale implementation by 2003. School and student participation is reflected in the table below:

School & Student Participation 1999 - 2003

NSW	1999 Initial pilot	2000	2001	2002	2003
Target group	Pilot schools	ALL govt schools invited to apply	ALL govt schools invited to apply	ALL govt schools invited to apply	ALL govt schools expected to participate
Number of schools	78 schools volunteered	317 secondary and central schools participated	420 secondary, central & SSP schools participated	510 secondary, central & SSP schools participated	529 secondary, central & SSP schools participated
Student participation	Targeting students “at risk”	14,000 students (Targeting Y9 – Y12)	Over 42,000 students (Targeting Y9 – Y12)	Over 130,000 students (Targeting Y9 – Y12)	Over 160,000 students (Targeting Y9 – Y12)

Allocating appropriate funding to *School to Work* ensured a clear message to stakeholders that the NSW government had made a serious commitment to this initiative. Funding guidelines were used to convey the priorities and expected outcomes of *School to Work* for each funding period and schools were required to report annually.

A “pull-push” funding model was used to engage schools with *School to Work*. Funding was provided to schools, firstly through an application and approval process at the local district level. Then in 2003 a decision was made to fund all government secondary schools, central schools and schools for specific purposes. This change to the funding model supported the position that all students in Years 9 -12 would have access to *School to Work* and reflected a growing acceptance as the influence of *School to Work* expanded across NSW government schools.

The success of the program is reflected in the following quote:

“The School to Work Program has really raised the profile of career education within the school. Funding has been paramount to the successful implementation of so many activities that are now highly valued by both students and staff”

Guyra Central School - 2003

Cultural change in an organisation involves the creation of a new system of values and beliefs that allow the organisation to perform. (Feldman, accessed 21/1/07) Following the announcement by the Minister in 1999, the Vocational Learning Unit of the NSW Department of Education and Training developed and committed their leadership to a clear and simple vision. This vision was to ensure that students in government secondary and central schools better plan and manage their transition to a range of post-school education, training and employment destinations. Students would develop individual school to work plans through a range of innovative strategies. (NSW DET, 2004, p.3)

Whole school change involves letting go the old and adopting the new and is reflected by a change in teaching and learning practice. Setting up pilot or trial programs and initiatives is a method that begins to mobilise commitment to change. To assist staff in schools to achieve the intended outcomes of *School to Work* the following initiatives were implemented:

- Involve identified staff (champions) in the development, implementation and evaluation of strategies to meet the outcomes of the new direction and inform improvement
- Demonstrate how the new direction supports the needs of students and enhances or complements the role of staff in the school
- Promote case studies, testimonials and examples of new successful practices
- Provide workshops and professional development that link the new direction to state, national and international priorities to school priorities and student outcomes
- Ensure that personal professional status is acknowledged, respected and enhanced by the new direction.
- Develop reporting processes that require reflection and accountability

This is not to say that *School to Work* does not meet resistance. Examples of the resistance by some were:

- Careers advisers perceived role threatened as *School to Work* concepts were expanded into the realm of other teacher's business and responsibility
- Curriculum teachers focused on curriculum implementation and saw it as 'more work' and extra responsibility
- Schools struggled with efforts to store and manage the Employment Related Skills Logbooks and find ways to incorporate its use in the classroom.

It is well documented that cultural change is a painful process as entrenched, trialed and embedded practices are reconsidered. Educational institutions constantly undergo change and they build a cultural resistance to new initiatives. Cultural change takes time, perseverance, persistence and positive reinforcement by managers and educational leaders.

By 2003, the strategies implemented were mobilising a climate for change. It was widely acknowledged that *School to Work* best practice was a whole of school commitment. There was a general acceptance of the desire to implement the notion of vocational learning as defined by MCEETYA, in the *New Framework for Vocational Education in Schools*:

Vocational learning is general learning that has a vocational perspective. It includes elements such as general employability skills, enterprise education, career education and community and work-based learning. All students should experience vocational learning at each year level throughout their schooling. (MCETTYA, 2000b, p.21)

The key strategies used to nurture this shift were:

- Provision of funding guidelines to districts and schools
- Development and distribution of significant resources, such as the:
 - Employment Related Skills Logbook – made available for all students to access in years 9-12.
 - Key Learning Area booklets – Eight separate books aligned to each of the curriculum key learning areas, developed and distributed appropriately to each secondary teacher.
 - Website presence on the Vocational Education in Schools intranet
 - Workplace Learning materials for employers, parents and students
 - Development of audio-visual materials in partnership with industry
 - Provision of at least one careers expo in each of the 40 school districts
 - Teachers access to the Teachers in Business Program
- Significant professional development and workshop activity
- District vocational education consultants with responsibility to manage, drive and promote local initiatives
- School annual reports providing accountability but also rich feedback used to drive new initiative and improve the quality and appropriateness of resource provision
- Integration of *School to Work* in other NSW DET priorities such as the NSW Quality Teaching Model, New HSC, and New 7-10 Syllabus implementation, Links to Learning, and Plan-it Youth Mentoring
- Development of strategic partnerships and alliances with industry and community organizations.

School to Work: the maturing years

The NSW government provided a further commitment to *School to Work* for the next four year period (2004 – 2007). In 2004 *School to Work: Creating Future Pathways* was designed to build on the progress of the *Ready for Work Plan: School to Work Program (1999 – 2003)*. It targeted all school students aged 14 - 19 years enrolled in NSW government schools.

School to Work: Creating Future Pathways recognised that students need to be active in managing their career planning and aware of their acquisition of employment related skills and enterprising attributes so that they are able to take advantage of the challenges and opportunities presented in this constantly changing world. (Vocational Education in Schools Directorate, accessed 23/1/07)

School to Work: Creating Future Pathways articulated a clear vision and provided a framework of four key result areas for school and regional planning. These are:

- **Planning Transition Pathways:** supporting students to develop confidence in self-managing their career and transition planning
- **Exploring Career Futures:** providing students with access to people, opportunities and a variety of media to assist them to process information about work, education and training options
- **Strengthening Student Outcomes through Vocational Learning:** supporting teachers to identify and provide a range of opportunities for students to make explicit links to vocational and enterprise learning in all curriculum areas
- **Building Connections and Networks** strengthening career, community and workplace learning opportunities for students through strategic connections, partnerships and networks

(Vocational Education in Schools Directorate, accessed 23/1/07)

By 2004 annual school reports indicated that NSW government schools with a secondary enrolment were well informed about *School to Work* and implementing it with varying degrees of success. Annual reports provide a powerful reflection tool for schools. For regions and state the annual reports enable the collection of data. This data informs areas for improvement; creation of initiatives to meet new and emerging issues; and accountability for program outcomes.

The *School to Work: Creating Future Pathways* framework provides a policy direction that reflects the readiness of schools and regions to build on the progress that had been achieved prior to 2004. The framework maintained continuity; respected the emerging cultural change; provided policy that encouraged innovation; enabled adaptation to local needs; and introduced new elements to improve the quality and depth of *School to Work* for students.

In 2004 the NSW Department of Education and Training realigned its management structure from 40 school districts to 10 regions. The new *School to*

Work framework adjusted to the changes initiated by the restructure. It embraced new management structures and adjusted communication methods. *School to Work* funding guidelines emphasised the importance of regional management by stating:

Regions will be the engines that drive vocational learning by providing leadership in the four (result) areas. (Vocational Education in Schools Directorate, accessed 23/1/07)

Each region identified a vocational educational consultant with key responsibility for *School to Work*, who would coordinate its implementation with the support of their counterparts in the region. Communication from state office to regional personnel was directed to the Regional Director or the managers of the vocational education consultants. In this new structure the state provided policy direction and the regions applied that policy consistent with regional priorities. Flexibility, innovation and meeting local community needs was encouraged.

A number of national research projects and reports influenced thinking and direction in this period. They were:

- The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI), and the Business Council of Australia (BCA) research project *Employability Skills for the Future* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2002)
- The development and trial of the *Australian Blueprint for Career Development 2003 - 2006*
- The *Learning to Work* report released by the House of Representatives Committee on Education and Training in 2004
- The *Enterprise Learning for the Twenty First Century Initiative*

Three of the key *School to Work* resources, the *Employment Related Skills Logbook*, the eight *Key Learning Area* booklets and the *Student Guide to Workplace Learning* were re-developed. This redevelopment took into consideration career self-management, as reflected in the *Australian Blueprint for Career Development* and the *Real Game Series*, as well as the employability skills and enterprising attributes identified in *Employability Skills for the Future*.

The *Learning to Work* report released by the House of Representatives Committee on Education and Training in 2004 confirmed the need to ensure that all teachers were aware of their responsibility in building students understanding of career issues. (Australian Government House of Representatives, 2004, p.220) This aspect is reflected in the *School to Work* key result area 3, *Strengthening Student Outcomes through Vocational Learning*.

Bezanson, L. & Watts, T. (2002, p.15) in the *OECD Review of Career Guidance Policies, Australia Country Note*, identified the confusion of terminology and conceptual understanding in the vocational education agenda that has also plagued *School to Work*. They noted:

...extensive efforts being made in Australia to introduce stronger vocational elements into the school curriculum...some conceptual confusion in this area, and a risk of terms like vocational education, vocational learning and career education, being used in a loose way which disguises issues rather than clarifying them.

While this lack of clarity may have appeared to hamper *School to Work* outcomes, one of the challenges of this cultural change was to clarify the new terminology.

Through strong leadership and a solid foundation *School to Work* has become resilient, respected and integrated into school management and practice. In 2005 *School to Work* annual reports provided by 481 NSW government schools with a secondary enrolment represented 91% of schools implementing *School to Work*. These schools represent secondary schools, central schools and schools for specific purposes. The total number of students reported to be involved in *School to Work* was 158,838 across Years 7 to 12. The program focuses on Years 9 – 12, however many schools have extended the reach to Years 7 & 8. (NSW Department of Education and Training, July 2006)

In 2005 an electronic annual reporting process was introduced, replacing a large paper-based process. This shift has enabled schools to confidently use technology for their reporting, supported by professional development and ongoing technology support from region and state personnel.

Strategies that ensured successful implementation of *School to Work* in the maturing years (2004 – 2006), additional to those noted in the early years are:

- A whole of school approach
 - Commitment by senior executive in particular Principal leadership
 - Incorporation of *School to Work* in the school management plan
 - Establishment of a *School to Work* management team
 - Integration of enterprise and vocational learning in curriculum delivery utilizing existing school processes and procedures as well as management structures
 - Development of partnerships outside the school boundaries ensuring the fusion of the school community and curriculum
 - Allocation of a dedicated careers adviser / school to work coordinator
 - Tailoring activities and programs to meet the needs of community and student diversity

- Regional Management
 - Establishment of a regional *School to Work* management committee
 - Incorporation of *School to Work* into regional management plan
 - Resourcing of *School to Work* coordinators to work more intensely with schools

- Establishing and maintaining professional networks of senior school executive / school coordinators / careers advisers
 - Identifying, implementing and coordinating professional development
 - Cultivation of innovative activity
 - Coordinating the integration of *School to Work* with other key initiatives in the region maximizing resources and expertise
- State planning and evaluation
 - Provision of policy direction, planning documents and resources
 - Implementing professional development for regional personnel
 - Development and support for professional development models and programs for school staff
 - Coordinating with other DET personnel to identify and implement *School to Work* in a more coordinated and resource effective manner.
 - Managing evaluation and reporting requirements

(Hollier and Hart, 2006)

School to Work: looking forward

The NSW government has announced its commitment to the *School to Work Program* until 2010. *School to Work* will continue to evolve as the process of improvement is informed by annual school and regional reporting; new national and international research; and government policy.

This new phase of *School to Work* acknowledges a more holistic K-12 approach which begins building students' career development competencies in the early years of schooling empowering them with skills to make informed career and transition decisions in the later years of schooling. *School to Work* will continue to build on its current strength and develop a more holistic approach through the concept of career development.

In 2006 a range of career industry, national government and state government activity has influence the direction of *School to Work*. The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in the new National Reform Agenda included a focus on human capital. The National Reform Initiative Working Group recommended to COAG "that COAG accept that improvements in workforce productivity and participation require continuing skills development from early childhood years – through school and working life – to retirement." (COAG, 2006)

The Third International Symposium on Career Development and Public Policy acknowledged that "the development of human capital is dependent on an individual's ability to identify and manage learning needs, learn, and optimise the use of learning through career planning, job search skills, and managing work life balance." (Australian Country Paper, 2006)

Watts (2006), at the 2006 Annual Conference of the Australian Association of Career Counsellors, noted that 'career development is crucial to the success of life-long learning policies' and had become 'centre stage' in public policy. Career development he stated 'is a public as well as a private good.'

MCEETYA has supported a trial of the Australian Blueprint for Career Development (ABCD) in 2006. The new phase of *School to Work* will utilise this document gaining advice from the national trial results and learning from NSW schools involved in this trial. The ABCD will be used to support planning, implementation and evaluation of career development programs and resources.

The Chaos Theory of Careers, developed by Bright & Pryor has implications for contemporary thinking in regards to student's career development in secondary schools; "...in particular, the apparently contradictory relationship between the need for planning and the influence of unplanned events." (Borg, Bright & Pryor 2006, p54) The importance of self-efficacy, contingency career plans and resilience to change and chance has strongly influenced this new phase of *School to Work*.

In 2006 the NSW Department of Education and Training released three education strategies:

- *Our Young learners: giving them the best possible start* - An Education Strategy for the Early Years from Kindergarten to Year 4, 2006-2009
- *Our Middle Years learners – Engaged, Resilient, Successful* – An Education Strategy for Years 5-9 in NSW 2006-2009
- *Our 15 to 19 Year Olds – Opportunities & Choice* - An Education and Training Strategy for 15-19 Year Olds in NSW 2006-2009

The new phase of *School to Work* has incorporated these three NSW strategies acknowledging that career development is a lifelong process therefore recognises the need to build student career competency from the early years of schooling. The emphasis on *School to Work* will remain, however, in the *15 to 19 Year Olds* strategy.

Apart from the ABCD Trial, *School to Work* has been instrumental in providing the foundation for trialling and piloting other initiatives which will be consolidated in the new phase. The following initiatives focus on student skill development for self managing their career and transition as well as student initiated, authentic learning designed to build self-confidence, resilience and self esteem. They include:

- *Building Bridges: enterprise learning in the middle years*, an innovative project involving students from a primary school and secondary school in each NSW school region. The students worked cooperatively with a local business or community organisation to initiate and manage an authentic enterprise project underpinned by curriculum outcomes.
- *Student Pathways Survey*, a self efficacy tool to support students career planning. The survey supports career counselling and will provide data for

schools to inform the provision of career development services in the *School to Work* initiative.

- *The Employment Related Skills Logbook*, delivered on-line, with the capacity to be merged into an on-line career management system, yet to be fully defined and constructed.
- *The Transition Adviser*, a role identified in targeted schools to strengthen transition support for particular students.

The introduction of Career Advice Australia by the Australian Government has implications for the implementation of *School to Work* in NSW schools. Critical to the success of both will be the complementation of career services and the avoidance of duplication. There are powerful advantages to be gained through cooperation ensuring that all students' career and transition needs are met.

Further work is underway to investigate and implement initiatives which have the capacity to enhance current efforts to support student's career and transition needs, in particular targeted groups of students, in the provision of the transition adviser role; the influence of parents in supporting their children's career development and transition from school; and the construct of a career and transition team to strengthen the delivery of school career services to students.

Summary

School to Work, initially targeting students 'at risk', has evolved and developed as a result of clear, well communicated policy direction, strong leadership, team support, and regular program evaluation to achieve continuous improvement.

This evolution and the program's current level of maturity could not have been achieved without the shift in program responsibility at a school level, where the program previously focused on a few to now focusing on the whole school community. Key to its success has been providing training and resources to ensure that all teachers have the capacity to support students in their career development. This has enabled specialist trained staff to better service students' needs at times of acute career decision making.

The holistic delivery of career development has emerged as a concept that is multifaceted:

- *School to Work* incorporates the right of access for all students, acknowledging the importance of specialised programs for identified students. It provides flexibility of delivery to accommodate the needs of students in different localities.
- *School to Work* identifies the need to integrate student's acquisition of career development skills and employment related skills into the delivery of the whole school curriculum, including both the formal and informal curriculum.

- *School to Work* is a deliberate planned delivery of programs in the school with the intention to build students ability to self-manage their career and transition planning.
- *School to Work* embraces the whole school community, encouraging access to authentic learning, personalising career exploration programs for individual students and embraces partnership development in the local community.
- *School to Work* is integral to the NSW DET strategies, *Our Young learners: giving them the best possible start; Our Middle Years learners – Engaged, Resilient, Successful; and Our 15 to 19 Year Olds – Opportunities & Choice*. It also supports other NSW DET initiatives such as the NSW Quality Teaching Model, Plan-it Youth Mentoring, Links to Learning, and delivery of Board of Studies NSW curriculum outcomes.
- *School to Work* finally, but most importantly, considers the whole person. It embraces research that identifies career development as a life-long process. *School to Work* has progressed policy and future direction to embrace students K – 12, as reflected in the Australian Blueprint for Career Development. It also identifies the critical role parents and carers play in young peoples' career and transition planning.

School to Work is presented in this paper as a journey of reflection and transformation. However the journey has not reached its destination. Reflection on current practise and new research informs continued transformation that aims to ensure student's career development prepares them for the new and emerging world they will not only enter but shape

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