

WACSSO Submission
Senior Secondary Pathways
Into Work, Further Education
and Training



Acknowledgments

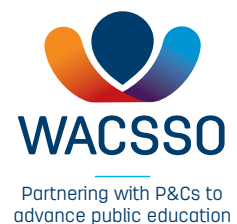
This submission has been prepared with the help of Western Australian public school parents, Parents & Citizens Associations and school communities. Over many years our affiliates have provided us with information about their experiences of navigating senior secondary schooling with their children and their school community. We would like to recognise and thank our affiliates and state councillors for ensuring we remain informed about changes and challenges in this important phase of schooling.

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Who is WACSSO

The Western Australian Council of State School Organisations Inc. (WACSSO) is the peak body representing parents of public school students in Western Australia. WACSSO provides services and representation at State and National level to 660 Parents and Citizens Associations (P&Cs). WACSSO is largely a volunteer organisation made up of a President and State Councillors (representatives) from geographically-based electorates and, as such, the organisation has a wide representative reach across the state.

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Abbreviations

ATAR	Australian Tertiary Admission Rank
EA	Educational Assistant
P&C	Parents and Citizens Associations
RRR	Rural, Regional and Remote
SES	Socio-Economic-Status
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WACSSO	Western Australian Council of State Schools Organisation

Introduction

Qualitative and quantitative research tells us that many Australian students and their parents are lacking knowledge of the career options and the senior secondary pathways available to students to assist in working towards and achieving their career goals.

It is imperative that the Australian public education system provides young people with opportunities to experience, learn and develop skills suited to thrive in current and future workplaces. It is important the Australian education sector strives for variety when providing senior secondary pathways, as students are individuals and need to be treated as such to foster achievement in their desired career pathways.

In addition, research clearly shows that significant barriers exist for students living with disabilities; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students; those living in regional, rural and remote areas, and students living in low socio-economic-status circumstances. The support given to these young people and their families is currently inadequate, as it does not fully account for barriers they face in gaining equitable access to a full range of senior secondary pathways.

This submission highlights how certain groups are limited by the current senior secondary pathway options. Accordingly, WACSSO has offered suggestions which are informed by research and the experiences of our affiliates; we hope our knowledge of the area will be reviewed and interventions to these pathways will be made.

WACSSO as a representative of parents of public school students, strives to create an understanding of the important role parents and carers play in the education of young people, specifically, those looking for senior secondary pathway guidance. We have made suggestions highlighting how the education sector needs greater engagement with parent and carer knowledge.

1. Essential Skills and Knowledge

1.1 Teaching Essential Skills and Knowledge

Making sure students acquire the essential skills and knowledge to thrive in the 21st century workplace and society is complex work, requiring a collective approach. Some families and communities may not have the capacity to provide support to young people with the planning and guidance required to navigate the variety of pathways available in the upper secondary and post-school years. In cases where families and communities cannot provide support, the responsibility falls to the schooling system. This means that, our schools must be adequately supported and resourced to ensure they can effectively provide young people with the guidance to understand the skills and knowledge needed to be successful in their future communities and workplaces.

Feedback from WACSSO affiliates has highlighted the complexity different locations, personal situations and financial positions bring to implementing a variety of secondary educational programs. To address this issue an equitable approach is needed, where federal, state and territory governments take students' personal context into consideration.

WACSSO has been involved in some positive initiatives with the Western Australian State Government, investigating the opportunities for government departments to provide meaningful work placements for students undertaking vocational education training (VET) studies. These types of initiatives are great as the public sector is large and has reach into regional, rural and remote (RRR) areas. WACSSO would like to see ideas like this implemented more extensively within the public sector as such placements can provide valuable real-world experience for students exploring vocational options. It also overcomes the concern many regional and rural school communities have expressed in regard to the variety of workplaces that are available to students when local business are relied on to provide all workplace learning opportunities.

2. Access to Appropriate and Flexible Pathways

2.1 Student Access to Appropriate Pathways

Our affiliates value a variety of pathways being available for young people as they approach the end of their formal schooling. These pathways are most effective where there are several options available and where these options align to the interests and aspirations of young people. WACSSO received feedback from an affiliate about their child who was partaking in a VET course which they reported was great in building the “core skills” needed for work. However, a lack of work placement options in the student’s area meant they were unable to engage in VET training in the field they wish to pursue as a career path.

2.2 Changeable Pathways Lack Necessary Flexibility

Information WACSSO received from affiliates suggests the flexibility a young person has is highly dependent on the student’s personal context. Factors that reduce a student’s opportunities such as disability, socio-economic-status and geographical location often mean students face a more rigid structure when participating in senior secondary schooling². WACSSO believes it is unacceptable that young people facing these issues are given less opportunities; this issue could be addressed by striving for targeted resource allocation to senior secondary programs.

3. Barriers Reducing a Students Access to Senior Secondary Pathways.

3.1 Geographical Barriers

In Australia the further from a capital city a student lives the less likely they are to have a variety of pathways open to them. Students living in RRR areas are often required to relocate to metropolitan or large regional centres in order to receive the full extent of what public education has to offer. Relocating to pursue higher educational opportunities has significant considerations for students and their families. WACSSO affiliates report the impact felt by schools, families, and communities of having students required to leave their communities in order to have access to adequate senior secondary pathways.

Low levels of teacher retention in RRR areas add further barriers to students living in these areas⁶. The mentoring role teachers play in a student's life often provides them with career advice relating to senior secondary pathways. Teachers moving to RRR areas are often not centred around these areas long term, which decreases the likelihood of students having a consistent mentor. Consequently, these students are less likely to have a teacher/mentor who really understands the student and can give them tailored advice about future career prospects.

A young person's geographical location should not determine their access to opportunities helping them to work towards career objectives. The education system should address these issues through innovative approaches that facilitate a variety of senior secondary pathways for RRR students. WACSSO has often called for better internet provision and technology support in schools to ensure that access and equipment can facilitate truly engaging and varied offerings in schools with small student numbers and where getting specialist staff to deliver face-to-face can be difficult.

3.2 Barriers Faced by Low Socio-Economic-Status Students

Federal, state and territory governments must do more to ensure Australia's public education system provides high quality, accessible and relevant education for all young people. A student's family socio-economic-status should not be a limiting

factor in their ability to reach their potential. While this submission focuses on senior secondary options, the complexities that are present with low socio-economic-status require that early targeted approaches are in place to support students as they move through their whole school life. Government must work across a variety of sectors to address key areas such as health, housing and poverty.

Students who come from low socio-economic-status families are often put at a disadvantage due to costs attached to many senior secondary options. Feedback from WACSSO affiliates has highlighted the financial burdens associated with senior secondary schooling options. Students on a tertiary pathway through ATAR score experience a high cost of resources needed to complete this pathway, such as text books. Many VET student's families need to transport them to work placements, buy equipment and pay fees to the registered training organisations schools often auspice with to increase the variety of options available.

The research is very clear that undertaking vocational and/or higher education after school dramatically increases employability and earning power. However, the high costs associated with further study are a deterrent for many young people and governments need to look at the short term, versus the long term, benefits of greater investment in post-school education.

3.3 Barriers Faced by Students with a Disability

Students living with disability face disadvantage with both educational outcomes and representation in the workforce⁴. This information along with feedback from WACSSO affiliates suggests that there is a lack of tailored support for these students. It is important for government services to understand the complex and diverse range of needs students with disabilities may have; in order to address these issues, resources need to be allocated to support the individual needs of the students.

Education Assistants provide a valuable support network for students with disabilities, however quite often EAs are not adequately qualified to deal with the intricacies of certain disabilities and classroom dynamics⁵. To address this, more resources should be allocated to ensure all staff are appropriately qualified to support students with disabilities. Currently in Western Australia there is no requirement for education assistants working with deaf students to have Auslan certification. This is just one example of where we see inadequate training reducing the opportunities for a specific group of students. Added support and

appropriately trained staff is likely to decrease disadvantages students with disabilities face and increase their options to stay on at school and to access further training when they leave school.

3.4 Barriers Faced by Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander Students

Aboriginal families are essential partners in the education of their children and must be recognised as such. Their cultural, linguistic and local knowledge needs to be welcomed and valued. When educational institutions and families work together to plan goals for young people the impact can be profound.

WACSSO recognises the 118.2% increase in Indigenous students accessing higher education between 2006 and 2017. We encourage federal, state and territory governments to investigate what is working to fuel these increases and seek to scale up successful programs, where appropriate.

4. Offering Partnerships and Support within Education

4.1 Parent, Teacher and School Partnerships

WACSSO acknowledges the substantial role parents play in their children's education and guiding their career pathways. We often observe there is a lack of partnership between parents, teachers and schools regarding planning for a student's senior secondary objectives. As highlighted in the background paper, students mainly seek career advice from their parents or caregivers. For this reason, there needs to be greater communication and partnership between parents, who have strong influence over their children, and teachers/career guidance professionals.

The background paper also highlights that many parents are not adequately informed about their children's options for senior secondary pathways. This itself is an issue, as students are looking to their parents for career advice and parents may not necessarily be the most suitable people to give that advice. This makes strong relationships between parents and teachers even more important, to ensure parents are equipped to give their children career advice. In addition, increased dialogue between parents and teachers will give teachers a greater understanding of the student's needs and career objectives.

4.2 Allocate Further Resources to Career Guidance

Career guidance advisors are a crucial resource for young people and their families, as access to careers through different pathways is a complex process. An issue that arises with career guidance advisors is that students are often only given this support in their latter years of secondary school (Years 10, 11 and 12). WACSSO believes this crucial service would be more beneficial if the professional guidance was present throughout a student's whole secondary education. This would allow a child to build a strong connection with their career guidance advisor, allowing students a greater understanding of which pathway best suits them.

In addition, professional advisors should create a connection with parents, which could increase the capacity they have to assist students and their families. All efforts schools make to create more positive and effective relationships with families are an investment that will yield dividends in the area of improved understanding of senior school pathways and beyond.

5. Using Data Effectively

5.1 Using Existing Data to Inform Decisions

While we acknowledge the factors impacting on education are multi-factorial and constantly changing and that there will always be a need for research and collecting data; existing data already shines a light on areas of disadvantage, particularly those surrounding access and the effectiveness of senior secondary pathways.

A myriad of informed suggestions have been made to federal, state and territory governments. Reports like *Through Growth to Achievement: Report to Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools* have highlighted the issues faced by the Australian education sector and how to address these issues. The Mitchell Institute's 2017 report *Preparing young people for the future of work* provides clear discussion of the issues created by the lack of connection between vocational training and other pathways, and the disadvantage this entrenches⁷.

Of particular interest to WACSSO was the powerful and compelling report prepared by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth for the Federal Department of Education and Training this year entitled *Please just say you're proud of me*¹. That report speaks of the importance of parental engagement in navigating

education pathways with young people. It highlights the positive outcomes for young people of more actively engaged parents and provides information for schools about how to better support parents to support their children in this critical phase of schooling.

This generation of young people have been measured and tested for their whole lives. This gives policy makers a rich data set to inform future action. While we have some concerns about the nature and frequency of some testing, we encourage reforms to be evidence based and to draw on this data. We call on governments to act on the reports and data already available.

5.2 Merging Assorted Data Sets

The disconnect between the school system, vocational training and the higher education sector is evident in the area of data sharing. Some of the problems that beset the VET sector in recent years were linked to registered training organisations enrolling students who clearly lacked the language, literacy and/or numeracy skills to complete the qualifications they were signed up for. This is a source of frustration in the context of young people who already had NAPLAN and other school based testing results that would have made these issues apparent prior to enrolment.

Recommendation 22 in the *Through Growth to Achievement: Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools*³ to accelerate the introduction of a Unique Student Identifier that would stay with a student throughout their education was cautiously welcomed by WACSSO. Notwithstanding some privacy concerns, we believe that if extensive data is to be captured around individual learners their results could be shared between sectors. The sharing of these results would reduce the chances of inappropriate enrolments, increase recognition of prior achievements, and reduce the impact of lost certification. We are aware of the Unique Student Identifier in the VET sector and would encourage this system to be expanded to assist students to move between pathways.

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