



School Career Guidance Benchmarking Project

Prepared by Youth and Family Services

December 2021

Contents

Project Background

Project Overview	3
Methodology	3

Key Findings

Service Offerings	4
Promotion and Awareness	6
Accessibility	7
Strengths	9
Challenges	10
Partnerships	12
Post-school Guidance	13
The Employment Landscape	14
Monitoring and Evaluation	15

Key Recommendations

Recommendations for Secondary Schools	17
Recommendations for Council	18
Conclusion	19

Project Background

Project Overview

Every year, Greater Dandenong Youth and Family Services facilitates the [Young Leaders program](#), a 16-week leadership course, introducing youth leaders to the work of local government; and supporting them to develop leadership skills and make a positive impact by planning and delivering community projects.

Representatives of the 2021 Young Leaders program identified young people's engagement in education and employment as a priority focus for their work. Recognising that young people in Greater Dandenong have lower education completion rates and post-school qualifications, and experience one of the highest disengagement rates in Victoria – with 17% of young people aged 20-24 neither engaged in paid work or education¹ – the Young Leaders saw a clear need to strengthen learning and career pathways for young people in our community.

Acknowledging the valuable role that careers guidance staff play in supporting young people's engagement in work and study, the 2021 Young Leaders developed the School Career Guidance Benchmarking Project to capture a snapshot of the services and supports that secondary schools offer; and to identify any barriers that young people face, where further attention and investment may be required.

The key objectives of the School Career Guidance Benchmarking Project were to:

- Gain insight into young people's experiences of career counselling, guidance, and support during secondary school
- Hear from career guidance staff, to learn what strategies and best practice approaches local schools are currently offering
- Identify key strengths and areas for improvement, formulating recommendations to help enhance career guidance in local secondary schools.

Methodology

The project sought to engage with the following cohorts:

- **Secondary students** with a connection to Greater Dandenong (i.e. those who live, work or study within the municipality); and
- **Career guidance staff** from secondary schools within Greater Dandenong and bordering suburbs.

Consultations were conducted via an online survey, over a four-week period from October - November 2021. School staff were provided with the option to participate remotely via phone or video interview.

¹ Greater Dandenong Profile of Health and Wellbeing 2021
www.greaterdandenong.vic.gov.au/health-and-wellbeing-profile-2021

A total of sixty-six students, and school personnel representatives from seven local secondary schools, participated in the consultation. Surveys for both cohorts had a 100% completion rate.

This report also utilises qualitative data from the *Youth Leadership Forum*² facilitated by Youth and Family Services in March 2021. Fifty student leaders from eight local secondary schools participated in the forum, sharing insights regarding barriers to youth employment.

The 2021 Young Leaders led the development and delivery of the consultation with schools. Youth and Family Services supported the Young Leaders with the analysis of key findings and have prepared this report on their behalf.

Key Findings

Service Offerings

An overview of the services and supports provided by Careers Teams.

Careers Staff were asked to describe the types of services and supports that their school provides for young people. The most common activities (offered by all seven schools) were:

- Facilitating opportunities for work experience
- Assisting with subject selection; and
- Individual counselling

These offerings are typically provided to students from Year 9 onwards, with guidance increasing in frequency as students near their final years of secondary schooling.

All seven schools reported giving some priority to supporting young people's short-term employment goals, delivering a range of activities to assist with employment readiness, such as resume-writing workshops (86%) and mock interviews (76%).

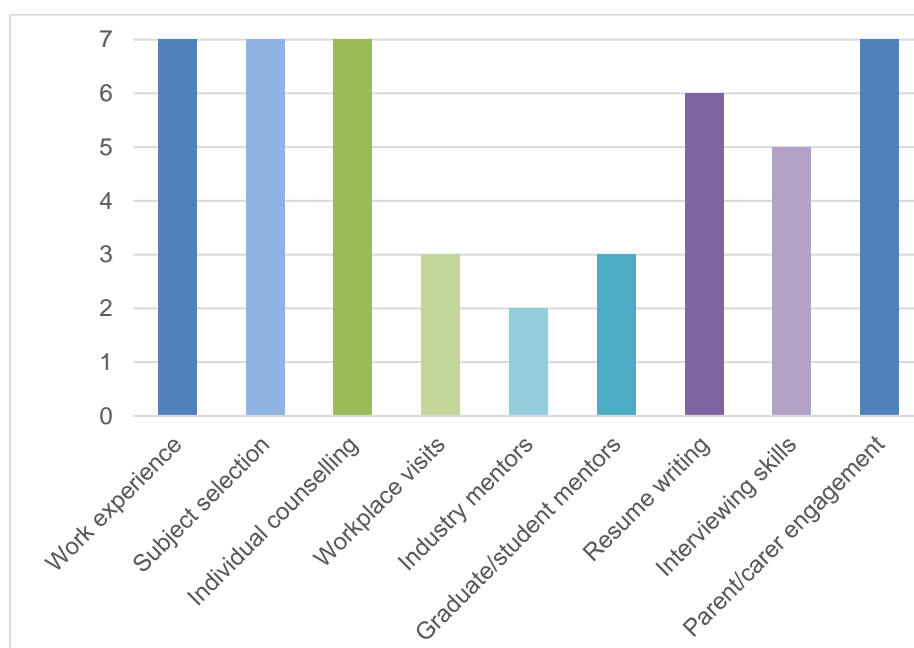
Less common services included facilitating workplace visits (43%) and connecting students with mentors – both former students (43%) and industry professionals (29%). Young people commented that they would benefit from additional mentorship opportunities and would like the chance to hear more from their school Alumni.

"[I want to hear] more anecdotes from past students who have undertaken the course that I would like to pursue, in order to gain more depth and understanding."

"[I want to learn more about the] experiences of people who've chosen a similar pathway, and how they may have diverged or stayed on their pathway."

² Youth Leadership Forum - Summary of Key Recommendations 2021
www.youth.greaterdandenong.vic.gov.au/flysystem/filerepo/A7717923

Figure 1: Staff responses - What careers guidance services does your school offer?



In terms of year level offerings, careers education appears to feature to a lesser degree in the curriculum for **Years 7 and 8**, with two schools reporting no career services for these year levels due to resourcing limitations. For those that do offer activities for the junior years, Careers Staff reported focusing largely on students' self-exploration and career interests.

In **Years 9 and 10**, most schools reported introducing individual careers counselling, providing one-one-one support with subject selection and pathway choices. In these middle years, students continue to explore their career interests through a combination of classroom-based programs and workshops, complemented by exposure to industry and tertiary settings through work experience and excursions.

Career guidance for **Years 11 and 12** focuses predominantly on course guidance and tertiary study applications. This information is delivered via a combination of methods including individual interviews, group seminars, and classroom-based activities. A summary of services delivered to each year level is outlined in *Table 1* below.

Table 1: Staff responses - What activities and supports do you run for each year level?

Year 7-8	Year 9-10	Year 11-12
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Immersive industry workshops and speakers Self-exploration to identify strengths and interests Career Expos Excursions to tertiary institutes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tailored, classroom-based careers programs Excursions to tertiary institutes and industry settings Work experience Individual counselling Subject Expo Alumni share experiences Morrisby Careers Assessment Cover letter and resume writing workshops Work rights and safety training University partnership workshops and events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individual counselling Careers Expo and seminars Employment readiness workshops Classroom-based programs Morrisby Profile refresher Assistance with tertiary study applications Financial assistance schemes (e.g. SEAS and scholarship applications) Excursions to tertiary institutes University partnership workshops and events

Promotion and Awareness

Strategies to promote career guidance services and connect with students.

Career Guidance Staff were asked what promotional strategies they use to build student awareness of their services. The most common approaches, cited by each of the participating schools, were facilitating presentations at school assemblies and student-initiated appointments (where young people approach staff). Five schools (71%) reported delivering presentations for individual class groups, as well as proactive student engagement measures, where staff approach students individually. Other popular methods included school newsletters - with some schools publishing a dedicated careers newsletter - and social media platforms, including 'careers' Instagram pages and closed Facebook groups, to share information with current and former students. Staff acknowledged the importance of disseminating information via key 'gatekeepers' at school, such as Heads of House and Year Level Coordinators; as well as reaching parents and carers via school websites and Compass newsfeeds.

It appears that the frequency and efficacy of these promotional approaches vary between schools, as students had mixed responses when asked to rate how well they know their school's Careers Team. On a five-point scale, participants' average rating was three ("kind of familiar"), however when asked to elaborate, a majority (59%) of respondents indicated that they knew their school's Career Counsellors and the services that they offer. Young people frequently referenced school assemblies, newsletters and social media as effective methods to communicate with students; as well as establishing connections through school events, like Career Expos.

"The careers staff at my school are really helpful and friendly, and they really try to get to know the students. I know about the services they offer because they send emails and a newsletter out when they have important information."

"They do assemblies every term to inform us of new things we can do, and they send us newsletters each week about uni and other pathways."

"The careers counsellors often post on [Microsoft] Teams and on Facebook important dates, such as application deadlines, university open days etc."

Conversely, almost a quarter (24%) of students said that they were only somewhat familiar, and 17% indicated that they did not know their school's Careers Team or the services they offer. Some young people identified COVID-19 lockdown and the transition to remote learning as a barrier to accessing career guidance. These students emphasised the importance of utilising digital platforms to increase exposure and share information - not only about career guidance services, but also to promote local opportunities for training, volunteering and casual work, so they can build up their employability skills and experience outside of school.

"They need to advertise what services and supports they provide. I don't think many people know what [the Careers Team] do, so sometimes it's a struggle."

"I know one of the career teachers' names, but we've never been introduced to them or their services before. They need to be more active within the student community."

"I'm not really [familiar] and it is worse due to COVID. I had to reach out and work hard to get an appointment. I only got one session in... by the next session, lockdown [had] started and I did not get guided properly at all."

"[It would be great if the Careers Team could] schedule a monthly meeting to give us more information about the courses and services available to us."

Accessibility

How career teams can be more approachable and provide the right level of support.

Students acknowledge that often the demand for careers support outweighs school resources and access to counselling. Student feedback was resounding in that young people need increased access to regular and consistent careers counselling, and that it is made available earlier in their secondary schooling. Almost a third (29%) of survey respondents mentioned that they would like to receive more career guidance and support than what they are currently offered.

Young people acknowledged that they could approach their Careers Team to seek out additional support, however, a key theme to emerge was that many students do not have the confidence to initiate contact. Young people expressed that they want assertive engagement from careers staff,

as opposed to a “come to us” approach which may discourage students from accessing support. Some participants reflected that it's often the young people that don't seek guidance who need it the most, highlighting the importance of Careers Teams adopting a holistic approach that takes into consideration students' individual circumstances – working with teachers and Wellbeing Staff to identify young people who may require additional support (e.g. those who experience greater disengagement, or heightened levels of worry and anxiety about the future).

"I think they should start career guidance from Year 7 so we can be [more] sure of what we want to do when we grow up."

"Catch up with students who are afraid to make appointments to ensure that no student is left behind."

"I think [the Careers Team] should try to reach out to students who are particularly unsure or anxious about their future."

"I would like to have more opportunities to get support from the careers staff as the transition from high school to university is quite daunting."

On the other hand, one quarter (24%) of survey respondents spoke very favourably about their school's career guidance offerings and commented that the help they are receiving is sufficient. Many students spoke about their school's "open door policy" and how, even if they didn't know the Careers Staff very well, they would feel comfortable approaching the Careers Team for help if needed. This supports the need for Career Guidance Staff to continue to raise their profile and promote their service as a welcoming and inclusive space, that caters to students of all backgrounds and needs.

"Our school is a huge advocate for bettering everyone's mental health, so I know someone in the careers department will be willing to lend an ear any time if needed regarding future choices and will guide us into seeing the best option."

"[Our Careers Team] promotes themselves as a welcoming and inclusive place to visit whenever I need help. We feel comfortable in asking and clarifying any queries."

"We are always encouraged to ask questions and seek for support if needed... We are able to easily access and seek support through various sources such as emailing the teacher or going straight to the careers department."

Strengths

Best practice strategies and approaches.

When asked to rate their experience of career guidance at school, students scored a median of four ("helpful"). Positive qualities that students have identified through their interactions with Career Guidance Staff include being *knowledgeable, informative, attentive, responsive, friendly, and approachable*. Young people expressed that their Careers Team listens to them and presents a range of options to match their skills and interests (median score of four "often"). Just over half (53%) of survey participants commented that they have received information about a wide variety of options, including alternative pathways to reach their goals. Students reflected that they value one-on-one, personalised support that is tailored to each young person's unique needs and interests.

"We're taught about a wide variety of options and are told realistic advice about the many pathways we can take. They have shown me that I am not limited to only one method to a career path."

"We're given information on uni, TAFE, work, and any combination of the above. They haven't given us any pressure to go to uni or to pursue one thing specifically. They cater to everyone's ambitions."

Careers Staff also identified their ability to provide tailored, individualised support as a key strength. They noted the importance of having flexible service offerings to suit the different needs and preferences of students (e.g. group sessions versus one-on-one counselling). Careers Teams that were well-resourced highlighted this as a great strength – having dedicated staff for different facets of careers education, guidance, and administration.

"We tailor our programs to suit the needs of our students, we are forward thinking and innovative, and have a passionate team of Careers Counsellors who go the extra mile to ensure that students are exposed to a variety of opportunities - even during the pandemic."

"My school employs a leading teacher, a support staff member whose primary role is to work with students at risk of leaving school early, and a part-time admin person... It is unusual for a school to put that level of priority on the careers area. To have a leading teacher involved in the school's strategic planning is very rare. It means that we have the status to do things like tell teaching staff they need to deliver the careers education activities."

Careers Staff emphasised the importance of adopting a holistic approach – commenting that they work well in collaboration with students, parents and carers, teachers, and the Wellbeing Team to provide wrap-around information and support. Other strengths included their ability to keep up to date with current opportunities and trends, providing relevant information for students; focusing on the development of employability skills (as opposed to just pathways education); and fostering passionate staff members who "go the extra mile" in advocating for students and supporting young people to navigate and reach their goals.

Challenges

Barriers faced by careers staff and suggestions for improvement.

When it comes to areas for improvement, young people cited that efforts should be made to enhance the quality of career guidance and information. Survey responses revealed that students feel as though they only *sometimes* receive honest and insightful careers guidance, scoring an average of three out of five. Some young people described experiencing "false hope" when being encouraged to apply for courses that they were unlikely to get into. However, sensitivity is required, as some young people recounted experiences where they were guided against pursuing their "dream career", which they found discouraging. Students indicated that the best way to approach this conversation is for Careers Staff to present a breadth of options, including alternative pathways that can be taken if one doesn't get their first preference. Young people reflected that this would take the pressure off achieving high ATAR scores and, in turn, would have a positive impact on student wellbeing.

"Most of the career services and support I have received hasn't really benefited me. It was more aimed at my interests, compared to what would benefit me in the long run. I would have preferred a more thorough session, where they were more critical and realistic. The counselling we are receiving currently is not enough. More is needed as I see many of my peers and myself still struggle to find the career that complements and encourages our strengths."

"They could try and motivate us a bit. The last time I asked them if I could become a doctor, they kind of cringed at me and told me I didn't really have a chance which was pretty upsetting."

"Understand my interests more and don't judge me by my grades. Help students all the way through, until we find a suitable pathway."

"There are more options than just the ones the presented and I think it would be useful for students to get a better grasp of how universities, TAFEs and other services work so they don't feel as pressured to perform."

While students want to be presented with a range of options, many expressed that they don't want broad or generalised guidance. Young people requested detailed information, with the opportunity to have pathways explained to them by Careers Staff, as opposed to receiving lengthy documents to read independently. Students commented that it's important for Careers Staff to keep pace with the latest opportunities and programs to support young people – not limited to pathways to education, but also promoting information about university tours, networking opportunities, scholarships and financial assistance schemes, as well as activities to build students' employability skills and experience, such as volunteering and short courses (e.g. Responsible Service of Alcohol, vehicle license or barista course).

"[Careers Teachers should] hold sessions for different types of guidance support. It's so much easier to hear about it than having to find the document and read through information without fully understanding it."

Some young people felt as though their school was biased towards promoting particular pathways - predominantly VCE as a pathway to university - and that they didn't receive enough information about other alternative and viable options such as VCAL, TAFE, traineeships, and apprenticeships.

"Publicise more about VCAL and the opportunities that come with that."

"We get only two options: TAFE or uni. There is also less info on the different ways that you can reach your chosen pathway, and how you can mix and match some options."

"They did not tell me that I could apply for the course I wanted at other universities and that there are pathways other than the university they wanted me to go to."

"There are things that weren't covered. They could teach you about the alternative ways to enter university, and how there is the SEAS application and lower ATAR requirements at under-represented schools."

The most identified need by young people, however, was more resourcing for careers education and support in schools. Students identified that Careers Teams need more staff, so that they have greater capacity to provide more frequent and personalised support, beginning in Year 7. This need was echoed by Careers Staff, who commented that there needs to be greater investment in human resources to keep up with student demands.

Other challenges identified by schools include navigating parental pressure and working with families to challenge beliefs about study and career options, where there are fixed expectations

regarding a young person's future pathway. Parental expectations often place greater emphasis on academic performance, which staff reflected can be a barrier to developing young people's employability skills, as families may lack an appreciation of the skills and experience that individuals need to develop to stand out to employers. It was recognised that these challenges are often further exacerbated by cultural and language barriers.

Careers Staff also identified establishing connections with employers and local industries as a significant challenge. Staff noted that this has been made increasingly difficult by the COVID-19 pandemic, preventing students from gaining valuable workplace exposure. Even where industry connections exist, Careers Staff described encountering roadblocks when negotiating students' leave of absence from class to attend work placements and excursions. Greater priority is given to classroom-based learning. Some respondents suggested that it would be beneficial to have dedicated time set aside in the curriculum to provide such learning opportunities. Others expressed that they would like to receive more professional development opportunities, and see the onboarding of more qualified counsellors, in order to better navigate challenges and meet the future needs of students.

"There's too much red tape, schools can be political and limiting. We have a lack of freedom to take students out of class to provide support. [We need] more engagement with employers and local community organisations in providing career exploration opportunities for students."

"The pandemic will make re-engaging students very difficult, so finding programs that encourage them to stay at school but also offer a taste of the workplace can really help. It's hard to find employers willing to take students for work experience and placements now. Time is always an issue."

"The time fraction that I am on as a single career professional for almost 1000 students is inadequate. As a result, I am unable to develop and roll-out careers programs for Years 7 and 8. All schools need more staffing. The Catholic system does not have a dedicated Careers Program like the Government system. It is antiquated and in desperate need of reform."

Partnerships

How career teams are collaborating with other stakeholders.

As highlighted above, establishing connections with employers and local industry has proven difficult for secondary schools, however all seven schools reported having partnerships in some form. The most common were partnerships with tertiary education providers, including universities and TAFE Institutes. These partnerships offer opportunities for mentorship, incursions, and excursions, as well as leadership and "work inspiration" programs.

A complete list of partners can be seen in *Table 2* below. Schools reported that they often use these partnerships to connect students with employment services and work placements (58%), or to link students into external careers counselling and paid work opportunities (29%).

Table 2: Staff responses - Who do you have partnerships with?

Tertiary Institutes	Services and Networks	Industry Connections
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monash University • Deakin University • RMIT University • University of Melbourne • Swinburne University • TAFE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VET clusters • Department of Education and Training (DET) • Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN) • Australian Business and Community Network (ABCN) • Smith Family Skyline 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Optus • Amazon • Cisco • CBRE (real estate group) • Law Foundation Victoria • Engineers Australia

Post-school Guidance

Approaches to providing career guidance, information and support beyond school.

All seven schools reported providing some form of post-school guidance and support for former students, with most facilitating check-ins with young people throughout the year after leaving. School staff explained that upon request, past students can access interviews and ongoing careers counselling, with some even supporting short-term career goals such as assisting with resume writing, applying for apprenticeships and traineeships, and securing part-time or casual work. Some schools have dedicated Instagram pages to stay connected and share information with former students, while others offer Alumni programs and workshops.

When it comes to young people's expectations of post-school guidance, responses were mixed. 12% of students commented that they do not expect any follow-up support, reflecting that they hope the careers guidance provided during their time at school will put them in good stead to navigate decisions on their own after graduating. The remainder of survey respondents (88%) commented that they would like to receive some form of post-school guidance – the most commonly referenced, being checking up on students via phone or email to see how they're tracking, and supporting young people to navigate course changes and selection once ATAR scores have been released.

Students commented on the importance of Careers Staff being approachable and accessible should they want to get in touch to receive guidance and support after leaving school. Some referenced their school's Career Website or Instagram page as a good platform to nurture these ongoing connections, and share useful information regarding scholarships, employment, and networking opportunities to former students. Young people also expressed a desire for their Careers Team to equip them with strategies to navigate "adult life" after school, wanting support "to achieve and be hard working".

"I hope that I would still be able to contact them even when I have graduated. I would like some guidance in finding a placement and just some overall check-ups."

"I would expect help in transitioning to university, TAFE, or other institutions. Guidance in preparing for life outside of high school would be great."

"It would be nice if the careers office could aid the students in re-evaluating their pathways [after receiving our ATAR scores]."

Another opportunity that young people look forward to after graduating is the chance to give back to their school community and help other students to navigate career pathways, through various Alumni and mentorship opportunities. Young people reflected that they would like to see greater utilisation of this model by schools, as it's not only beneficial for current students who get to learn real-life case studies from their school, but it's also a great developmental opportunity for Student Alumni who get to build employability skills in the process of mentoring.

"Bring back past year 12's every few years to talk to other students about our pathways. Pair us with other students so they can hear about our experience."

The Employment Landscape

How schools align career guidance and education with future industry demands.

To maximise young people's employment prospects, it is crucial that career education aligns with future industry and skill demands. However, the world of work is constantly evolving, which means that there are sometimes gaps between career education delivery and real-world industry contexts. We asked schools to share how they keep up to date with these trends and changes. Responses reveal that Careers Staff have a breadth of resources and networks to stay informed (see *Table 3 below*), but that the information available is largely broad, population-level data, and not specific to local trends and demands in Greater Dandenong and surrounding areas.

Careers Staff reflected that Greater Dandenong Council is well positioned to play a central role in connecting schools with community and industry settings and circulating information regarding localised data and trends. Suggestions include sharing this information with schools via webinars and fact sheets, highlighting snapshots of local industries. Others suggest that Council could play a larger coordinating role, appointing a key contact to assist School Careers Teams in navigating barriers – potentially working jointly to fund, design and implement careers education initiatives.

"There is a big disconnection between schools and the local community. There needs to be more support for careers counsellors in linking students with industry [and incentivising] employers' support... Council should provide budgets for Careers Teams to fund excursions, incursions and program creation such as mentoring."

"In terms of what Council can do, maybe some local industry snapshots i.e. what the main industries in the area are, and where there are current or predicted skills shortages. Even some infographics or simple information that can be shared with students would be helpful."

"It would be interesting to know what types of opportunities are available that we could be promoting to the students who are looking for an alternative pathway to tertiary studies."

Table 3: Staff responses - What information, supports and professional development do you receive to keep up with the changing landscape?

Networks and Organisations	Information and Subscriptions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career practitioner seminars, mentoring and information sharing • Industry connections • MyFuture • Department of Education and Training • LLEN • Career Education Association of Victoria • Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) • Foundation for Young Australians (FYA) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career Development Association of Australia (CDAA) newsletter • LinkedIn • Professional development • Journal articles • Labour market data • Social media and news articles • General research

Monitoring and Evaluation

Strategies to measure the efficacy of career guidance and education.

To achieve sustained improvements in Career Guidance service provision, it's critical that schools embed regular and rigorous evaluation measures. Career Staff reported using a wide range of evaluation tools and strategies to assess students' needs and measure the efficacy of their activities and supports.

Traditional methods include student surveys and feedback forms, monitoring student outcomes (e.g. tertiary offers and post-school engagement in education, training, or employment), and student participation in careers activities (e.g. number of counselling

appointments, attendance at school careers events). Career Staff utilise different benchmarking tools to assist them in evaluating progress, including measures from "Career Tools" and the "Career Industry Council of Australia (CICA)".

Some innovative evaluation methods shared by schools include facilitating focus groups with students and utilising the school's Careers Instagram page to conduct anonymous polls. A clear theme to emerge was the importance of youth voice and ensuring that student feedback is at the centre of everything that Careers Teams do.

"Student feedback is an important part of our practice and allows us to be innovative. Student voice allows us to tailor our services and programs to the needs of our cohort."

Key Recommendations

Recommendations for Secondary Schools

- 1. Increase young people's workplace exposure across a wide range of industries.**
 - Embed opportunities for work placements and site visits within the school curriculum.
 - Facilitate more school incursions, connecting students with industry mentors.
 - Educate young people about their local employment context, highlighting career opportunities that exist within the City of Greater Dandenong (e.g. manufacturing).
 - Strengthen connections with the South East Local Learning and Employment Network (SELLEN), to help bolster opportunities for learning in the workplace.
- 2. Facilitate mentorship opportunities with young role models.**
 - Profile case studies of former students, sharing their journeys via online platforms, and inviting Alumni to present to current students.
 - Collaborate with tertiary institutes and workplaces to facilitate mentorship opportunities, where students are "buddied up" with a young person from their chosen course/career.
- 3. Increase service offerings for Years 7 and 8, enabling exploration of individual strengths and career interests from an early age.**
- 4. Bolster promotional efforts to increase the profile of Careers Staff and familiarise students with the services and supports available to them.**
 - Preferred methods include publishing a dedicated careers newsletter or social media page, as well as providing regular updates via email, Compass or Microsoft Teams, so that students can keep abreast of upcoming opportunities and deadlines.
 - Broaden information-sharing to encompass the promotion of local opportunities to build employability skills and experience, such as volunteering, part-time or casual work, short courses, and networking events.
- 5. Prioritise proactive, assertive engagement by Careers Staff, to ensure that no student gets left behind.**
 - Adopt a holistic cross-team approach, working alongside teachers and Wellbeing Staff to identify young people who may require additional guidance and support.
 - Continue to strengthen the Career Department's "open door" culture, supporting students to feel welcome and empowered to initiate contact when needed.
- 6. Strive to provide honest and insightful careers guidance and education.**
 - Educate students about the future world of work, including job demands and skill shortages, so they can make informed pathway choices.
 - Provide impartial guidance, presenting a range of options that young people can take to reach their desired goal. Ensure that alternative pathways such as VCAL, TAFE, traineeships and apprenticeships are explored and discussed.

Recommendations for Council

1. Broker partnerships between secondary schools and local industry.

- Harness relationships with local employers and community organisations to build industry connections for schools, including facilitating opportunities for site visits, work placements and mentorship.
- Continue to promote the South East Local Learning and Employment Network (SELLEN) as a key interface with school Careers Teams.

2. Support school Careers Teams to stay up to date with the local industry context, by providing information on employment opportunities and trends in Greater Dandenong.

- Develop educational resources that provide a local industry snapshot (e.g. fact sheets for students, webinars for Careers Staff).

3. Advocate for increased funding and human resources for career education, guidance, and support in secondary schools.

4. Work with community to challenge stereotypes and fixed beliefs regarding learning and employment pathways.

- Through educational activities and profiling positive case studies, reduce the negative stigma attached to VCAL, TAFE and other alternative pathways (that fall outside the VCE to university path).
- Raise awareness of the benefits of careers in growth industries, where there is significant skills shortages and job demand, to challenge fixed beliefs regarding what constitutes a 'desirable' or 'prestigious' career.

Conclusion

Secondary school is a critical stage, where young people must navigate the many ideas and possibilities for what they want to pursue in life, and how they plan to get there. Making these decisions can be extremely difficult and can be confusing without the right information and supports in place. Fortunately, in Victorian schools, students have access to a great advocate and resource in their school Careers Team. This benchmarking project is testament to some of the excellent and innovative work that 'Careers Guidance' in secondary schools are doing to give young people the best possible start in their career journeys. A lot can be learnt from the strategies and examples cited in this report, as schools continue to strive to improve their career education and service provision.

However, there are still a number of barriers inhibiting school Careers Teams from performing at their full potential, preventing young people from fully accessing the level of support that they need. Both Council and secondary schools have a critical role to play in addressing these barriers, to ensure that Careers Teams have the resources and connections they require to best prepare students for "life after school". These identified recommendations provide a pathway for secondary schools, local government, employers and community organisations to join forces and enhance career guidance and support for young people.

Following the release of this report, Greater Dandenong Youth and Family Services will be collaborating with relevant Council departments, local businesses, and secondary schools, to implement the above recommendations. Any agency or organisation with an interest in working collaboratively to support the implementation of the reports' recommendations is encouraged to contact Youth and Family Services on 9793 2155.