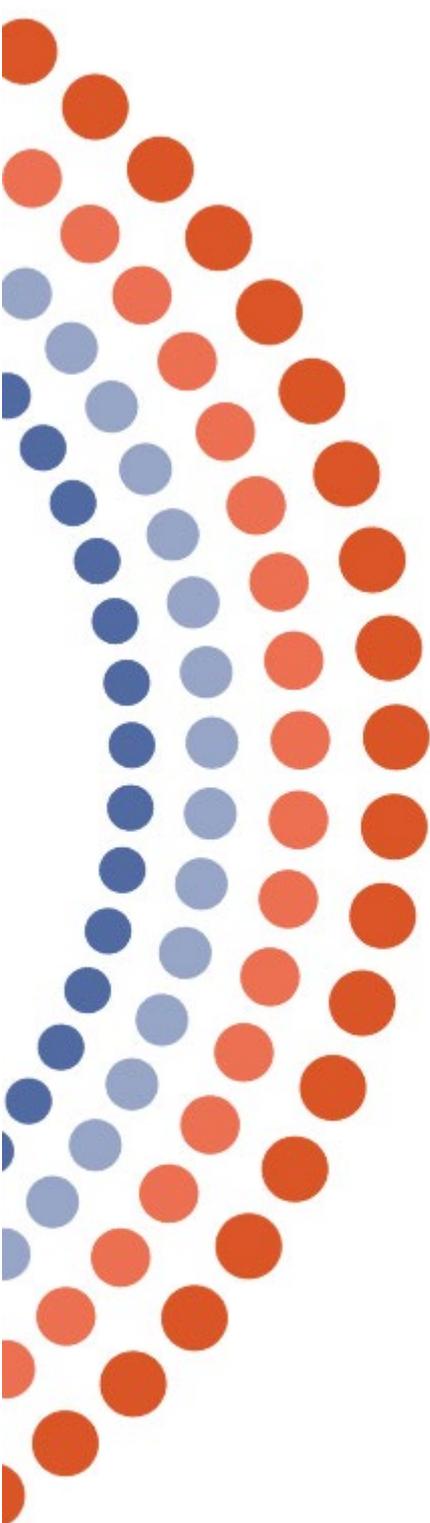




**Conditions for
Career Practitioners in
Victorian Schools
October 2023**





Background

In 2021, the Yarra Regional Career Group and ACCE partnered to conduct research into the conditions for career practitioners in Victorian schools. At the time there were concerns about career practitioners working outside their scope as career professionals or supervising students beyond their pay grade. The research found this was particularly so for Education Support Officers and that there had been a downgrading at the school level for some respondents from a higher level pay grade.

The 2021 research revealed a range of pressures placed on individuals at the school level who felt tasked to drive career education when there was a lack of support by school leadership, limited funding, no career education subject, and limited understanding of a career role in education. The 2018 Parliamentary report, *Inquiry into career advice activities in Victorian schools*, made numerous recommendations aimed at improving professional career guidance in Victorian schools but had still not been implemented in 2021.

Without mandated minimum conditions, many career practitioners employed in Education Support positions in the 2021 research were working for very low wages. Despite their low pay, they are expected to deliver a quality program to students which often includes work experience and a wide range of other career services. For career practitioners who are recognised as teachers, many are expected to deliver a quality career program on a minimal time allowance, despite their career activities being highly time intensive.

ACCE used the 2021 research findings to lobby and advocate for career education and development, and improved conditions for career practitioners, particularly in schools. At the same time, there have been a range of government inquiries across 2022 that have focused on employment, workforce development, and reviews of the VET system and Universities. With a focus on the country's productivity, ACCE believes it is timely to update its 2021 research and understand if conditions for career practitioners in Victorian Schools have improved.

The following 2023 research findings identify the resourcing for career education and services in ACCE member schools. It is important to consider these results in context of the role of school career services which should be focused on supporting students to make informed pathway choices, career decisions and meet the work readiness needs of employers.

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Recommendations

1. Ensure that the career education funding provided to all Victorian government secondary schools for students in years 7 to 12 is only used by school careers services for career activities.
2. Mandate a minimum professional career staffing ratio of 1:450 for career practitioners to students.
3. Provide training to school leadership so they understand the importance of careers education and guidance for students and that it is the fundamental work of schools.
4. Make schools responsible for delivering a minimum suite of career education and guidance services annually and fund this accordingly (including annual reporting).
5. Include a career education subject in the curriculum from primary school to enable students to learn about the world of work and make informed career choices.
6. Ensure an introduction to careers education for teachers is included in initial teacher education or as a short compulsory professional development unit and ensure Principals are trained to understand the importance of career education.
7. Promote career education and career development to the community so there is increased understanding of its important role in successful transitioning for young people and adults.
8. Establish stronger connections between schools and industry to ensure students can access essential workplace learning and experience.
9. Provide systems that reduce the administration burden for school career services that support student workplace learning and work experience.
10. The Department of Education and other school sectors should ensure career professionals are treated with respect for the work they do by ensuring professional qualification recognition and pay scales consistent with this.



Discussion

The Importance of Career Education and Guidance



There is no doubt that career education and career development improve outcomes for students and adults. Career education is a well-studied field with return-on-investment data available internationally. Research has shown that when a country collaborates across employment and education departments to develop dynamic, nationally focused career policies and operationalise effective career education and guidance activities from school through to skill, study and employment pathways, there are substantial cost gains to a nation over the long term.

While employers and industry are sometimes viewed as the ultimate beneficiaries of career investment, communities, families, and individuals benefit by being able to reach their full potential. Well matched employment outcomes are associated with a sense of purpose and beneficial mental health indicators are correlated with positive employment outcomes.

OECD research of youth career readiness has shown significant associations between teenage career related activities/attitudes, and better employment outcomes. The relationship between career guidance-related attitudes/activities at age 14-16 show overwhelmingly better outcomes in employment 10-15 years later in terms of:

- lowering youth rates of those not in education, employment or training
- higher wages
- greater job, career, or life satisfaction¹.

The OECD work readiness team have identified that too few students show signs of being career ready and their career thinking is too narrow, confused or influenced by gender or socio-economic background. Parents and peers are also known to influence a child's career decisions and while these influences may be well intended, they often lack the robust career interventions and knowledge that that can be provided by trained career professionals.

¹ OECD Career Readiness. (2021). *How youth explore, experience and think about their future: A new look at effective career guidance*. OECD.

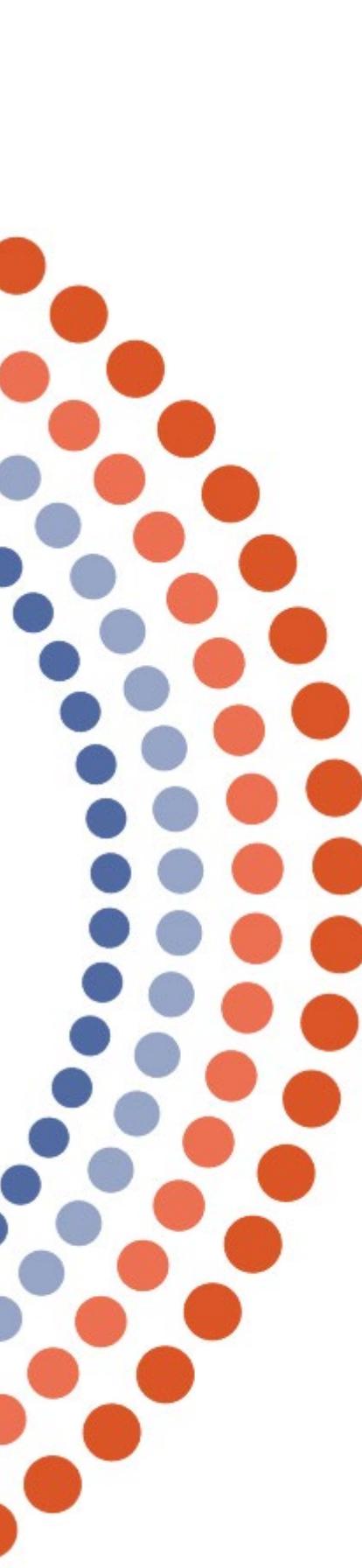
Transitioning from school has been identified as a challenging process for young people by the OECD and Education Council. Changes in work structures, new industries, and COVID are among some of the factors that complicate a young person's ability to make informed pathway decisions and career choices. Vulnerable cohorts are even further at risk, and this is compounded by the Australian education system that is unable to deliver a minimum standard of career education and guidance.

In all countries, career guidance has been viewed as a public good and a benefit to workforce development. Without an educational lifelong learning policy for students and guidance policies for citizens, Australia will not meet its Working Futures plan.

As part of ACCE's constitutional aims, advocating for quality career education and guidance for all Australians is central to our mission. To support these aims it is imperative that we continue our research into the current working conditions for those who are supporting the career education and outcomes of our students.

The reporting of the 2023 research has not coded qualitative feedback, but instead reports all the verbatim comments so individual feedback is heard. It highlights the stark reality for career practitioners in schools.

The ACCE Committee of Management is pleased to share the latest research findings with members.



1. Methodology

A Survey Monkey questionnaire comprised of 31 Questions was developed and opened in September 2023. The survey was promoted to the ACCE membership of career practitioners, many who work in Victorian Schools. The ACCE Committee of Management also promoted the research through their Regional Career Groups.

The 2023 survey instrument was similar to that used in the 2021 research study, but a number of questions were altered, and some were removed. It is important to note the ACCE membership cohort may have also altered in that time as membership ceases or professionals transition to work outside of the education sector.

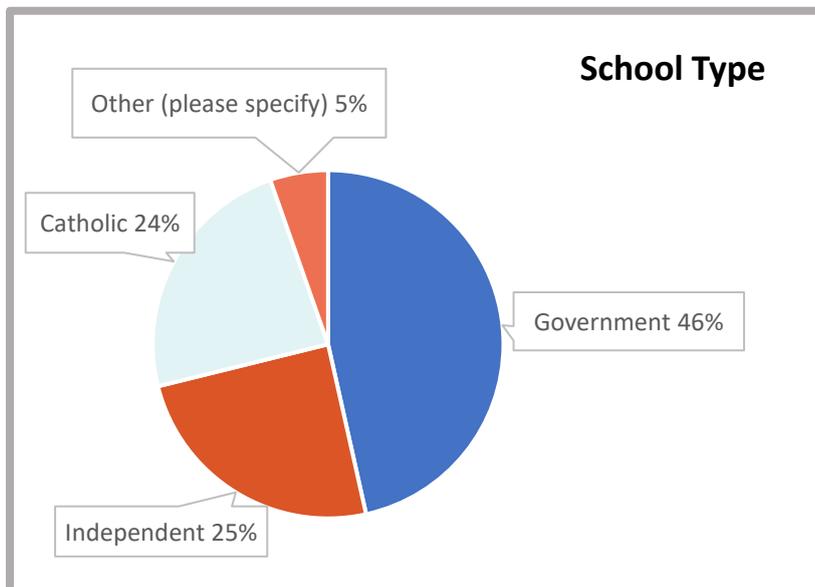
As the survey was opened close to the Term 3 holidays, an extension was provided and communicated to members. The final closing time and date of the survey was midnight on 19 October 2023.

A total of 187 respondents completed the survey but 5 responses were discounted from the analysis as not meeting the eligibility criteria. In addition, there were some incomplete responses that meant not all respondents completed the survey completely. The final analysis is based on the number of respondents answering each question and analysis across questions has been conducted using data from those who completed those questions.

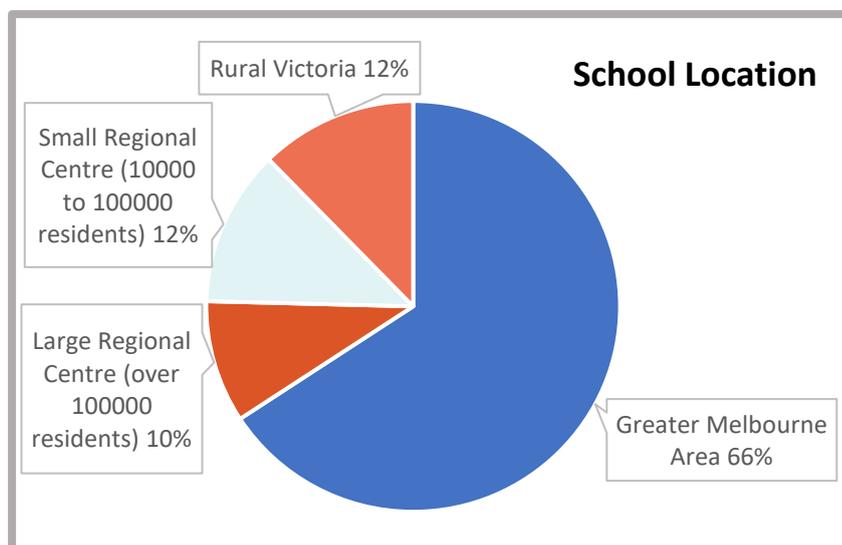
ACCE reviewed the verbatim comments and decided not to code thematically to highlight members' feedback. As the survey was a deidentified research project and to protect privacy and confidentiality of participants, some redactions were made to a small number of comments.

2. Respondent School Location and School Type

Respondents were asked what kind of school they currently worked in. Options included: Government, Independent, Catholic or Other school type:



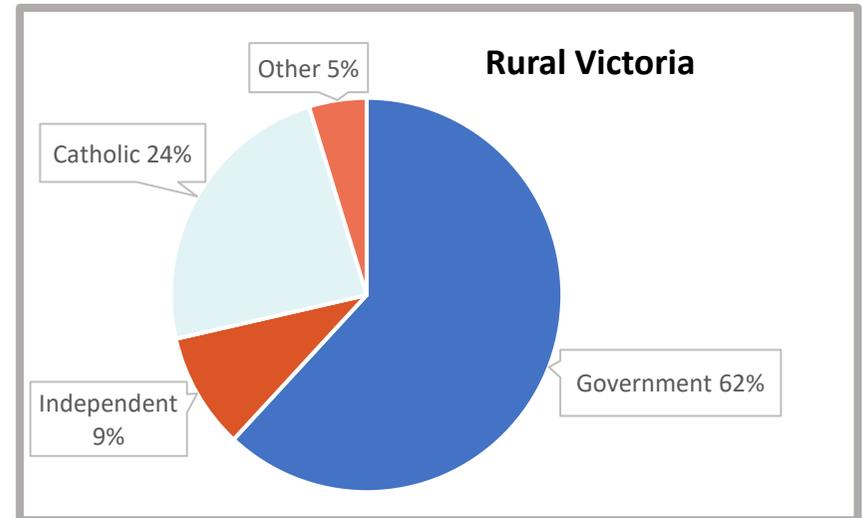
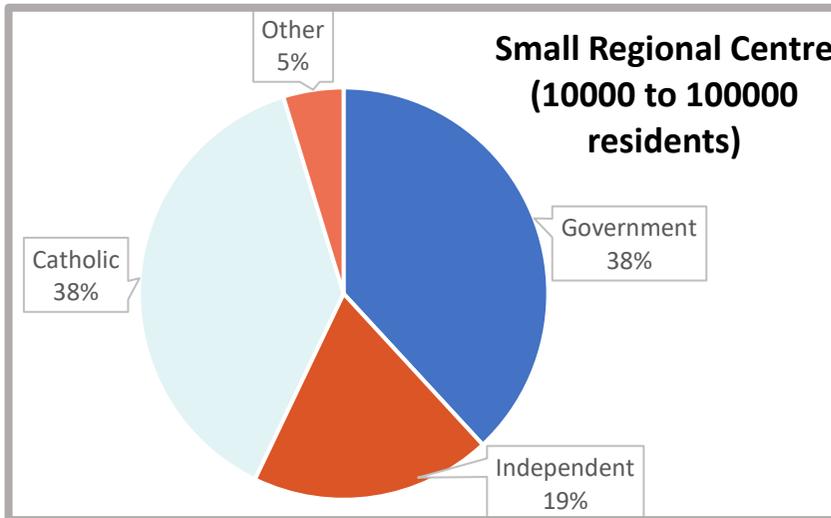
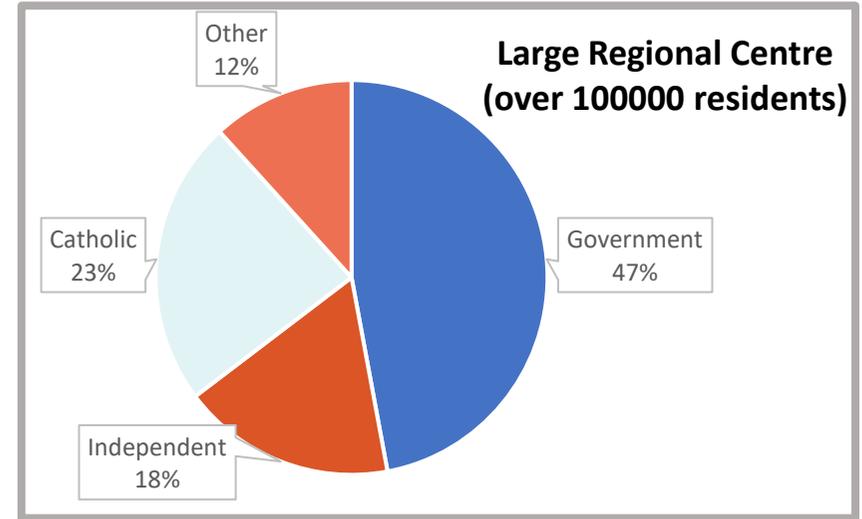
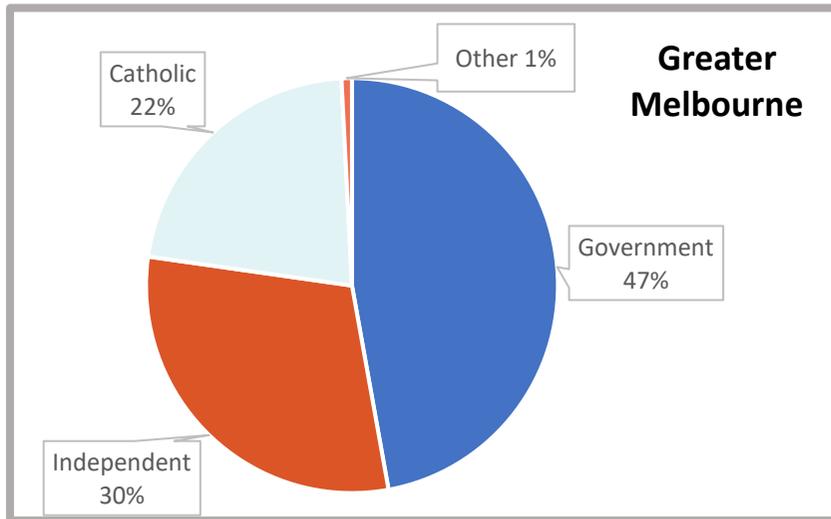
Respondents were asked where their school was located and 66% of respondent schools were based in metropolitan Melbourne, 10% in Large regional centres, 12% in small regional centres, and 12% were located in rural Victoria.



The school location of respondents was similar to that in the 2021 survey as follows:

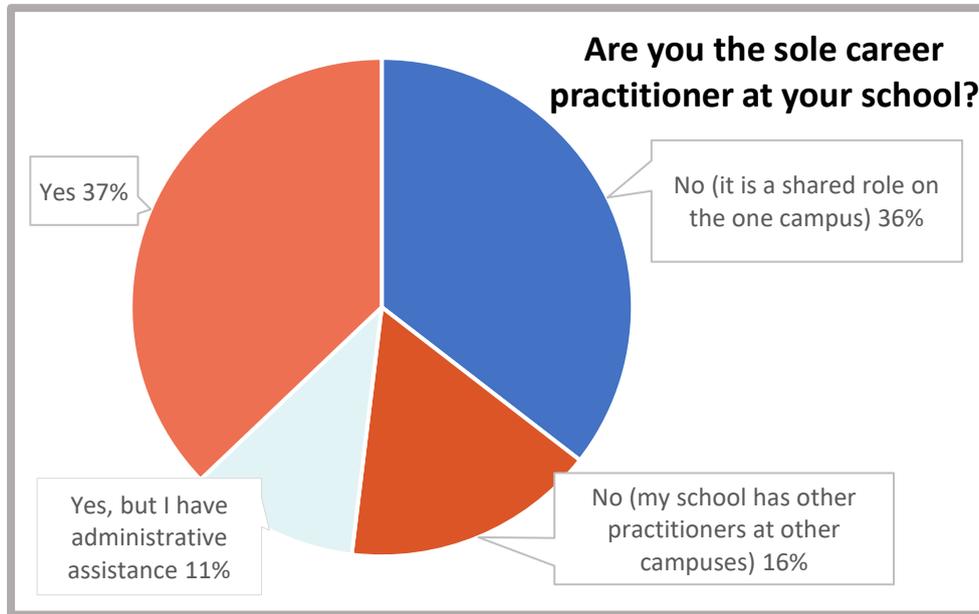
- greater metro Melbourne 71%
- large regional cities like Ballarat and Geelong (8%),
- small regional cities such as Seymour or Morwell (10%),
- rural Victoria (10%).

The school types respondents were working in was charted against the four key demographic regions:

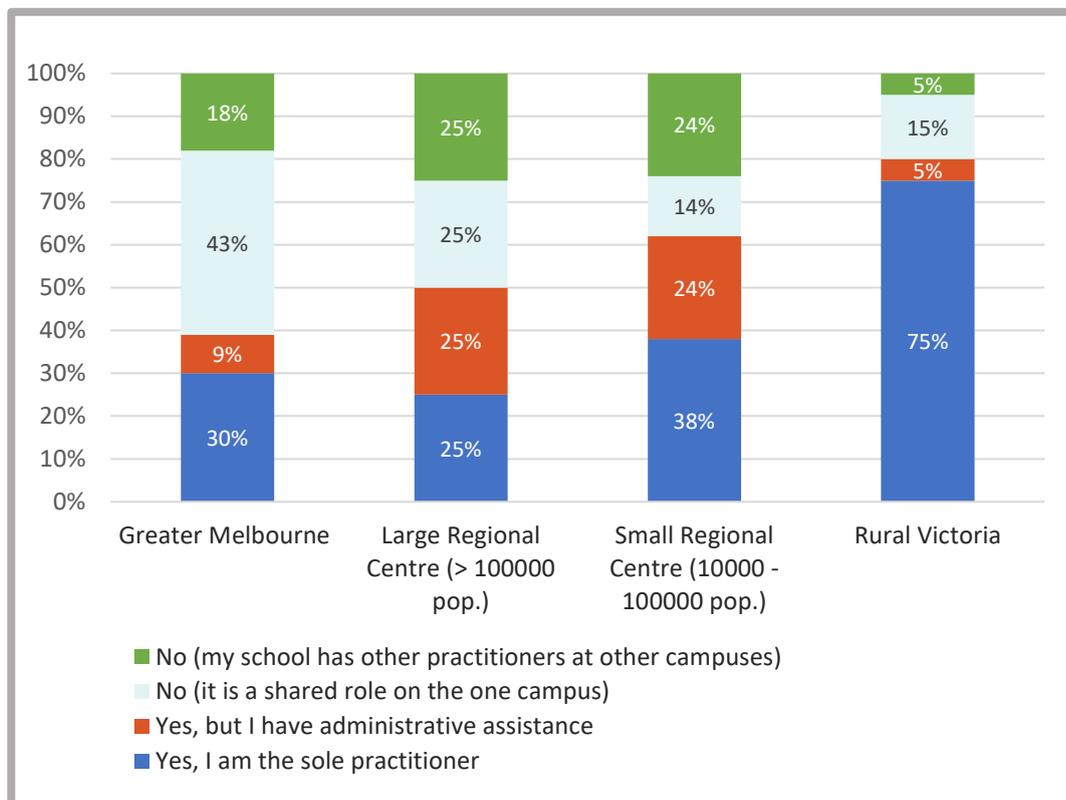


3. School Career Resourcing

The 2023 research aimed to understand the resourcing arrangements for career professionals in different locations. Respondents were asked if they were the sole career practitioner at their school. Over one third were sole practitioners and nearly the same percentage said they were working in a shared role on a single campus:



Analysis sought to understand if there were school career practitioner resourcing variance as a result of a school's demographic location:

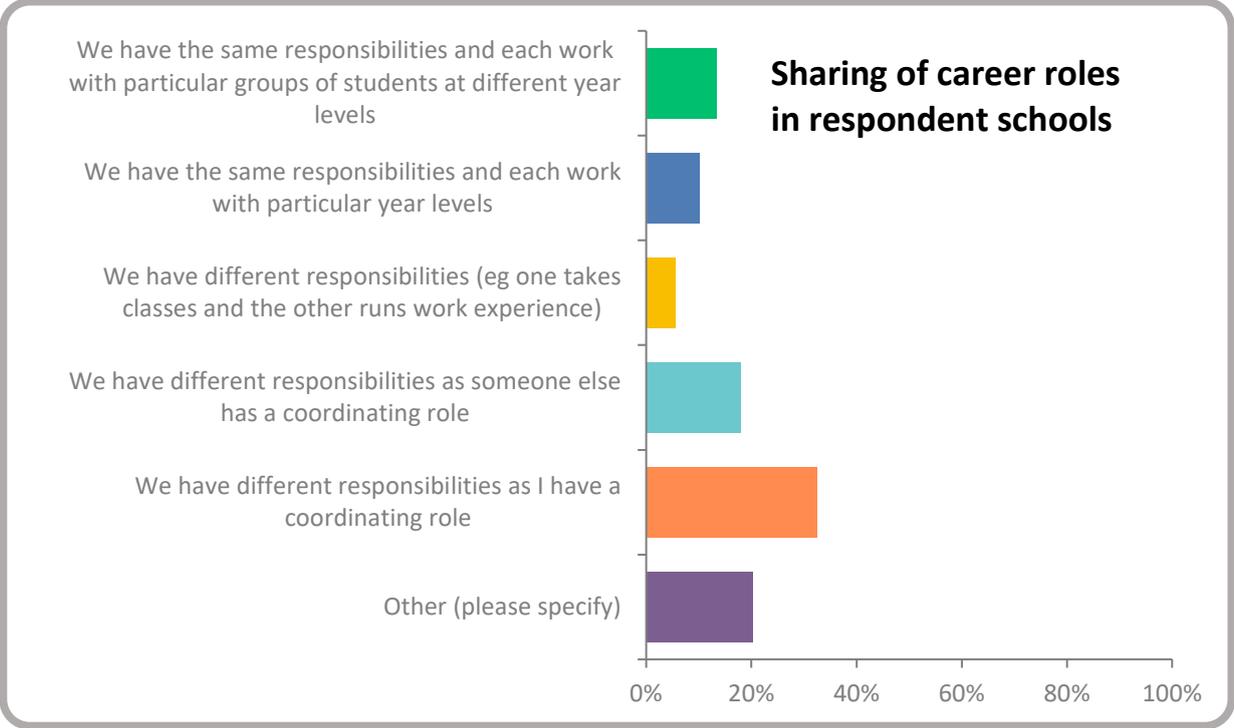


- In Greater Melbourne, the two largest resourcing categories identified by respondents were as a sole practitioner (30%) or employed as a shared role on one campus (43%).
- Respondents working in schools in Large Regional Centres were evenly spread across all resourcing options.
- A third of Small Regional school had a third of their career practitioners working as sole practitioners in the school (38%) followed by nearly a quarter of career practitioners working in a school where there were other practitioners on other campuses (24%).
- Three quarters (75%) of respondents from Rural Victorian schools were the sole practitioner.

The following table includes the data charted on the previous page:

	Greater Melbourne	Large Regional Centre (> 100000 pop.)	Small Regional Centre (10000 - 100000 pop.)	Rural Victoria
Yes, I am the sole practitioner	30%	25%	38%	75%
Yes, but I have administrative assistance	9%	25%	24%	5%
No (it is a shared role on the one campus)	43%	25%	14%	15%
No (my school has other practitioners at other campuses)	18%	25%	24%	5%

Respondents who shared a career role in their school were asked how their role was shared. Nearly one third (28%) noted they had different responsibilities:



When asked to specify other arrangements, a range of verbatim comments were provided by respondents and these are matched to school type below:

Government Schools

No (it is a shared role on the one campus)

I have a co-ordinator and an admin assistant. I do lots of research and collaboration with students.

Unclear - I have one hour allocated weekly and the other staff member has one day allocated but our duties are similar and I do more planning for career days

We have same responsibilities and each work with particular groups at different levels and I also have the VET Coordinating role

We have three neighbourhoods on the one site and one CP is responsible for each neighbourhood. We also have two additional CPs who coordinate and deliver programs, provide training and counselling and support the CPs working in the neighbourhoods.

We job share the career role across the board

No (my school has other practitioners at other campuses)

My role is a leading teacher role in Careers, Pathways & Transition and I also manage the VET program whereas my colleague manages Careers at the junior campus for Year 7-9

Split across two campuses so different tasks depending on campus/year level

We are on multicampus Seniors 10 11 12 and two junior 7 8 and 9

Independent Schools

No (it is a shared role on the one campus)

We have mostly the same responsibilities, but I have a coordinating role (paid leadership). We share all year levels.

We mostly have the same responsibilities and are interchangeable

No (my school has other practitioners at other campuses)

One practitioner per campus doing the same role

We have different responsibilities and each work with all students across all year levels from Year 9 to Year 12

Catholic schools

No (it is a shared role on the one campus)

2 teachers as career practitioners, 2 non-teaching career practitioners, 1 admin helper, 1 coordinator. Some shared roles (careers appointments), some different responsibilities (curriculum, work experience, excursions etc).

We have the same responsibilities, and both work part-time 3 days per week with one day overlapping

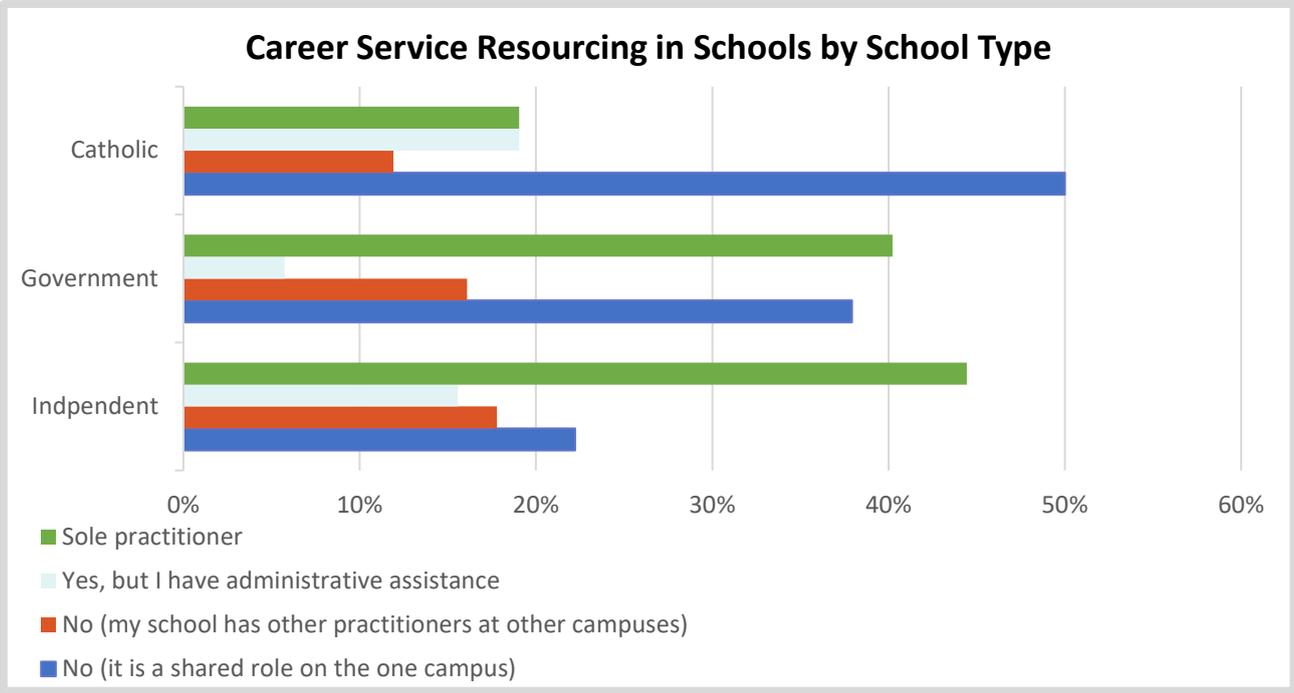
We have the same responsibilities and work with the same groups of students

We have the same responsibilities except one also has a teaching role

No (my school has other practitioners at other campuses)

Similar roles, across senior years, but one also has VCE teaching load.

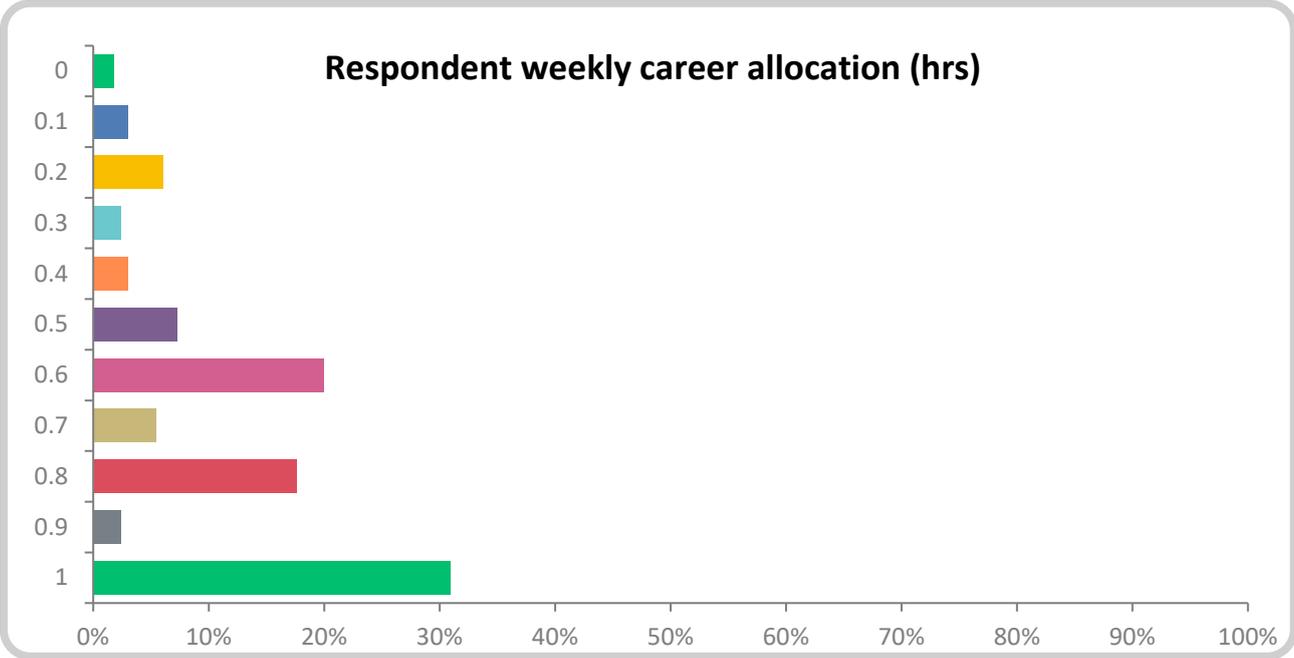
When comparing career resourcing across school types, there were more sole practitioners in Independent and Government Schools than in Catholic Schools. Catholic schools had a greater percentage of shared roles on one campus. The lowest resourcing percentage was career practitioners with administrative assistance in Government Schools.



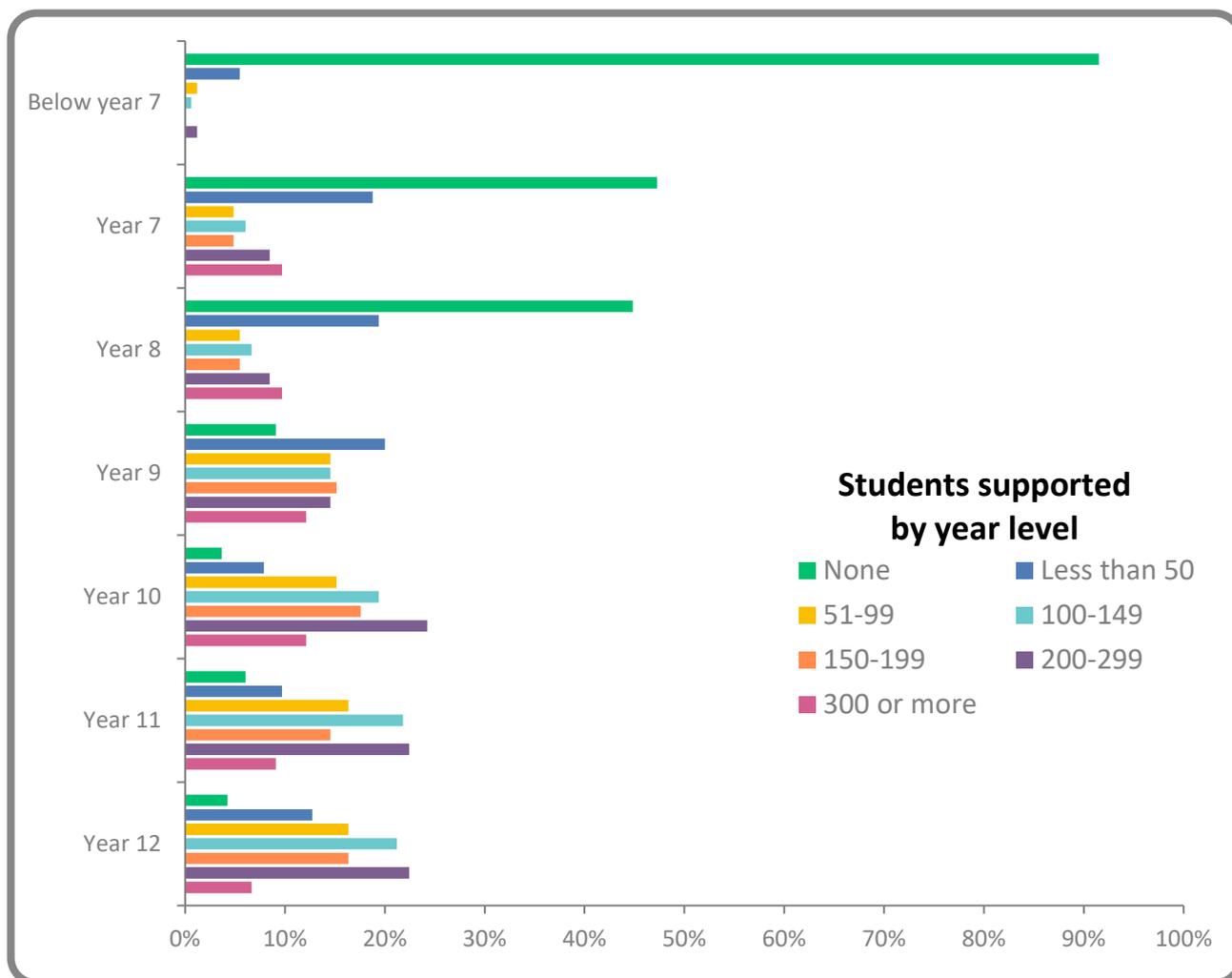
Respondents noted the time that the school had allocated to careers. The largest percentages were in the following allocations:

- 31% had a full-time allocation
- 20% had a 0.6 allotment for careers
- 18% had 0.8 allocated for careers

24% of respondents were allocated 0.5 or less for careers and 76% had over 0.5 time allocation.

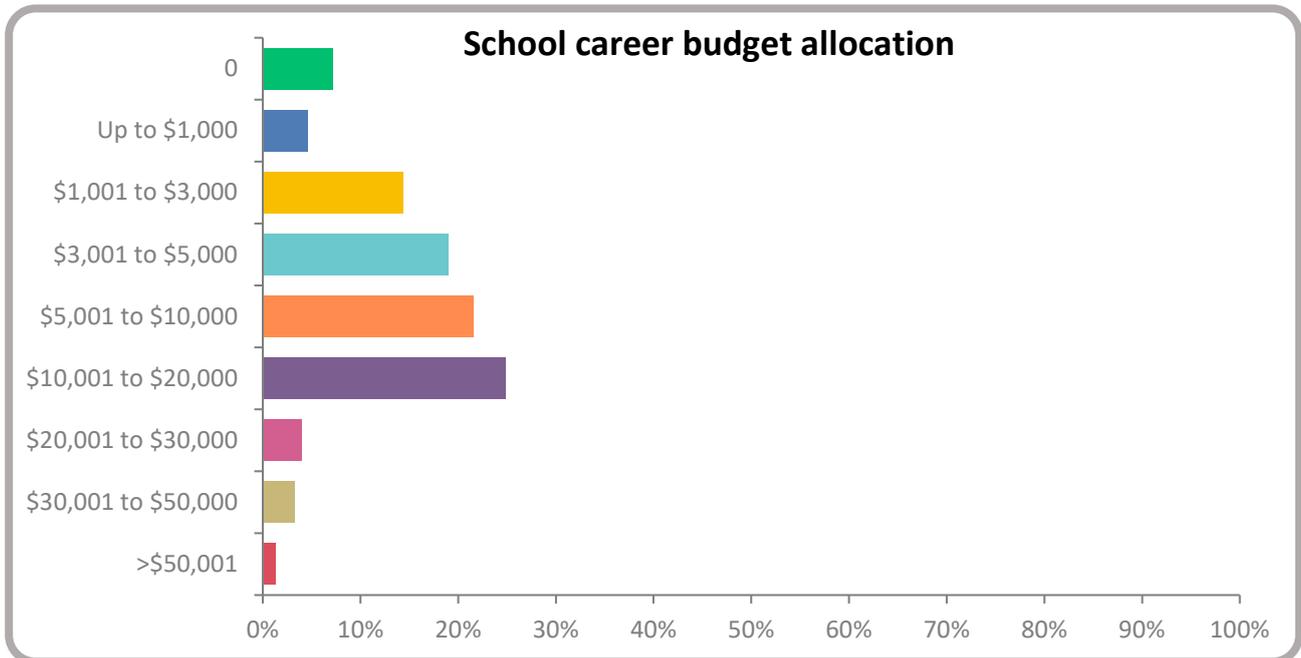


Research sought to understand the number of students respondents worked with and the different year levels involved:

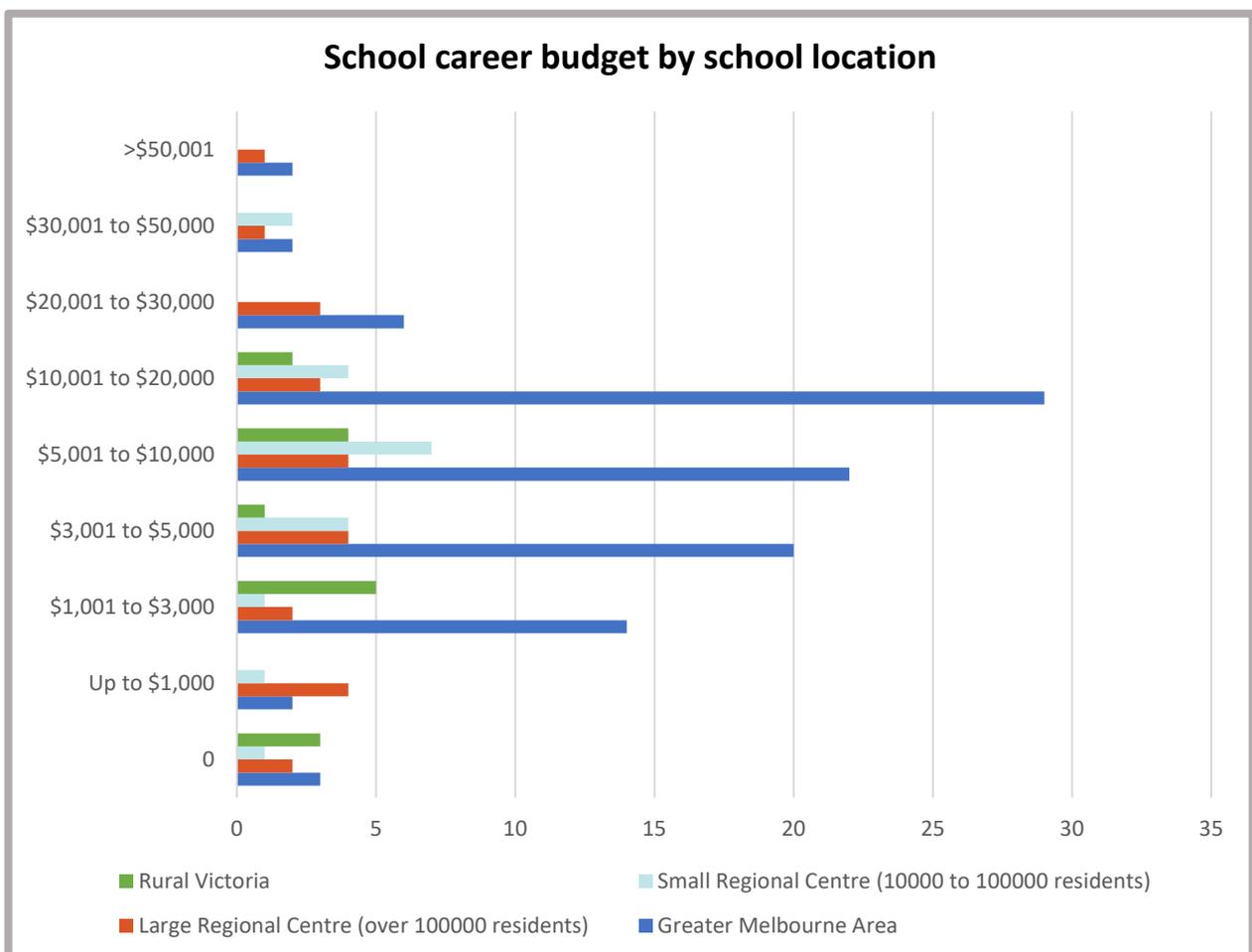


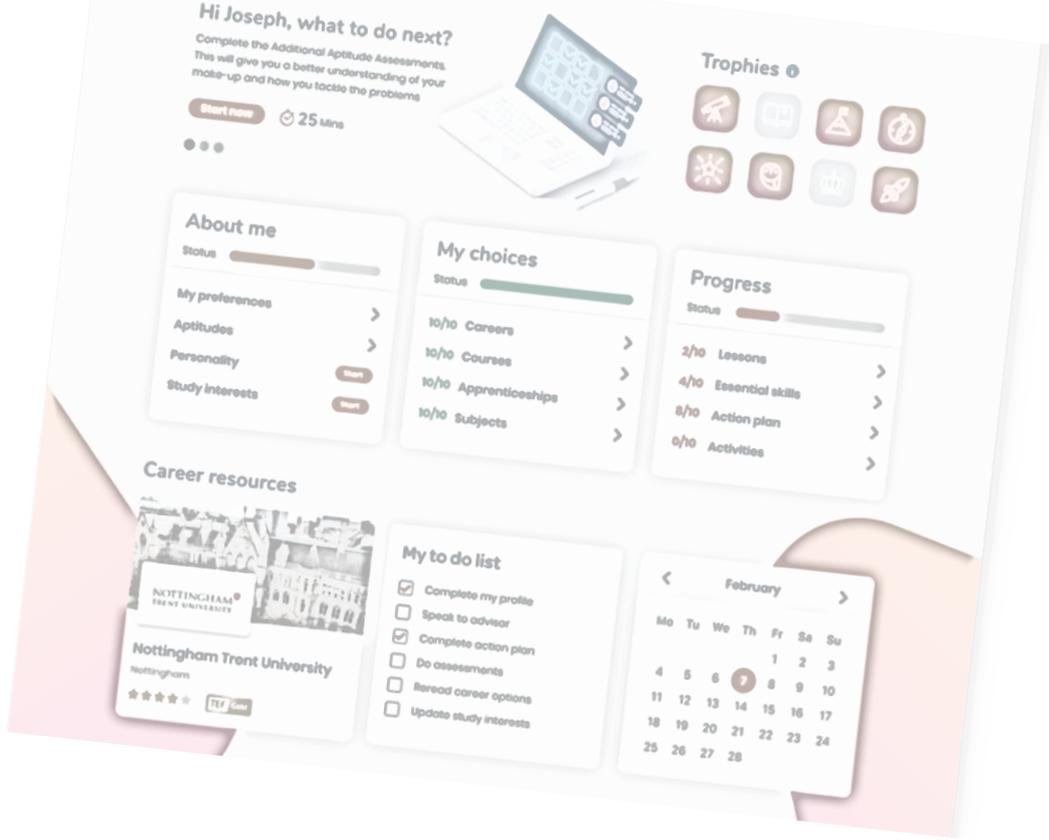
	None	Less than 50	51-99	100-149	150-199	200-299	300 or more
< year 7	91.5%	5.5%	1.2%	0.6%	0.0%	1.2%	0.0%
Year 7	47.3%	18.8%	4.9%	6.1%	4.9%	8.5%	9.7%
Year 8	44.9%	19.4%	5.5%	6.7%	5.5%	8.5%	9.7%
Year 9	9.1%	20.0%	14.6%	14.6%	15.2%	14.6%	12.1%
Year 10	3.6%	7.9%	15.2%	19.4%	17.6%	24.2%	12.1%
Year 11	6.1%	9.7%	16.4%	21.8%	14.6%	22.4%	9.1%
Year 12	4.2%	12.7%	16.4%	21.2%	16.4%	22.4%	6.7%

Career budgets are an important aspect of career education to pay for the various resources and activities needed to support students. For many respondent schools, the annual budget for career services was in the majority low:



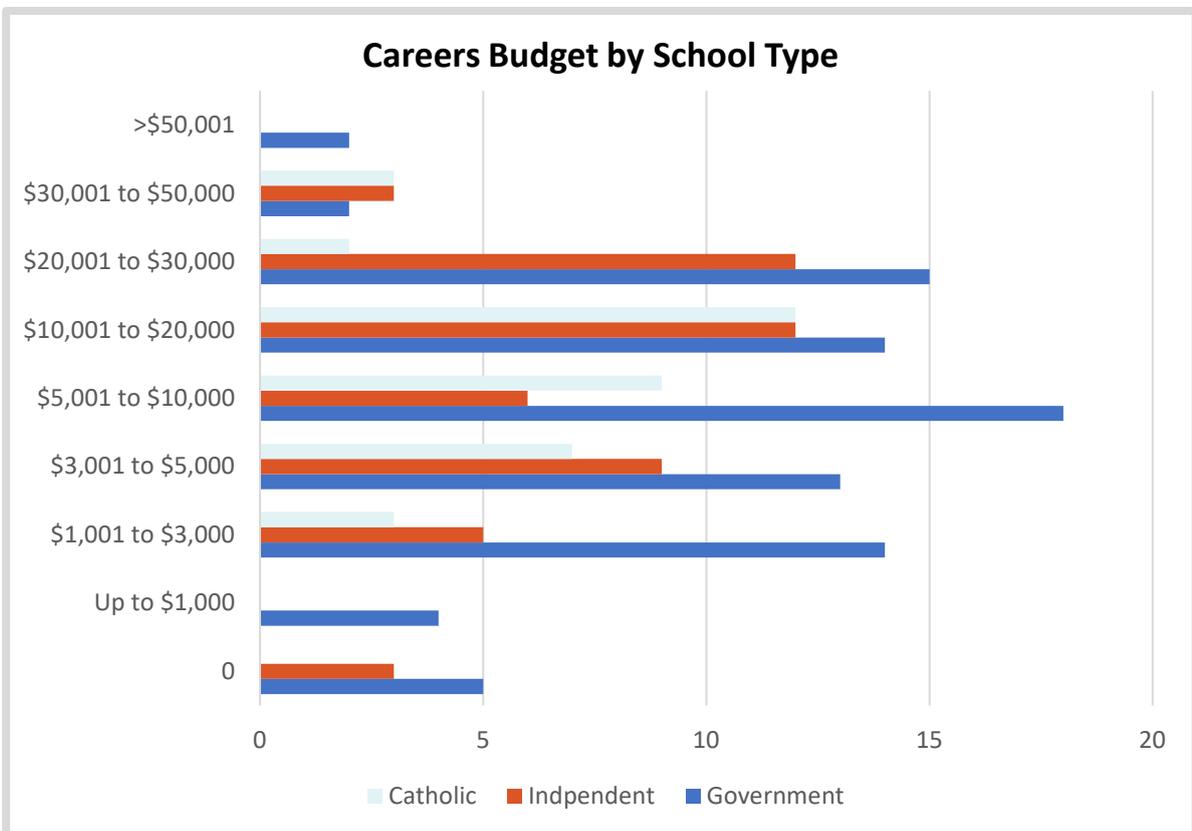
Larger career education budgets were associated with schools in the Greater Metropolitan Melbourne region. This highlights the inequity for students outside of the greater metropolitan areas. The most common budgets were within the three bands between \$1,000 to \$20,000.





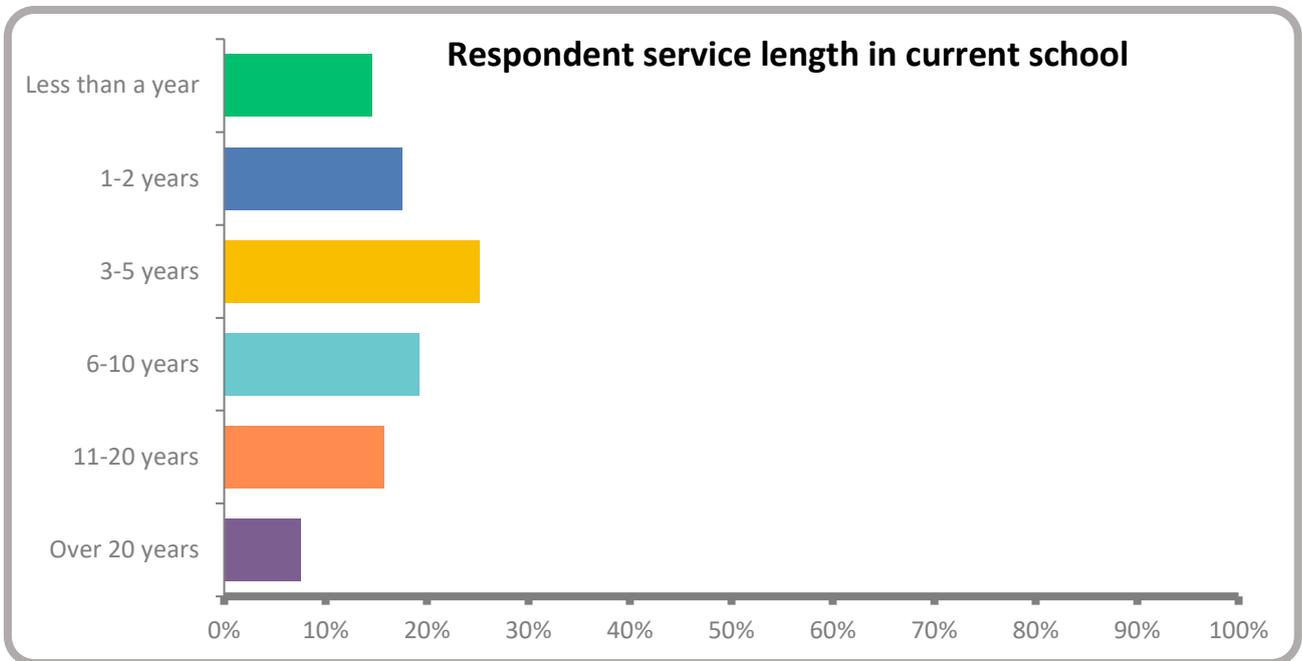
The following table identifies the careers budgets by school type. The largest career budget identified was in a government school. However, independent schools received the biggest slice by percentage of the next budget category \$30,001-\$50,00 followed by Government Schools in the category \$10,001-\$30,000, and then practitioners working in Catholic Schools and Government were closely aligned with a budget in the \$5,001-\$10,000 band.

Note: How the budget was spent or what was included was not included in the question.



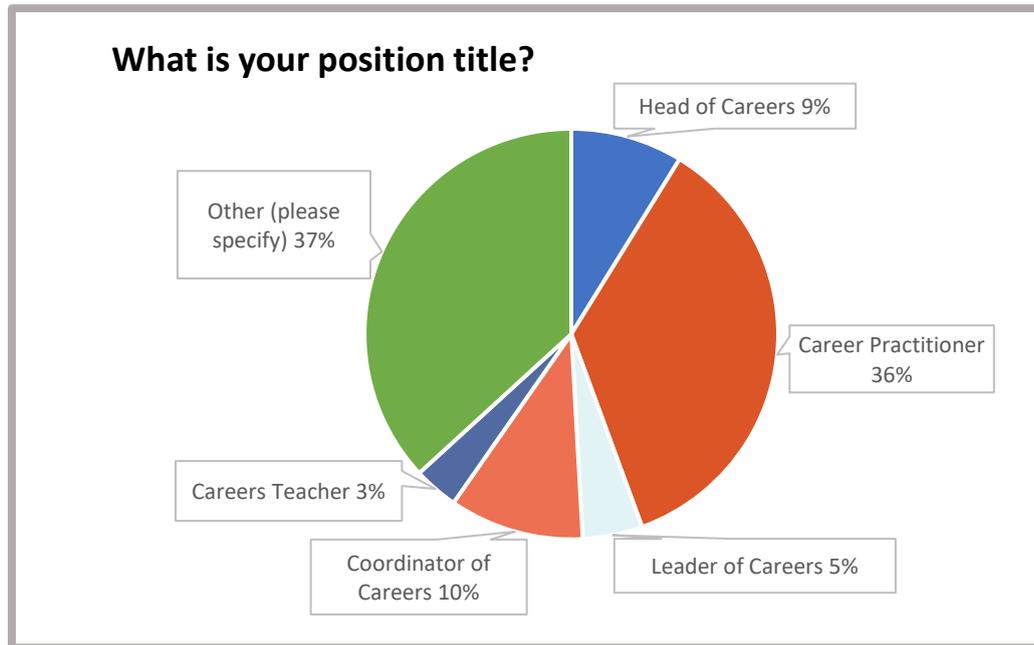
4. Length of Service

A quarter of respondents had been in a career role in their current school for 3-5 years. 15% had been in their role for less than a year, 17% for 1-2 years, 19% for 6-10 years, 16% for 11-20 years and 8% for over 20 years.

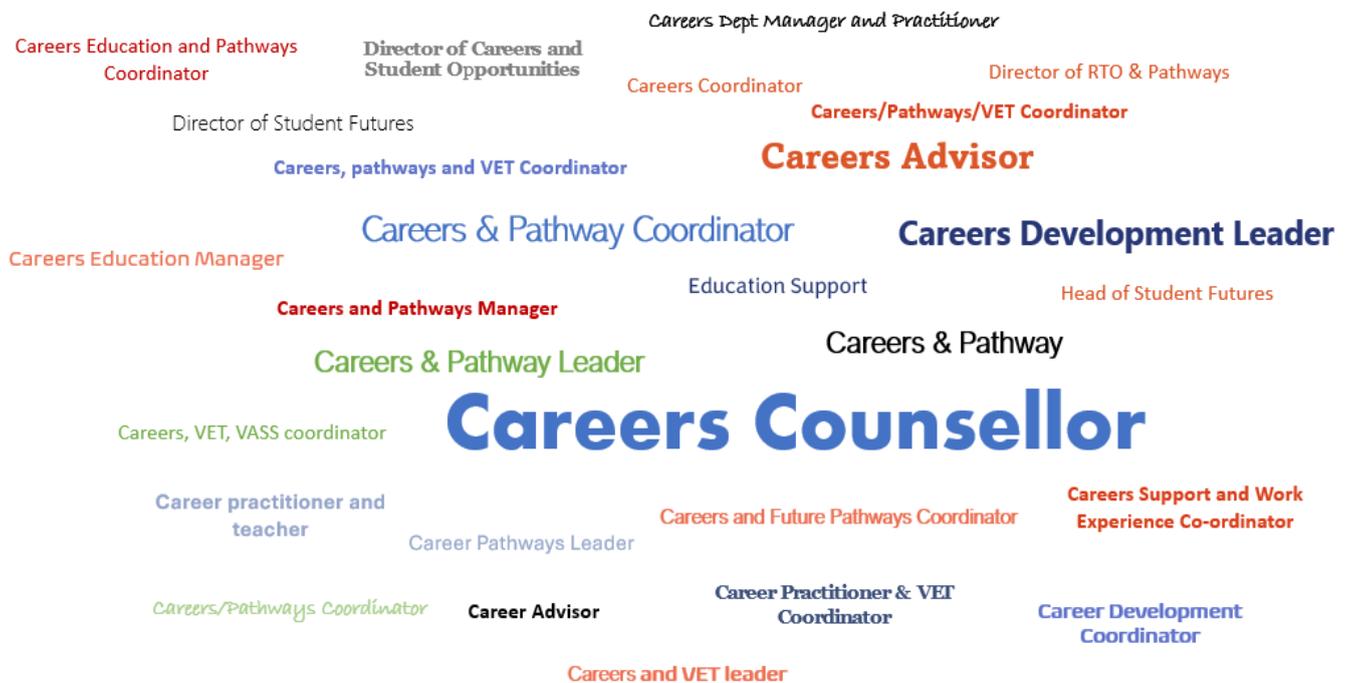


5. Position Title

The position title most common in the list was Career Practitioner 36%, followed by 'other' at 37%.



The following 'other' titles were provided by respondents with the most common being careers counsellor followed by Careers and Pathways Coordinator, then Careers Advisor. Most of the titles included careers and pathway and coordinator appeared in the 'other' titles eleven times.

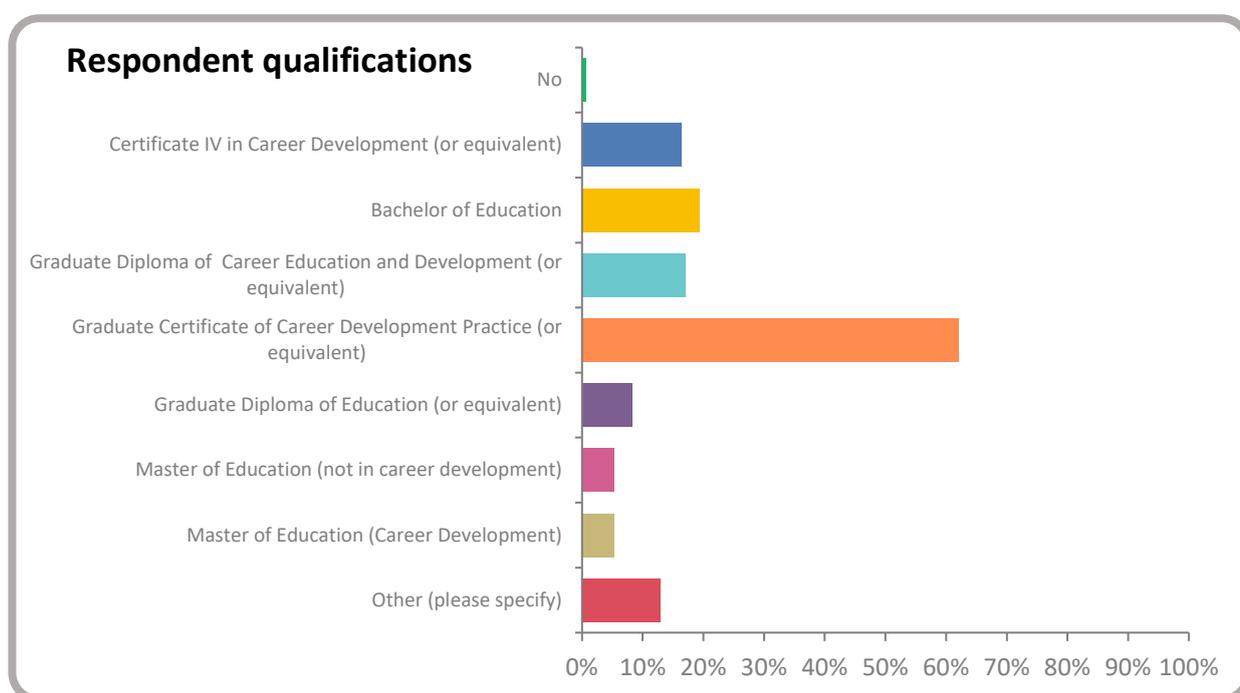


6. Qualifications

82% of respondents held a graduate diploma or Graduate Certificate in Career Development qualification. 16% had a Certificate IV in Career Development. 23% of those with Certificate IV in Career Development also held a higher tertiary qualification in Career Development and some had tertiary qualifications in education or other fields.

In the 2021 survey 97% of respondents held a tertiary qualification in career education and the smaller respondent base in 2023 may have had an impact on this percentage difference.

Overall, there was a high level of qualification across the respondents. One respondent identified as not having any formal qualifications and 41 respondents held two or more qualifications from the short list provided in question 7. 8 respondents identified a master's qualification outside of the list and 9 of the 16 respondents with a Graduate Diploma of Education (or Equivalent) did not identify their additional qualification.

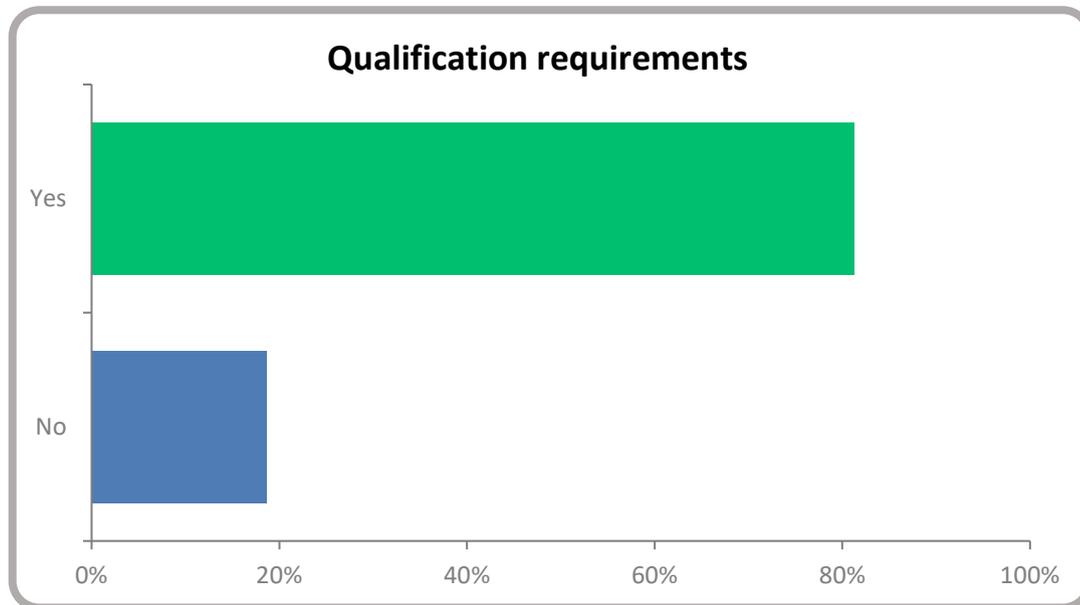


The qualifications identified in the 'other' question option are listed below:

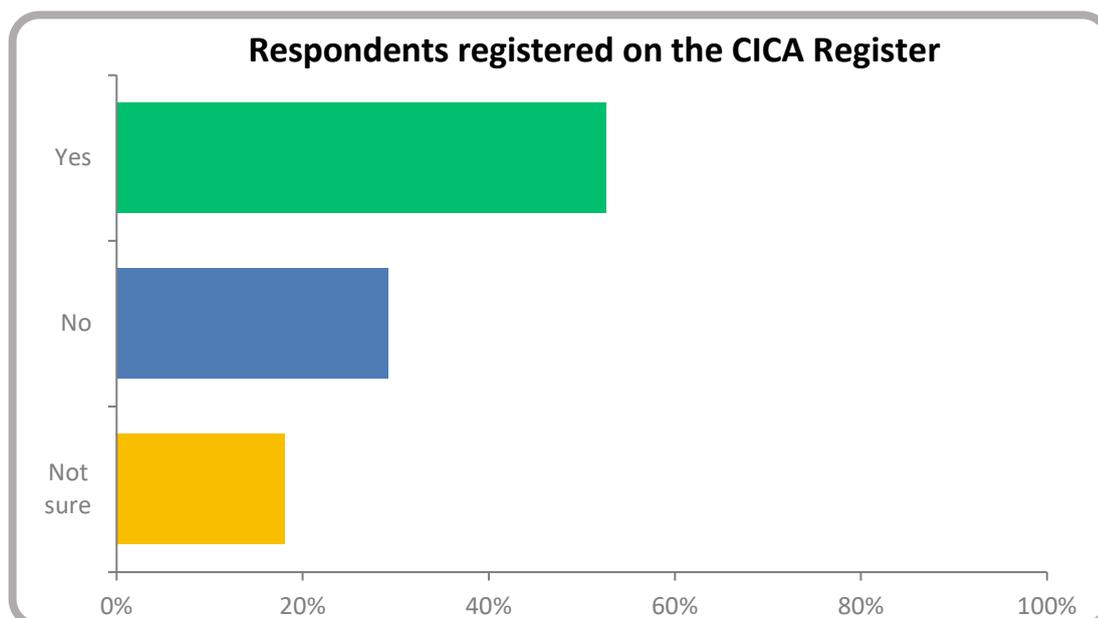
- Advanced Diploma Management (NZ)
- Bachelor of Arts Hons (Education)
- Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Laws
- Bachelor of Arts
- Bachelor of Psychological Science
- 4 x Bachelor of Science
- Cert IV training and assessment
- Cert IV Workplace Training
- Diploma of VET & TDD
- Graduate Certificate HR Management
- Graduate Certificate of Careers Education
- Master of Business (Information Technology)
- Masters of Counselling
- 1 unidentified

7. Qualification Requirements

While the sample was half the size of the 2021 survey, over 80% of the 2023 survey respondents noted their school required formal qualifications in careers to be in their current role. This compares to 30% in 2021 survey who answered they were not aware of the school's requirement or there was no formal qualification needed.



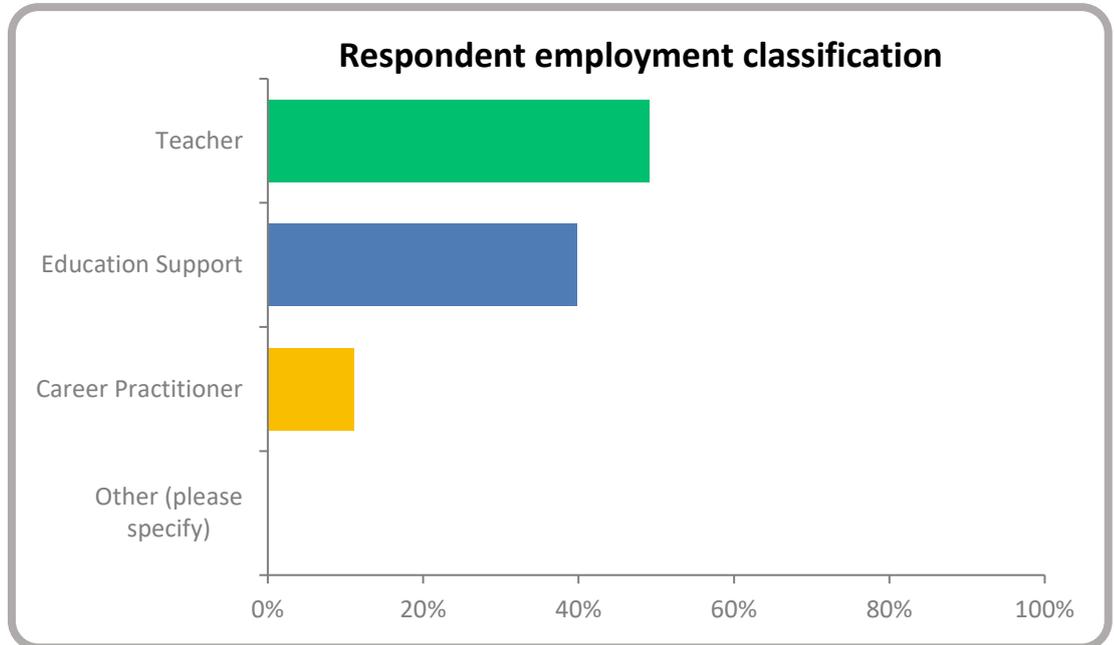
Over 50% of survey respondents identified they had registered on the Career Institute's Australian Register for Professional Career Development Practitioners. While the register is a key means for professionals to identify their standing and CICA endorsed qualification, it is possibly of less interest to school employed practitioners who do not require this for their employment.



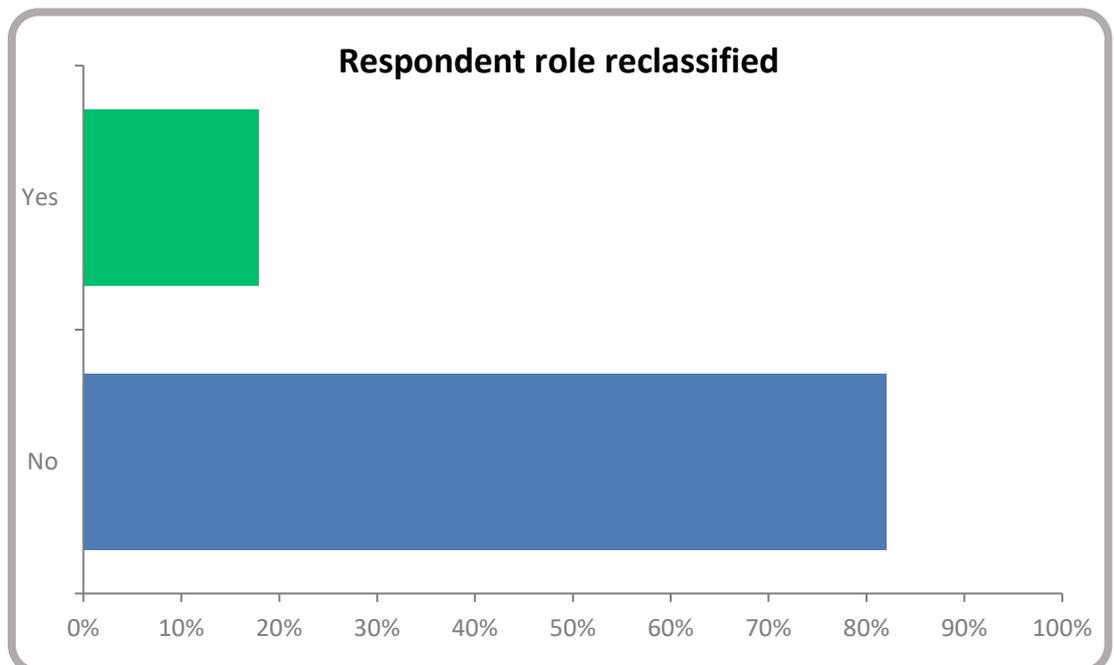
18% of respondents identified they were not sure if they were registered on the National Career Institute's Australian Register for Professional Career Development Practitioners indicated that the National Career Institute and CICA have more work to do to ensure that career practitioners understand the role of the register for the professional sector.

8. Employment Classification

Respondents were asked if they were currently employed as teachers or in an education support position. Nearly 50% responded they were teachers, 40% were classified as ESO and 11% were employed as career practitioners.

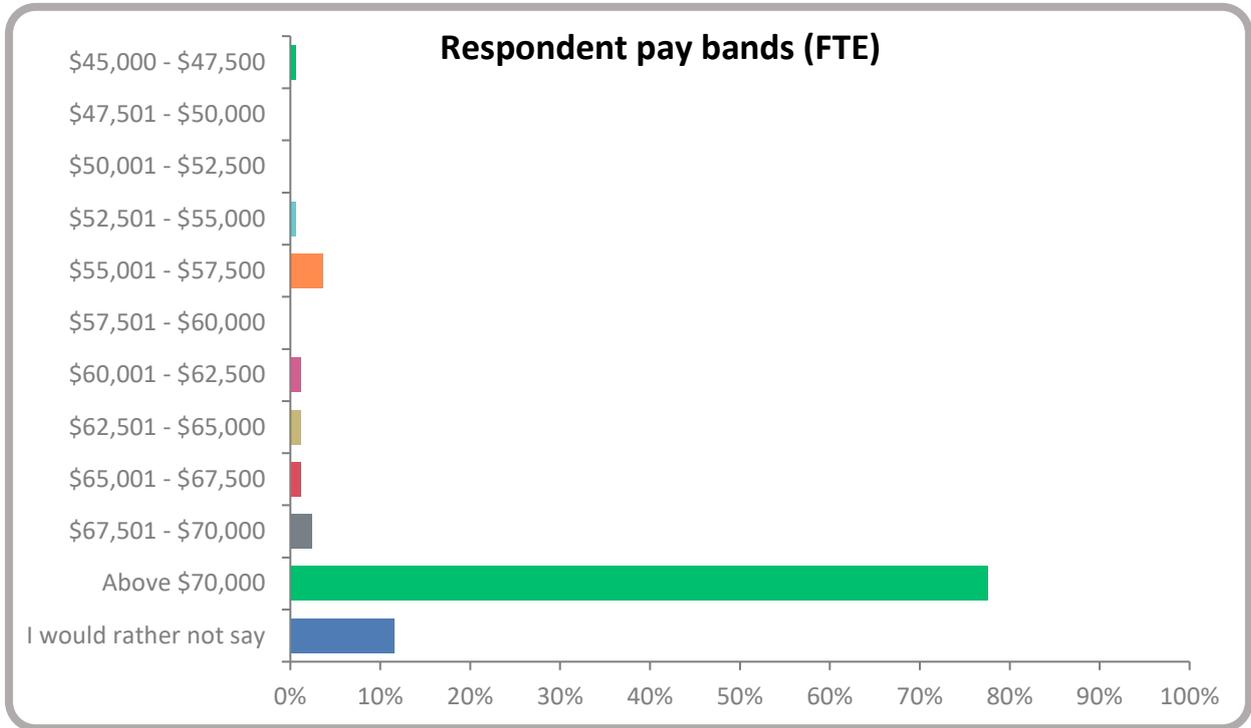


When asked if their role had been reclassified from a teaching position to Education Support, 18% answered yes. This is much lower than that reported in the 2021 research where nearly a third of respondents stated their position was reclassified from a teaching position.

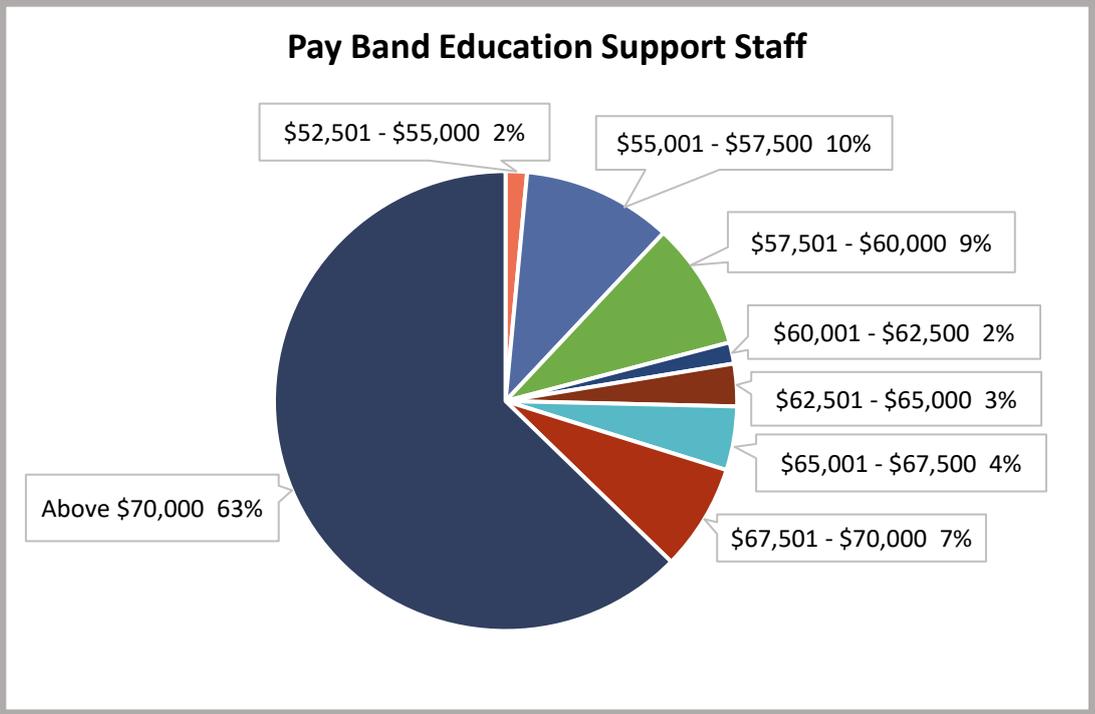


9. Full time equivalent salaries

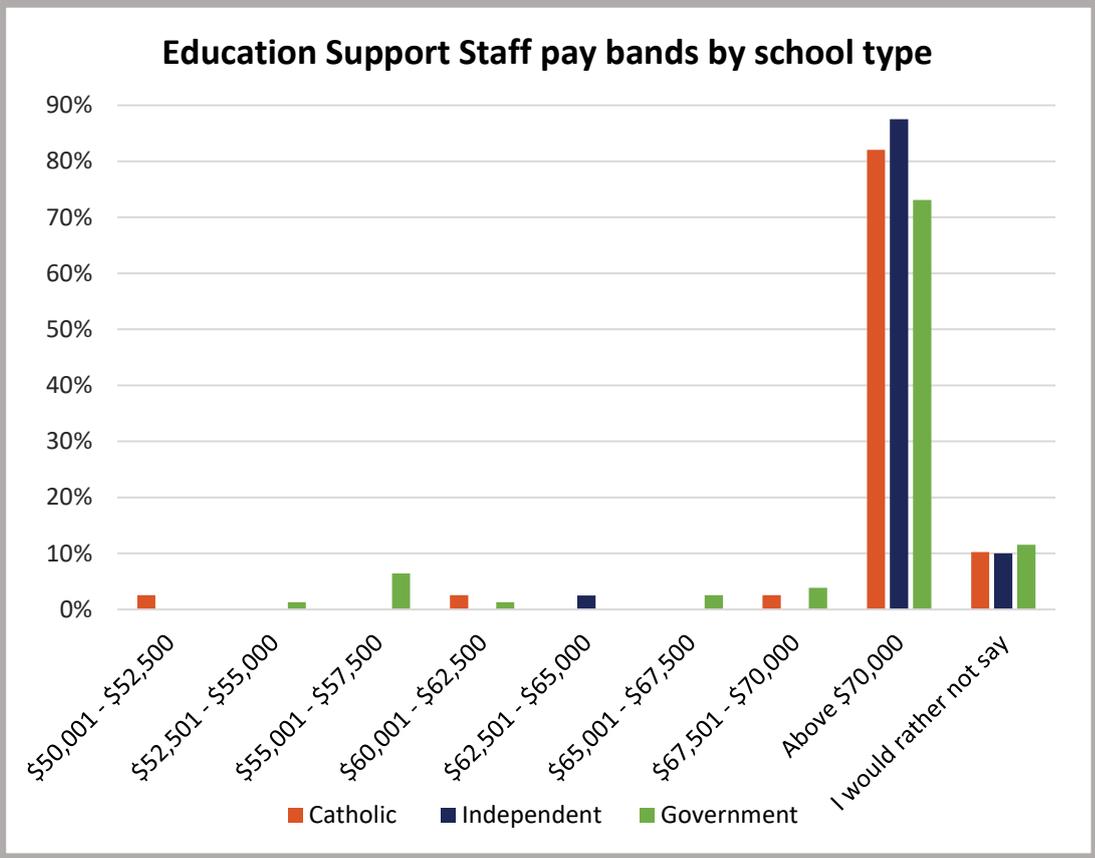
Full-time equivalent salaries were very low (under \$70,000) for 9% of respondents.



When comparing full-time equivalent salaries across the classifications of career practitioner, teacher and education support staff, there was greater variance in pay band amongst education support staff.



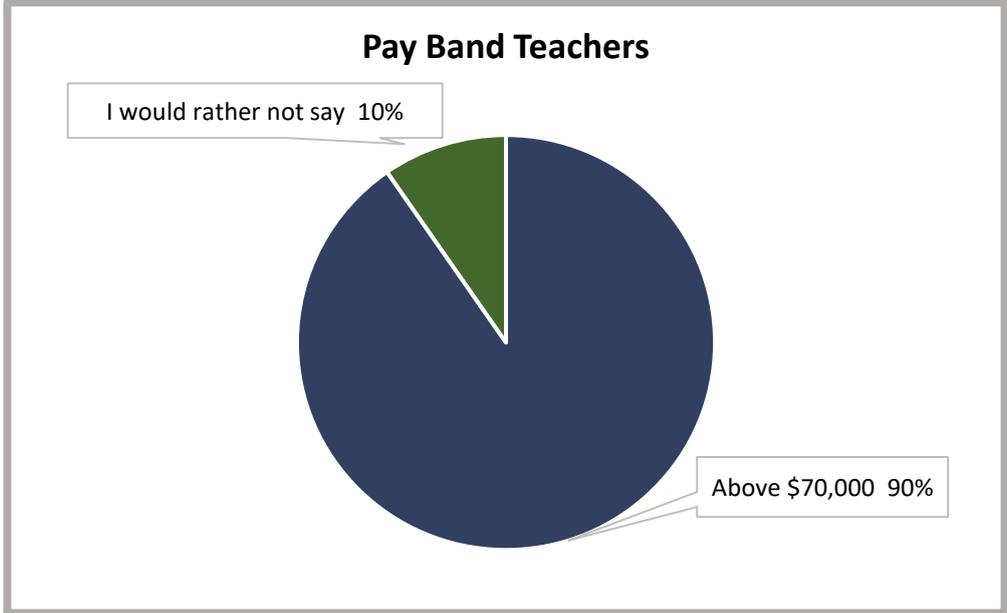
Respondents pay bands (FTE equivalent) were compared across school type:



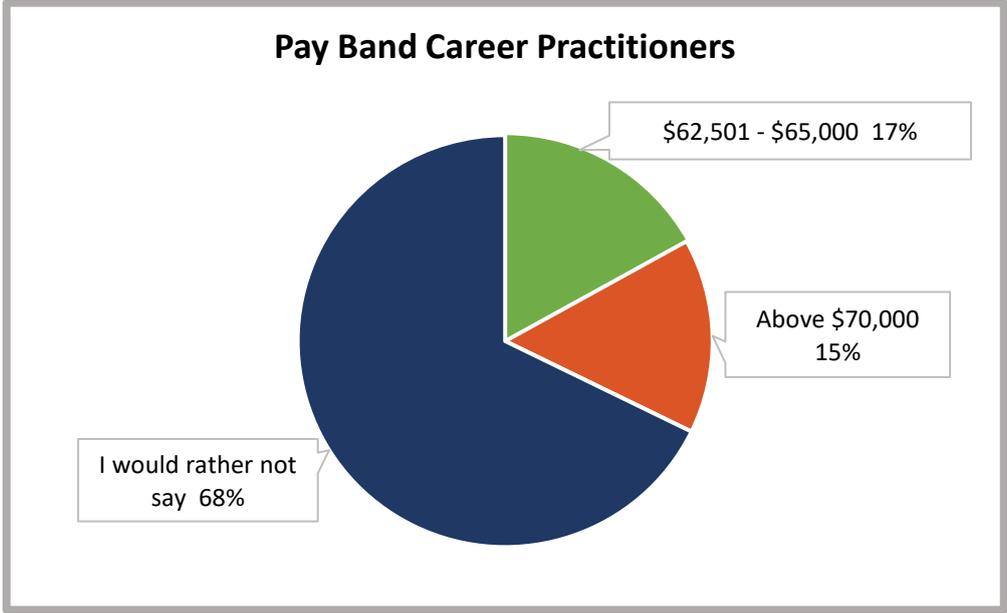
Seven of the career practitioners who reported their full-time equivalent pay rate was under \$60000 were all in education support positions. One example includes a practitioner working in a small regional centre in Catholic school with more than one career practitioner. They held a senior career title but were paid in the \$55001 to \$57500 full-time equivalent pay band. They held an AQF level 8 qualification in education.

Another respondent worked in a large regional centre government school. They supported 100 Year 9 students and students at the higher years including compulsory work experience, providing VET co-ordination, VTAC application support, university incursions, excursions, trips, expos. They are the only practitioner at the school and are paid between \$55001 and \$57500 full-time equivalent.

This pay band is about \$200 per week above the current average award wage of \$882.80 per week (www.fairwork.gov.au/pay-and-wages/minimum-wages accessed 23 October 2023). Conversely, 90% of teacher respondents were earning above \$70000 full-time equivalent:

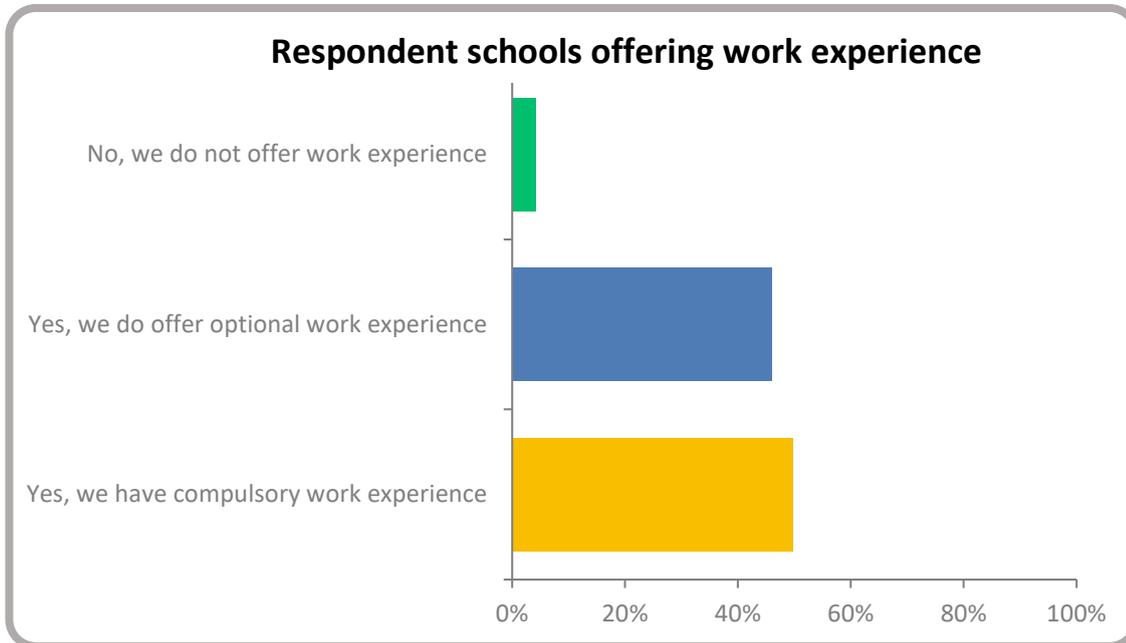


A significant number of career practitioners did not wish to disclose their salary. 17% identified their full-time equivalent earnings at equal to, or less than \$65000 (FTE).

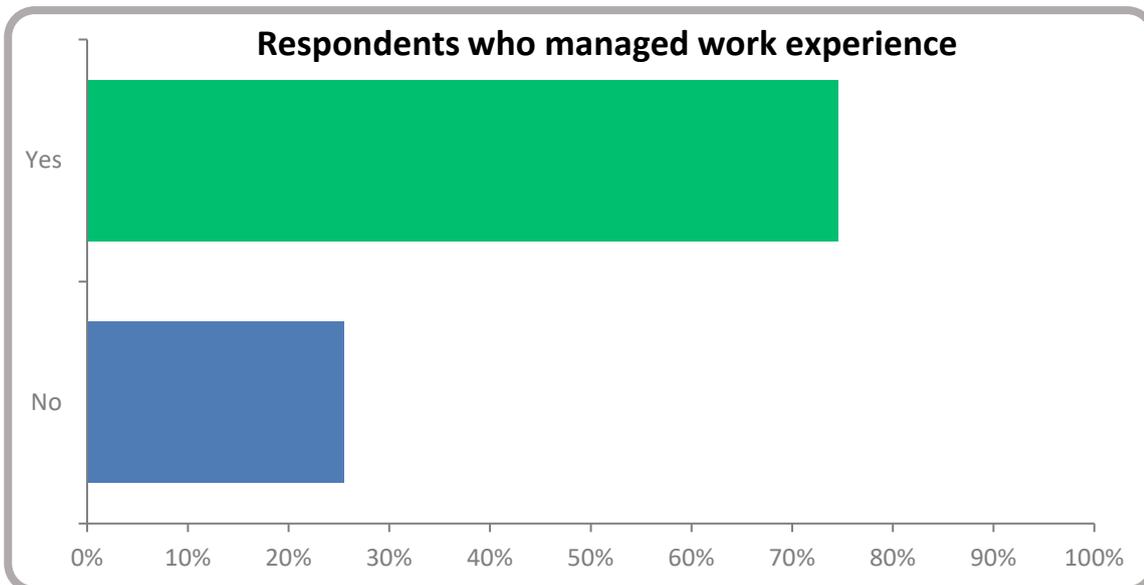


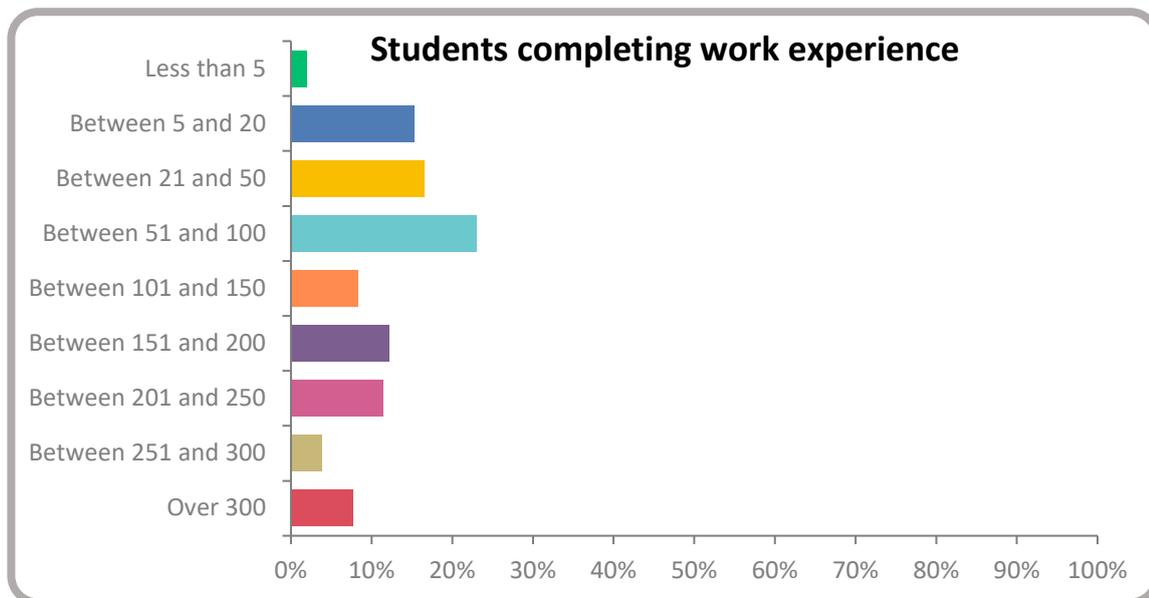
10. Work Experience and Structured Work Learning

Only 4% stated they did not offer work experience, 46% offered optional work experience, and 50% ran compulsory work experience.

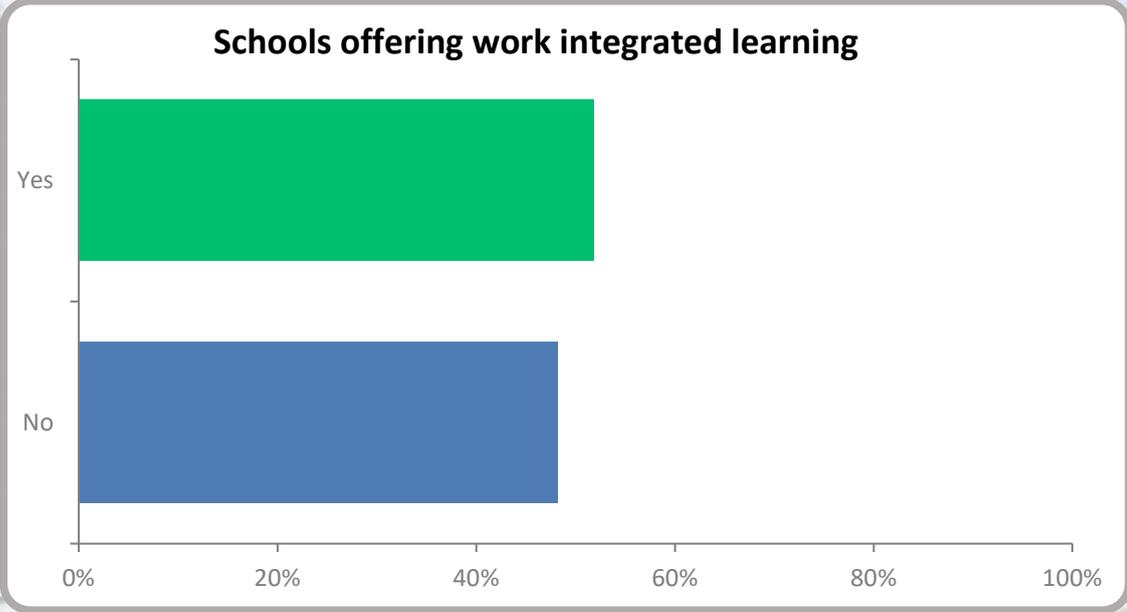
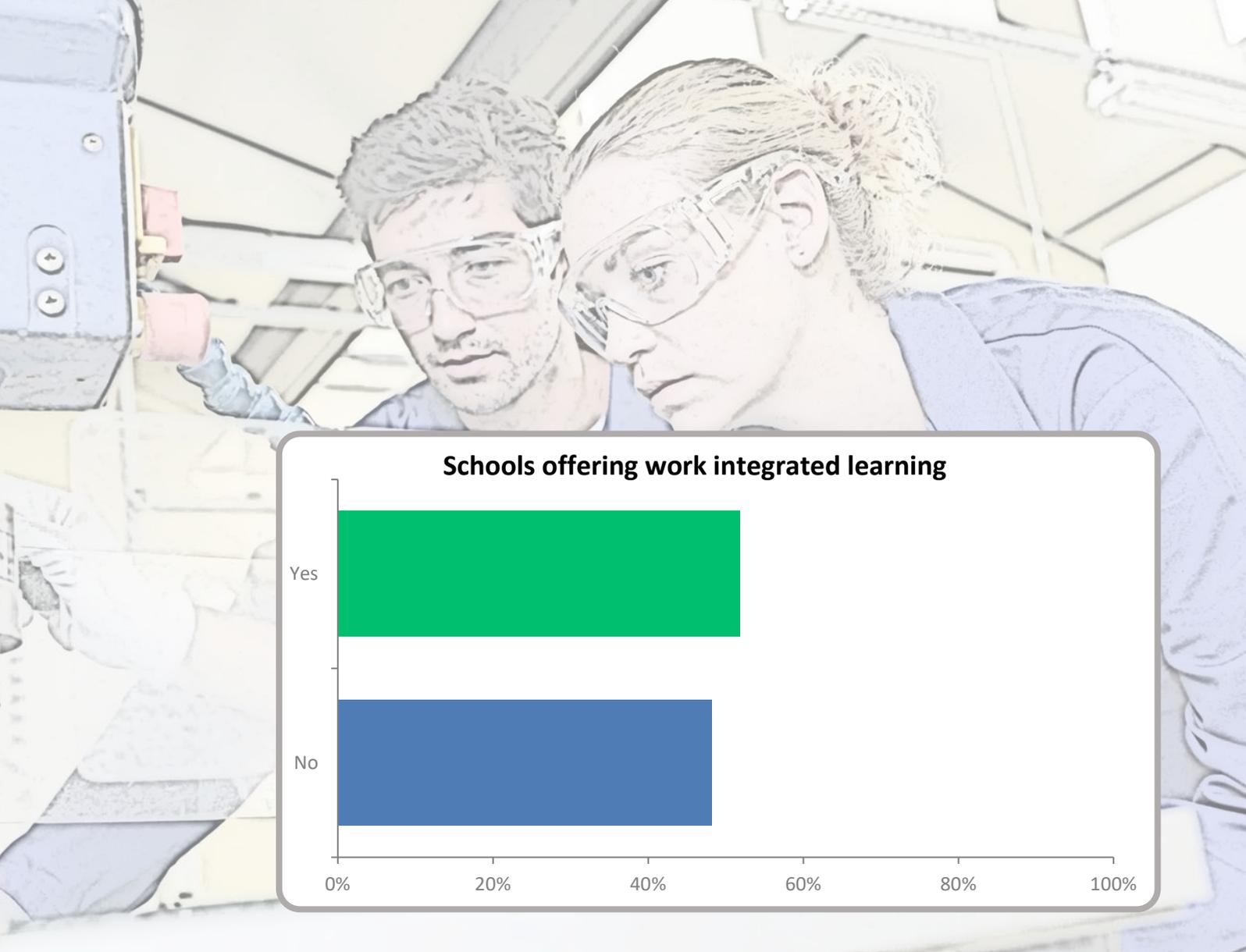


Of those responding that they had a work experience offering at school, 75% managed this:

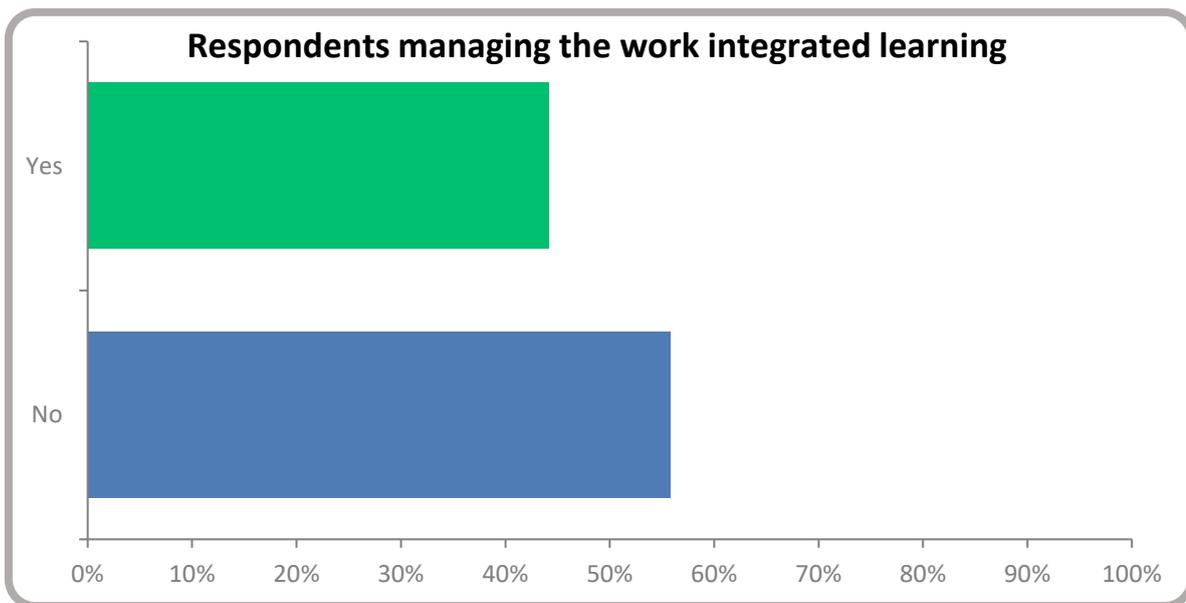




The number of students completing work experience varied considerably from less than 5 to over 300.



52% of respondents said that work integrated learning was offered at their school (chart above).

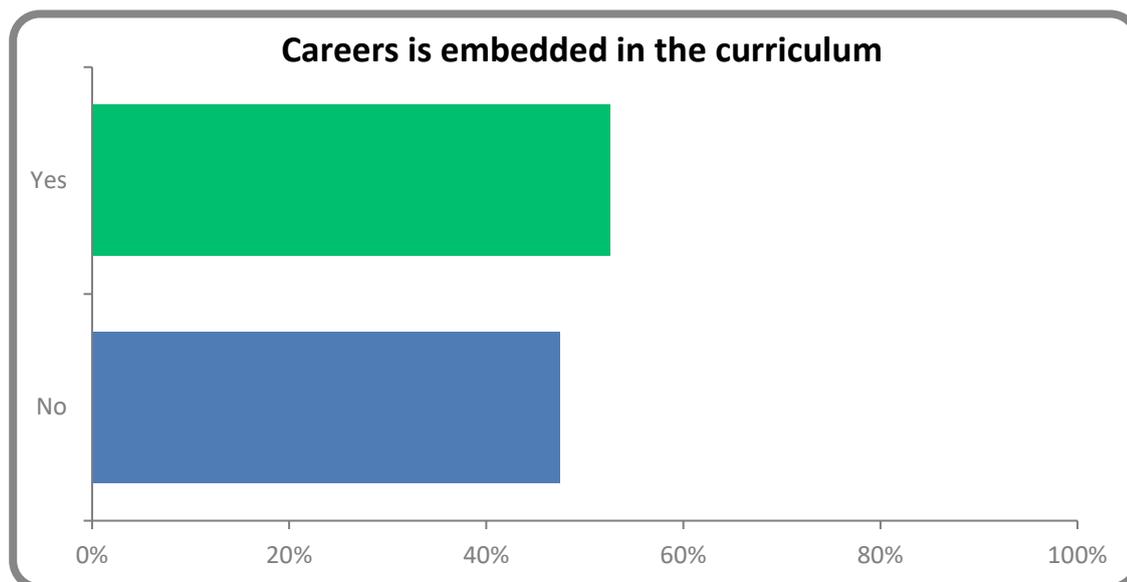


45% of those working in schools offering work integrated learning managed this at their school.

11. Leadership and Expectations

When it came to leadership support, 76% of respondents agreed that leadership was supportive of them in their role. However, 68% also noted their role had changed in the last 2-years and this required them to increase the services they provided in their career role. For those working in Government schools, only 39% could access their career education funding for careers work.

Over 50% of respondents identified that their school did have careers embedded in the curriculum. However, 73% identified that expectations had changed over the past two years.



Some respondents who identified that expectations had changed over the past two years cited a wide range of factors. Many were managing multiple issues and increased workloads across the board that impacted their ability to focus on the career role:

A VET Coordinator's role has increased largely due to all the recent changes including the new Funding & Applications/Enrolments process - New Connect classes requiring presentations/programs to be provided to teachers for classroom delivery - Student numbers increasing on a regular basis

A lot of catching up since Covid lockdown. Older students do not have careers interests or C.C.P's in place.

Additional student and parent meetings occurring across all year levels, but particularly in years 9 and 10, than compared with previous years.

Careers and VET Mentor groups support yard duty Attend camps

Increased number of students to deal with, especially those more at risk. Many of our year levels have increase from 200 to close to 400.

Delivery and management of the Morrisby, increased number of transitions and early school leavers (post covid), increased work with post school transitions. Providing support to staff about careers and pathways (staff are always changing). Changes in the TAFE sector including teacher shortages with mandated VET in the VM have created more work for career practitioners to find solutions.

Even though I have only been in the role for less than a year, the role and careers in general has grown substantially.

Greater involvement with disengaged students in Years 7 & 8.

I am full time - 3 days only to offer careers support to Year 11 and Year 12. I have 400 Year 12 students and close to 400 Year 11 students. I also have to mentor the Year 7-10 careers counsellor

who only has a day and a half to do her role. It is tragic that many principals do not understand the incredible value add we bring to the students. We LOWER anxiety and stress, INCREASE self-confidence and hope in the future. We contribute to better school results. The role is undervalued!!!!

Little to no clarity of expectation

More parent student interactions. More intervention interviews with students who are disengaged from their learning and not attending.

Prior to moving into the careers space in 2023, I was only coordinating work experience.

Run some Year 11 group sessions to discuss carers in clusters

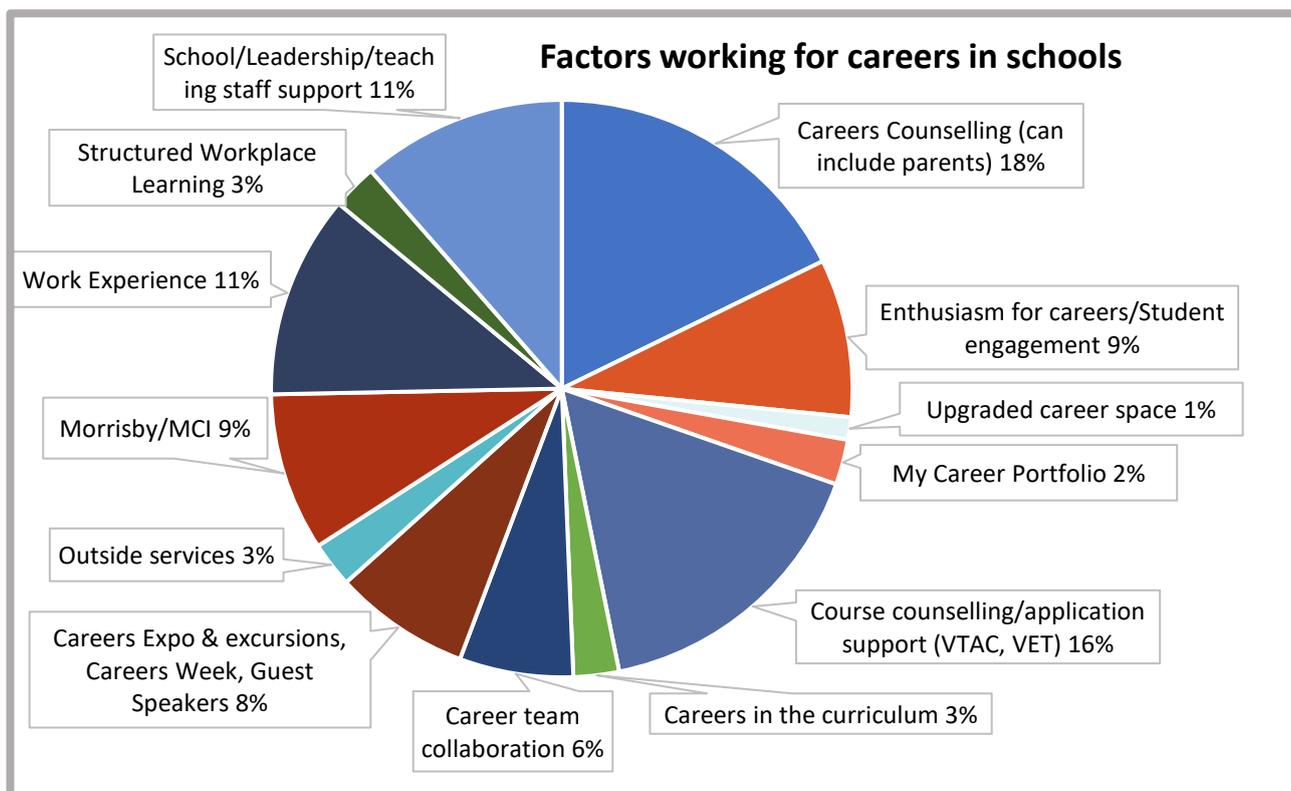
Strengthening VET pathways (VET co-ordination, less success in placing student in courses) and VCE Reforms (introduction of VCE), managing parental expectations for assistance with SWL, increased difficulties finding work experience placements, more emphasis on tracking students and following up students with school exemptions, finding alternative pathways for disengaged students.

VASS Administrator, VET workload increase, admin person removed so this has been absorbed, Reducing Early Leavers, CEPI, understanding school reform (with no one officially leading)



12. Supportive Factors and Barriers

When asked what was supporting the careers service at their school to work well, a wide range of factors were identified:



Several respondents said they were still establishing some of their career services. One respondent noted that a lack of communication and commitment from teaching staff sharing their skills with ES staff was problematic. Below is a selection of verbatim comments provided by respondents:

Having partnerships with organisations, such as Geared4Careers

I do everything in Careers, and I do it all well, what is lacking is more time in front of students

Knowledge of what careers offers

Level of support we provide students even though stretched thin due to student numbers, incredible programs and experiences of work available to students, visible - more and more students are accessing our services.

Me, I am working very well despite my extreme workload and lack of support. The Counselling and support I provide to the students is working as they feel listened to and acknowledged

Our coordination and timing of events

Outcomes for students are positive, other staff have observed engagement

Staff are keen to learn how to integrate into their program

Students exit to destinations of their choice

Support to Yr12s transitioning beyond high school

We can still deliver services, despite the cutback in both time and budget

We manage to do most of the compulsory stuff

Work Experience can be undertaken at any time. The mentor teachers deliver an embedded part of the careers program. I am supported to study the Grad Cert.

Year 10 Careers program

We have a dedicated 1 period per week for a class that can be used to deliver pathways-related curriculum. We also have an LT dedicated to careers and pathways who oversees the work we do. It's also valuable to have both CPs employed as teachers.

Year 11/12 booking system... Morrisby implementation (but not use in years 10/11/12)

Involvement in middle years meetings/planning, flexibility to see students during class times, Programs we use, e.g. Career Tools, The Careers Department, Compass Newsletter, having 2 qualified CPs to discuss issues and planning

I love supporting the Year 11 and 12 students and consistently receive glowing feedback from students and parents. To save money, I was made an ES employee after close to 30 years as a Careers Counsellor being paid as a teacher. I actually take careers sessions with every Year 12 class at the beginning of Term 1 - teach 30 classes!!! The students really appreciate what I do for them - as do their parents. We have close over 2000 students here! My time combined with the Year 7-10 person is not even ONE full time allotment!!! Say no more. The situation is dire - in many schools. We hear media discussions of how important careers education is but this is what happens in a so-called top government school. We do what we can.

Having qualified career counsellors providing the right advice and support (as opposed to teachers) has been a positive change

Most things are a Yr 10 career program that has a timetabled 1 hour per class. Support at the school makes it very easy to implement and run programs.

The Year 9 Career Taster Program. Other career taster opportunities are being developed across the Year groups but need further embedding.

Individual Careers meetings with all year 12 students; delivery of a compulsory week of work experience at Year 10 and a preparatory work experience program delivered at the end of year 9; career development sessions for the whole year 10 cohort

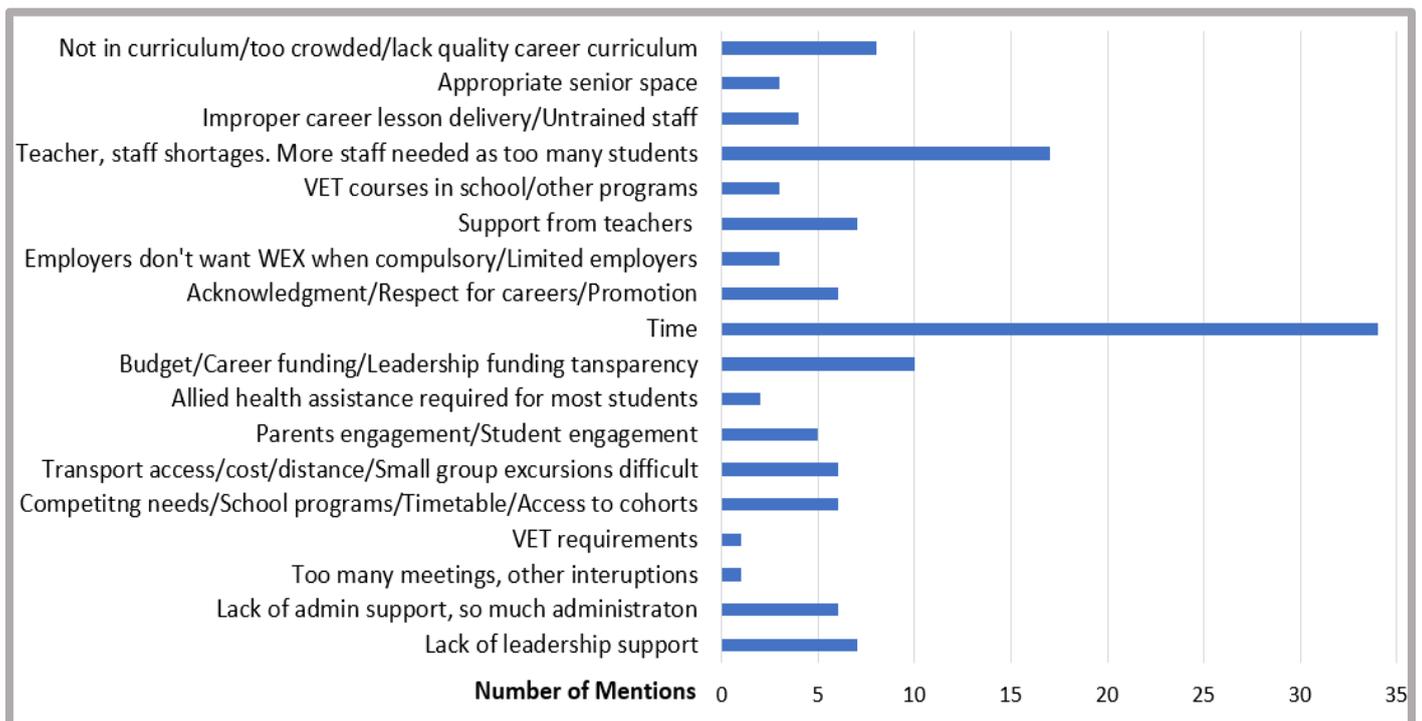
1:1 Careers Counselling with all students at Yrs 10 and 12, VTAC, SEAS, Scholarship Support, Pre-Course Selection Assignments and Work Experience at Yr 10

Being a member of the senior school leadership team means I have a strong voice to represent the needs of students from a careers/pathways perspective/lens and have a valued voice where I have a lot of input into how we support students whilst at school and in preparing for life beyond school.

Structured Workplace Learning, student engagement in part time work and pathway planning

Opportunities for students to participate in excursions and workshops to explore possible future career options. All year 12 students have a 1:1 appointment at least once, but as many times as they wish. VM students have a minimum of two 1:1 career appointment

A range of barriers facing careers services in schools were identified and included the following:



A selection of barriers to career services in schools included:

- Lack of leadership support
- Lack of teacher engagement/access to teachers to help them deliver career content
- Not enough time
- Too many students and not enough career practitioners
- Competing curriculum demands
- Too much administrative work
- Non-Awareness or lack of appreciation and respect for career practitioners
- Lack of morale amongst practitioners due to pay scales and the wide discrepancy in pay
- Unsure of the career funding from leadership
- No space to run something for the cohort

Time and resourcing were significant issues and respondents noted the dual role that careers played in many schools. There were concerns about not being able to fit students in for the appointments they wanted, being unable to embed a great career service for students, having everything seems to be 'flicked to careers', finding time amongst other programs, and careers being an ever-increasing role. The ratio of practitioners was also an issue

Time. Lots of time goes into administrative work, that's because there are only two of us in a school of 2000+ students, around 30-40% of work is admin.

Staff to student ratio 2 Practitioners to 1853 students

We have 1300 students in years 9-12 and 2.5 staff; need dedicated and qualified support staff; need space in the curriculum

Leadership acknowledging that there needs to be trained staff delivering careers counselling. Currently we have two recently qualified practitioners, yet neither of us has time allocated to delivering this to students.

13. Other feedback about conditions for career practitioners in schools

The last survey question asked: *Is there any other feedback that would support this research into conditions for career practitioners in schools?*

The question allowed respondents to provide open feedback about what was important to the role/service and what needed to be advocated for on behalf of school career services to support the needs of students. Many responses centered around mandating minimum conditions, particularly for career practitioners in education support positions. Other factors included accessing career education funding in government schools, and ongoing staff to student ratios mandated at an acceptable level for proper career education resourcing in schools.



A common theme was the wide disparity in pay range for career practitioners doing the same job. Respondents felt there were no apparent rules governing how this and it needed addressing. The issue was particularly relevant for those working as ESOs and it made respondents feel disenfranchised and that their work was undervalued and not clearly understood. A number suggested that Principles needed to be directed to have at least one full time careers counsellor for a minimum number of students to establish a functional ratio. Others noted more time and more resources to deliver reasonable career services.

Without a career subject in the curriculum, alliances between teaching staff and career practitioners could be fraught as careers is seen as competing for face-to-face teaching/curriculum time. The lack of access to career funding in government schools, time and resourcing were issues frequently noted.

Although there are 2x Career Practitioners, one of us is also the VET Coordinator. A role that has expanded administratively over the last few years. If CEF was received more careers related excursions/presentations/class sessions could be organised, providing students with the opportunity to consider career pathways thus leading to increase in subject classroom engagement.

The difference in pay that Career practitioners doing the same jobs in government schools need to be addressed. They range from Range 2 to 5 and there are no clear rules governing this.

The rate of pay needs to be reflective of the responsibility we have within a school. ie) careers counselling and employment supports. Careers ES staff are the 2nd lowest paid in a gov school, yet our level of responsibility and commitment is equal to that of an LT or AP

Less meetings, less portals.

There is funding but we don't access it as are told the school can use the funding for anything really.

How our role is seen and classified within schools requires does not seem to reflect the level of services we're expected to provide.

When it comes to developing career related programs there should not be a distinction between teacher and education support capabilities. If a person is employed to develop career related programs and counsel students 1:1, then they should be on similar money to teachers. Education Support staff are capable of developing programs that teachers can then facilitate in the classroom and this needs to be recognised at the appropriate level.

More recognition of skills through pay and more time allocated.

There needs to be a mandated staff to student ration in schools and not issued as a guide only for Principals.

The variety of pay and work conditions for ES in the role of CP across schools needs to be addressed to make it more consistent.

Career Practitioners are often seen as a helpful "extra resource" when it is one of the most important roles in the school. The reason schools exist is to provide students with the education and skills they will need when they transition into the workforce. Preparing them for this transition is as important as any one of their academic subjects.

Once again, minimum pay scale for careers/pathways coordinators should be Level 1 Range 4. I have been sitting at the top of my range for 15 years. Being the only person at my school is challenging and means having to be across every aspect of careers every day. I spent 15 years at a well-resourced government school (only 11 - 12) and have come to a 7 - 12 3 years ago and it is incredibly difficult to cover all aspects of careers to every student as one person.

Students are really disengaged with the curriculum and so more are seeking alternative pathways out of the school system.

There is funding but we don't access it as are told the school can use the funding for anything really.

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There is funding but we don't access it as are told the school can use the funding for anything really.

A difference between Career Education and Career Counselling needs to be identified and highlighted.

CC working alongside learning curriculum will help students transition to work far easier than they do currently. The problem of disengaged students is increasing with no resources for transition, for students who haven't engaged in years and are not ready for adult education or work. At the end of the day, it should be recognised that the job of schools is to educate and prepare students to become adults, be independent and be able to transition to work or further study.

Careers curriculum is still at the bottom of the pile for many schools.

I feel that leadership supports the careers dept and views careers as an integral part of students' education.

I don't feel supported or involved in the school and I do not know what the budget is as it has never been provided to me. I did request the information.

I feel that there should be a set ratio of Career Practitioners to students for Principals to follow. I keep getting told that my salary is paid out of the Career Education Funding and that isn't enough to cover me let alone employ an additional education support admin person to assist in Careers

The education department needs to make careers a priority in the curriculum and ensure it is done.

We need rules for student:careers ratios. I think the E.S. version of the role needs to be reclassified. The work we do is worth more than where it fits on the pay scale

I am a non-teaching background careers practitioner. Five of our careers staff on a 41 week a year contract, as the school does not see a need to pay us the additional weeks of the year, despite us often working outside of Term time. I also have a huge problem with our classification being Education Support. We are more highly skilled than administration level and until this classification changes, we will continue to be paid and treated as admin staff. It's very upsetting that we are not treated on the same level as Teaching staff here at the school but are in fact seen as inferior and less qualified. Our salaries and contracts are not an accurate reflection of the highly skilled service we deliver to students and families. I really hope this changes in the coming years and we can be professionally recognised, more respected and more fairly remunerated on par with teachers.

Careers coordinators run an entire program and only get paid in the same range as a career practitioner with no management responsibilities. This would be the equivalent of a teacher doing coordination but just getting paid as a teacher. Carers Coordinators should be paid at Range 4.

We consider ourselves to be very lucky in our careers team, but do have to advocate regularly for the continuation of our program and time allowance.

Equity in pay for ES staff as compared to teachers in careers positions, same work but not paid the same despite ES staff having relevant qualifications and often have a wealth of knowledge and experience to bring to the job.



The language and assumption that Careers Practitioners who work within a school are teachers creates an us and them disparity. Career practitioners need to be recognised within the education system as highly skilled professionals, often with extensive industry experience and networks. A review of all governing Careers Associations. Is there a need for CICA, CDAA and ACCE?

We were once considered "best practice" and then as a result of a leadership change, staff were reduced from 3 full time CP's and admin to one part-time CP.

We need extra admin support. A lot of our time is taken up with photocopying, printing, scanning and data entry.

Please mandate conditions for practitioners in Catholic schools.

Budget does not appear to be an issue, I have never been refused a request, I am conscious of what I ask for though.

Excellent to be doing this - would be interesting to read in conjunction with the LLEN survey about work experience.

I would like to have feedback given as to why the AEU did not put in the 2022 agreement that careers should be at a minimum 1.4 level. It is still sitting at 1.3 and most jobs are still advertised at this level.

The career education funding that goes to schools, has been told to me by the Business Manager it goes into the schools bucket fund and is used for other purposes in schools and that I should not expect for this to be used for the purposes of careers.

Principals need to be directed to have at least one full time careers counsellor for every 1,000 students!!! There should be one for every 500 - so I have heard. this should be mandated by DET/someone!!! It will not happen until it is mandated.

CPs wages should be increased. Don't think other staff members understand the work we do.

Need more time to read through resources available.

I consider myself luckier than many others as we are better resourced than other schools, however, with 1600 in our school and also being responsible for VET, we are time poor. I think it is fair to say Principal Class need to understand better what our role entails, and the time needed to do it well. Also many teaching staff see Careers programs as intrusive on face to face learning time. Some see the program as 'fluff' and unimportant. Many teaching staff have gone to school then uni, then school to teach and some have no concept of the world of work outside schools.

Key Findings

Some respondents were well supported by leadership and noted that students enjoyed and felt helped by their services. However, many more respondents felt there was a general lack of support for their work. This resulted from a wide range of factors such as:

- not having a career subject to tie careers education onto
- a lack of leadership support and/or support from teachers for their work
- an underlying lack of understanding about the importance of careers education
- being given many other tasks to perform
- too many students and not enough career professionals
- no access to careers budget
- carrying a teaching load.

The many barriers to providing careers services indicate systemic failings in schools that impact Australia's ability to operationalise its career education policy. Australia has developed the Australian Blueprint for Career Development but the barriers to delivering quality career education and guidance in schools was linked by respondents to a limited understanding of the importance of career development in schools.

Many practitioners in government schools are unable to access their career funding for careers activities and this is unacceptable given its purpose and the focus of the Government on Australia's *Working Future* white paper. It confirms a disconnect at the strategic leadership level in schools between the function of schools and important government drivers of economic change.

For many ESO respondents, while their role had become busier, there were wide variations in their pay band that did not seem aligned to their level of work and responsibilities. This situation had not improved since the 2021 research and respondents felt the only solution was a mandated solution. In addition, many felt that their work was not valued and they needed to compete with the curriculum rather than work within it – a situation that may be difficult to change without a career education subject in the curriculum.

Overall, resourcing of career services in schools remains an ongoing issue as there is no minimum ratio provided for career practitioners to students in Victoria. Respondents noted that finding time in the curriculum, more headcount for career staff, budget/money for career resources and activities, and support for administration tasks were important. ACCE has strongly advocated for a ratio of 1 career professional to 450 students at the time of the 2017 inquiry, *Transforming career education in Victorian Government Schools'* inquiry based on many international ratios. While ACCE has maintained its position on this ratio, it is important to note that education systems in peer countries have moved to vastly improved career support such as of 1:185 or 1:250.

Importantly, career education connects students to their learning. It can build hope and provide a connection to a life beyond school, which is particularly important for disengaged students and those at risk of not being in education, employment, or training (NEET). With more students reportedly becoming disconnected from school, now is the time to make a serious change to the way we approach career education – career education should not be a national afterthought.

Recommendations

1. Career education funding is provided to all Victorian government secondary schools for career education activities for students in years 7 to 12. Ensuring that career education funding is only used by school careers services for career activities is critical.
2. Australia should mandate a minimum professional career staffing ratio of 1:450 for career practitioners to students.
3. Provide training to school leadership so they understand the importance of careers education and guidance for students and that it is the fundamental work of schools.
4. Make schools responsible for delivering a minimum suite of career education and guidance services annually and fund this accordingly (including annual reporting).
5. Include a career education subject in the curriculum from primary school to enable students to learn about the world of work and make informed career choices.
6. Ensure an introduction to careers education for teachers is included in initial teacher education or as a short compulsory professional development unit and ensure Principals are trained to understand the importance of career education.
7. Promote career education and career development to the community so there is increased understanding of its important role in successful transitioning for young people and adults.
8. Establish stronger connections between schools and industry to ensure students can access essential workplace learning and experience.
9. Provide systems that reduce the administration burden for school career services that support student workplace learning and work experience.
10. The Department of Education and other school sectors should ensure career professionals are treated with respect for the work they do by ensuring professional qualification recognition and pay scales consistent with this.

