




SVA PERSPECTIVES

Education



One million people live in disadvantage in Australia today. Each year billions of dollars are poured into social services and reform programs across welfare, education and health and yet so many people continue to experience disadvantage.

SVA works to improve the lives of people in need. Our unique approach focuses on understanding the structural causes behind persistent disadvantage, then finding and supporting the innovative approaches that can create systemic change. Our practice is evidence based; a discipline we apply to every facet of our organisation.

By offering funding, investment and advice, we support partners across sectors to increase their social impact. Since 2002, we have worked in partnership with community service organisations, philanthropists, governments and businesses to help improve the lives of people in need. Through our work, we have developed a practical understanding of what it takes to tackle disadvantage.

People and organisations that create real impact have a deep understanding of the environment they are operating in. This means being clear on the exact issue they are trying to address and understanding who else is operating in the ecosystem. They design and deliver their programs and services based on evidence of what works best.

High-impact organisations contribute to system change. They introduce innovative approaches, work collaboratively, share their knowledge so others can learn from them (both successes and failures) and jointly advocate for change.

As part of our commitment to driving system change, SVA has developed a series of papers in four focus areas; Education, Employment, Housing and First Australians. We have combined our practical experience with publicly available data and research to present our perspective. In each paper we set out our vision for the future, a summary of the issue, actions required to achieve the vision, a discussion of the drivers of better outcomes and small snapshots of SVA's work.

We hope that these papers spark debate, innovation and collaboration.

Everyone has a role to play. We invite you to join us in building and sharing the knowledge base of what works best to improve the allocation of funding, increase the impact of services and change lives.

Rob Koczkar
CEO
Social Ventures Australia

SVA's vision

SVA shares the vision articulated in the Melbourne Declaration of an Australian education system that develops the intellectual, social and moral wellbeing of young people as well as contributing to the economic prosperity and social cohesion of the nation.¹

At present Australian children don't have an equal opportunity to access a high-quality education, with children from disadvantaged backgrounds likely to start behind and be at high risk of falling further. SVA has developed an evidence-based perspective on the actions and drivers required to promote equity and a high quality education system for all.

This includes ensuring that home, community and formal learning environments all support learning. It also means harnessing the drivers for improving education outcomes, particularly by supporting effective teaching, from ages 0-5, through formal schooling and in the school-to-work transition (including further education).

The issue

Educational outcomes are influenced by a person's socioeconomic status. Those who experience disadvantage have a much higher risk than the general population of poor education outcomes.

Education alone cannot address underlying disadvantage but SVA believes there should be an equal opportunity for all children to receive a high-quality education, tailored to their needs, to maximise the chance for them to develop the skills to participate fully in society (the 'Education Goal'). High-quality education is the path to a sustainable, independent and meaningful livelihood.

An individual's lifetime earning capacity is largely determined by the age of 18 and education is one of the most important contributors.² Children who do not receive a good education are at greater risk of later unemployment, earn less and are less likely to participate in the labour force.³ They are also more likely to be involved in crime⁴ and to become disadvantaged parents.

There is a strong and well documented correlation between education, participation and productivity.⁵ For each extra year of education, a worker's earnings rise by 5.5% to 11%, all other things being equal, and each extra year of education may raise productivity by 3% to 6%. If the percentage of young people completing year 12 rose from 80% to 90%, gross domestic product would be \$1.8 b higher in 2020.⁶

Our Education Goal is in two distinct but related parts; (i) ensuring equal opportunity and (ii) providing high-quality education. We need to address both as there is little benefit if disadvantaged students have equal access to an education that is not appropriate for the modern economy. And disadvantaged students are also likely to fare worse than more advantaged young people who have the social capital to mitigate the impact of a misaligned formal education.⁷



1. EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

Children with a disadvantaged background do not have an equal opportunity to access Australia's education offerings. A 2015 Mitchell Institute report on educational opportunity in Australia⁸ illustrates both the strong correlation of disadvantage with poor educational performance and the potential for great schooling to 'make up the gap' in attainment.

Disadvantage affects every stage of schooling, even readiness to attend on day one. Those in the lowest socioeconomic quintile are more than twice as likely not to be 'school ready' as students in the highest (31.7% versus 15.2%)⁹ and the differences are greatest in the aspects that matter most for academic achievement. In the middle years of schooling, those whose parents did not complete year 12 are 3.72 times more likely to be missing out than students with at least one parent with a university degree (49.5% v 13.3%)¹⁰. For year 12 attainment the socioeconomic gap is as much as 28% between the lowest and highest and about 40% of young people with low SES backgrounds do not complete year 12 (or equivalent)¹¹.

On average, disadvantaged children perform below their peers and are more likely to drop out before completing year 12.¹² By the age of 15, students in the bottom socioeconomic quartile can be almost three years behind those in the top quartile.¹³

There is a strong over-representation of key groups in those who perform less well in schools. The gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students for year 12 completion is more than 40 percentage points¹⁴. In the OECD's PISA 2012 survey, Indigenous Australians scored so much lower in mathematical, scientific and reading literacy that the score indicated they were about two and a half years behind their non-Indigenous colleagues in all three categories.¹⁵ The survey also showed that metropolitan schools have more high performers and fewer low performers than those in more remote areas.¹⁶ A huge 75% of young people in the juvenile justice system dropped out of school before year 10.¹⁷ And, despite more than 90% of children with a disability attending a mainstream school, only 36% complete year 12.¹⁸

Australia has a stronger link between performance and socioeconomic status than the average OECD country. Nearly 60% of the most disadvantaged students in Australia are in schools classed as disadvantaged – well above the OECD average and substantially higher than in any comparable OECD country.

2. HIGH-QUALITY EDUCATION

The Grattan Institute argues that education is the single most important policy area to get right because 'better education has vital non-economic benefits such as contributing to wellbeing, health, social mobility and reduced crime rates.'¹⁹ So we need to ensure that we are building an education system that equips children to succeed in an increasingly competitive world.

Worryingly, the data on student outcomes suggests that Australian students' academic performance has not improved in the past decade. On the whole, NAPLAN data has been largely flat since 2008, PISA data shows declines in Australian students' performance in relative terms (compared with high performers) as well as static or declining performance for Australian students in absolute terms.²⁰ It is clear that there is more work to do if we are to meet our 'national aspiration of a world-class education system'²¹.

A total of 40% of the workforce is below the minimum literacy and numeracy standards needed to function in a knowledge economy.²² In the 21st century, improving standards to world best practice would add up to 0.7% to GDP every year.²³

Drivers of better outcomes

SVA believes that certain conditions and actions are more effective than others in moving us towards the Education Goal. Based on the evidence summarised later in this paper, we consider these to be the key drivers of better outcomes.

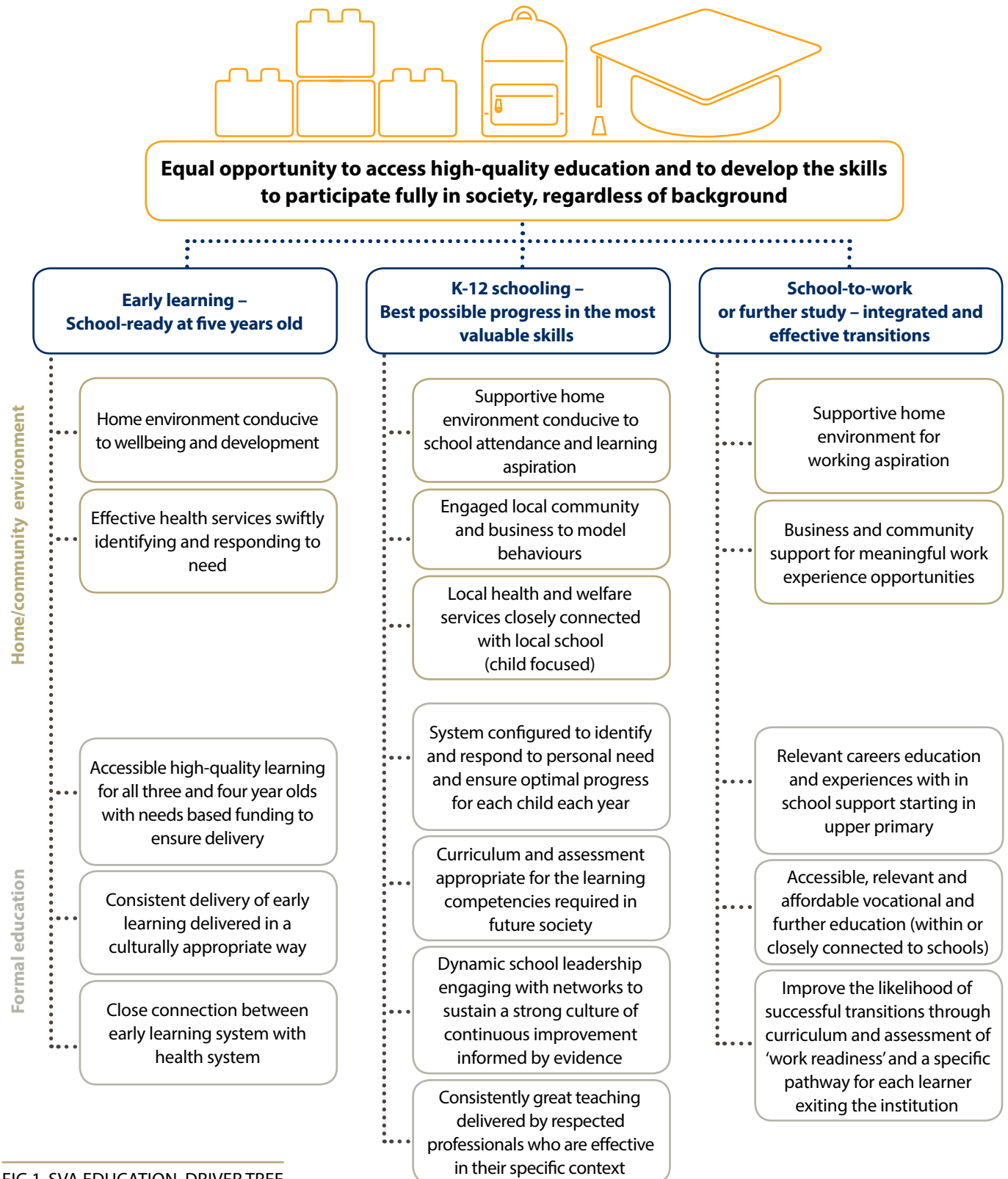


FIG 1. SVA EDUCATION DRIVER TREE

Actions required

We need three things across all chronological stages:

1. Involvement of the wider community (healthcare, family and business) in supporting activities to enable and support the impact of formal education.
2. A substantial upgrade to formal education models so that they are teaching the skills and creating the employment pathways required for participation in the 21st century economy.
3. A strong and healthy evidence ecosystem where all education programs and initiatives are developed from an evidence base and appropriately evaluated for ongoing improvement.

Within each chronological stage we need specific action and support:

Early learning – school ready by 5 years old

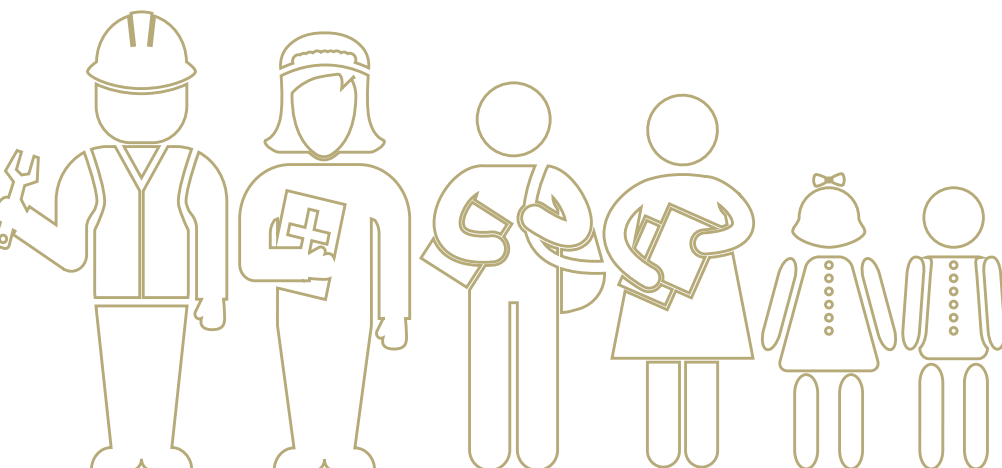
4. Home environment that is conducive to wellbeing and development in crucial early years supported by effective health services swiftly identifying and responding to need.
5. High-quality early learning that is closely connected to the health system available to all with strong subsidies (close to zero cost) for disadvantaged families.

K-12 schools – best possible progress in the most valuable skills

6. Home environment remains critical to ensuring attendance and learning aspiration and must remain connected to other service providers, particularly for those experiencing disadvantage.
7. The education system widens its approach on relevant skills and knowledge for the 21st century and is reconfigured to respond to personal need and individual achievement rather than yearly attainment.
8. School leaders support teachers to deliver great learning opportunities underpinned by a strong evidence base of impact and improvement.

School to work or further study – integrated and effective transitions. Transition from school is a crucial dropping-off point that must be picked up both by schools and the employment community

9. Schools must normalise employment and careers options for disadvantaged young people, co-locate vocational activities in standard school settings and ensure a tailored individual pathway from school to the next stage of training, education or employment.
10. Governments and the employment community must invest in and support programs that create opportunities for exposure and experience to nurture aspiration and allow for meaningful transitions to real work.







Understanding the drivers of better outcomes

EARLY LEARNING – SCHOOL-READY AT 5 YEARS OLD

THE CHALLENGE

Australian education is missing the opportunity to build strong learning foundations in early childhood. The learning progress of young children from disadvantaged communities is most affected by poor and disconnected early childhood education and health systems.

Home environment conducive to wellbeing and development

The home is the child's first (and most influential) learning environment. Features imprinted in the early years in the home have an enormous impact on the capacity for future learning and achievement. A child who is developmentally vulnerable at the start of school is likely to have poor outcomes throughout their life.

A rich learning environment at home helps children reach cognitive development milestones, and have better reading, vocabulary, general information and letter recognition skills – all factors that contribute to educational attainment.²⁴ Comorbidities such as domestic violence, abuse, parental addiction or unstable housing can all contribute to a home environment that is not conducive to learning and development.

Creating a home environment that fosters early learning requires a combination of **universal** services (such as maternal and child health), **targeted** early intervention programs for families at high risk, and **intensive** support for families experiencing violence, substance abuse, insecure housing and other forms of social exclusion.

Early intervention programs that have been shown to be effective include:²⁵

- The Pathways to Prevention Project,²⁶ which established structured interventions with family, school and community to improve outcomes for disadvantaged youth, particularly in antisocial behaviour.
- The government-funded Brighter Futures (NSW)²⁷ and Referral for Active Intervention (Qld) programs have been shown to keep families out of the child protection system and to reduce damaging influences.
- In addition to mitigating home factors that disrupt a child's development, the evidence also suggests that improving parental capacity and relationships can significantly influence a child's ability to learn.²⁸
- The Positive Parenting Project reduces stress levels, depression, anxiety and conflict.²⁹
- Improving the education levels of primary carers (particularly single parents) to bachelor's degree or the equivalent improves the development of children because parents spend more time speaking with and teaching children.³⁰
- While the type of parental relationship (married, de facto, gay, straight) does not affect the outcomes for children, its stability does and parenting programs that account for this are more effective.³¹





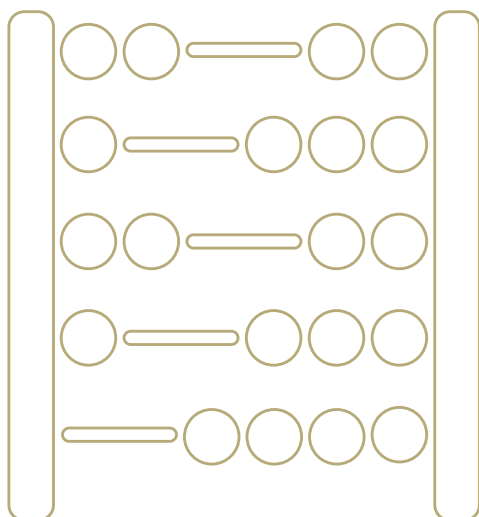
Effective health services swiftly identifying and responding to need

It is important that children do not miss out on the health services they need so that they are not placed at further disadvantage. Health problems or developmental delays affect meaningful learning.

Early childhood diseases are often poorly diagnosed and treated in disadvantaged communities. This is particularly concerning where long-term impacts such as hearing loss are preventable. Similarly, diagnosing disabilities and mental health disorders is often delayed in disadvantaged communities due to lack of service, particularly in regional and remote communities.³²

Ensuring proper health checks and diagnoses are carried out is more challenging when the parent/carer is not as aware of their importance, or is not as independently capable of using the services, or has previously had poor experiences with government agencies.

Rates of health screening and diagnosis for early childhood diseases and disabilities need to improve. This is particularly important for children in disadvantaged communities. Improving participation in early childhood education and mandated initial health screenings will speed up identification and diagnosis and ensure children receive the right support from their first contact with the education system. However, initial screenings and diagnoses are only the first step. The appropriate interventions, programs and treatments must then be accessible. Telehealth and virtual health solutions offer new opportunities for rural and remote communities to receive health services.



Accessible high-quality learning for all three and four-year-olds with needs-based funding to ensure delivery

High-quality early learning has a significant positive effect on a child's development, wellbeing and readiness for school. For children from disadvantaged backgrounds, it has the double benefit of reducing risk factors at home.

Children who do not receive a high-quality early education are:

- 25% more likely to drop out of school.
- 40% more likely to become a teenage parent.
- 60% more likely never to attend higher education.
- 70% more likely to be arrested for a violent crime.³³

International cost-benefit analysis shows that for every dollar spent on effective early childhood intervention, there is as much as a US\$7 return to society.³⁴

Australia's provision of early childhood education is poor.³⁵ Only 0.1% of GDP is spent on early childhood educational institutions, compared with 0.8% or more in countries such as Chile, Denmark and Luxembourg.³⁶

While high-quality early learning is important for all children, it has the greatest benefit for those from disadvantaged families. PwC estimates the economic benefit of investing in vulnerable children at \$13.3 billion in cumulative additional contribution to GDP to 2050. This is larger than the already substantial \$10.3 billion benefit to GDP from children receiving a quality education and care program.³⁷ For vulnerable families, affordable childcare also lets primary carers participate in the workforce, which adds income and strengthens the home environment.

Yet disadvantaged families and vulnerable children are less likely to attend early education and care. Such families are more price sensitive³⁸, find the provision of early learning doesn't meet their needs, particularly if they work part time or as casuals, and confront extra barriers to access.³⁹ The Productivity Commission Inquiry into Childcare and Early Childhood Learning acknowledges the need to improve the system and states that low-income women and their families face the greatest barriers to work.⁴⁰

Australia needs a universal early learning system for all three and four-year-olds. The system must be structured so that disadvantaged children can attend, irrespective of their parent's work status. This level of support will need to include a deep subsidy (close to full cost) for those who cannot afford it. In one comparison Australia ranked third last among 25 OECD countries in an evaluation of early childhood programs⁴¹.

Early learning is improving through the implementation of the National Quality Framework and the National Quality Standard. The principles of equity, inclusion and diversity that underlie the Education and Care Services National Law need to take account of the circumstances of disadvantaged families. This includes ensuring that rural areas have adequate options, that waiting lists are minimised, and that service quality is high, regardless of the socioeconomic status of the community.⁴²

Early learning centres should also be a 'soft entry point' for further support to disadvantaged families. Early learning centres can be a connection point between families and support services by finding out when a family needs help and referring them to services offering additional support.



Consistent delivery of early learning in a culturally appropriate way

For early learning to be effective it must be appropriate to the culture and setting of the child receiving it. According to UNESCO, 'the best results are gained when ECCE [Early Childhood Care and Education scheme] caters to the child's holistic development – facilitated by multi-sectoral collaboration – and provides developmentally and contextually relevant educational experiences'.⁴³ Access to early learning is not enough to improve educational achievement in Australia. Consistently high-quality learning must be delivered in an appropriate form.

Learning that is not tailored or responsive to the culture and setting of the children receiving it will not have the anticipated benefit and will waste resources. Children whose language background is other than English (LBOTE) may need extra instruction. Recent migrants and refugees are particularly susceptible. Indigenous families are another group whose strong cultural traditions should be recognised and reforms of early learning should take account of the need for direct involvement of Indigenous organisations in the delivery of early learning.

Culturally diverse communities often experience disadvantage and because of the complexities of their learning experience, they are less likely to achieve good outcomes. Learning services need to be culturally suitable to increase the enrolment, attendance and responsiveness of children and their families. This goes beyond simply tolerance and includes respect for other cultures, the promotion of positive cross-cultural relationships, and an understanding of what it means at all levels. Culturally proficient services remove barriers to access such as administrative processes and prohibitive fees.⁴⁴ Dedicated training of early learning educators is needed to achieve this.

Close connection between early learning system and health systems

Integrated delivery of early learning and mainstream health and community services is needed to give children healthy opportunities to learn and develop.

A total of 22% of children are developmentally vulnerable in one or more domains, when measured against the five Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) domains (physical health and wellbeing, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive skills (school-based), and communication skills and general knowledge). This figure rises to 43% for Indigenous children and to 44% for children in remote areas.⁴⁵

According to AEDC research, 'almost one fifth of Australian children in their first year of school experience additional health and development needs: 4% with formally diagnosed conditions and 18% with emerging problems that don't qualify for special education supports'. Children with extra healthcare needs were disproportionately represented in the lowest quarter of academic achievement.⁴⁶

Home visits by nurses to vulnerable mothers and babies have shown significant benefits in child development, school readiness and positive parenting practices and are being evaluated in several locations by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth.⁴⁷

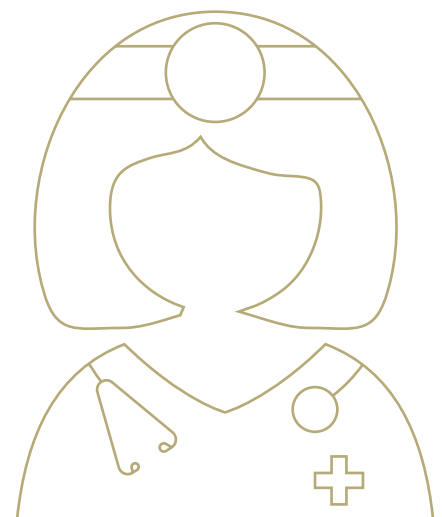
Integrating early childhood services is beneficial because of the link between health and educational development and because it enables health and education providers to share information about a child's needs. This is especially the case in disadvantaged communities. Data sharing among institutions provides opportunities to better understand each child more comprehensively and mapping health outcomes and challenges to early learning behaviours would provide educators and institutions with valuable insight to better tailor services and provide necessary support.

The provision of multiple services at a single site needs to increase. This would save time and effort for families and allow a quicker response to incidents affecting a child's wellbeing. It would also allow the sharing of resources and data and increase support for schools and educators.⁴⁸ UNESCO says integrated ECCE services help ensure holistic childhood development, especially for vulnerable children. It defines integrated ECCE services as a union of resources and personnel from multiple sectors in a single program managed by a single administrative unit. Programs in Colombia, Honduras and Cuba are positive examples.⁴⁹

For children with additional healthcare needs and particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, more investment will be needed to ensure they receive the same learning opportunities as their peers. AEDC research calls for tailored interventions for children with extra health and development needs so that their functional status, personal characteristics and external influences are considered and misdiagnosis is avoided.⁵⁰

Goodstart Early Learning

- **Focus:** SVA was a founding member of the consortium that created Goodstart Early Learning to transition a failing childcare provider into Australia's largest non-profit early learning provider with a focus on high-quality education, regardless of disadvantage.
- **Achievements with SVA support:** The syndicate structured a \$165m transaction that included debt financing, government loan and private investment to successfully bid for 650 ABC Learning Centres, which were then rebranded Goodstart Early Learning. SVA has given ongoing support in strategic planning, business opportunity assessment and cost base review.





K-12 SCHOOLING – CONSISTENTLY EFFECTIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING

THE CHALLENGE

There is significant disparity and inconsistency in the quality and impact of teaching and learning across and within the Australian education systems, sectors, schools and communities.

Supportive home environment conducive to school attendance and learning aspiration

To achieve the best educational outcomes, children need stable housing, an absence of domestic violence and abuse and adequate healthcare. They also need a home environment that values schooling. This can be improved if parents and carers have stable employment.

Professor John Hattie has identified six major sources of the variation in student achievement.⁵¹ The student themselves and what they bring to school through their background make up 50% of the variation in predicted achievement. And a further 5-10% is predicted by parental levels of expectation and encouragement. The balance is 'in-school' factors such as schools, leaders and teachers.⁵²

Children who do not attend school regularly do not receive instruction and miss the modelling benefits of regular attendance. If schooling is valued in the home, the child is more likely to attend.⁵³ These approaches are difficult to develop in disadvantaged households. Most of the schools that have low attendance are in the bottom quintile of the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) scale.⁵⁴

Poor attendance is exacerbated in disadvantaged communities by increased family stress, less access to good healthcare, transience and homelessness. There is often significant pressure on adolescents to work to contribute income to the household.

In disadvantaged school communities, attendance is below 85%, and less than 80% for very remote schools.⁵⁵ Assuming there are 200 school days a year, 15% equates to 30 days missed.

Over 12 years of schooling, this equates to 18 months missed. Attendance is also linked to retention in later school years. There is a 20% gap in retention rates to the end of year 12 between young people from lower and higher socioeconomic groups.⁵⁶

Children whose parent has a university degree are 10% more likely to finish year 12 than those whose parent does not. And a study in the Netherlands showed that the risk of a young person dropping out of school decreased by 7% for each year of parent education.⁵⁷

Coordinated support for disadvantaged families is necessary to ensure young people attend school regularly. Keys to encouraging better year 12 completion are making the education-related government rebate and benefit structure more accessible, educating families about the benefits of 13 years' schooling and supporting the home environment in income and healthcare. Schools that have high transience and unemployment rates also need more resources.

Some young people have levels of disadvantage or impairment that require alternate education interventions and placements. Not everyone thrives in a school environment. They need support that focuses on employment and building skills for economic independence. Coordinated case management that tracks and supports families, schools and service providers will reduce duplication while building efficiency. Coordinated case management is also important so that new schools 'pick up' where the last school 'left off'.



Engaged local community and business to model behaviours

Schools in isolated disadvantaged communities struggle. Communities with complex challenges require a collaborative approach and engaging the community in support of young people is critical to building learning success.⁵⁸

Education is everyone's business. When local businesses and the community support schools through activities, investment, sponsorship, the contribution of services, skills and expertise, the value of education becomes notably more important.

Partnerships in education provide a broader safety net for responding to the challenges and complexities of disadvantaged communities in particular. Schools are less effective when working in isolation. Business and community partnerships help develop educational opportunities aligned to community needs.

Successful schools in disadvantaged communities are deeply connected to their community.⁵⁹ They have more financial and social capital to effect change within the school. This link reinforces the value of education to parents and carers beyond the school gate as the wider community promotes the school's work.

Specific funding allocations should be made to enable community coordinators who broker and manage partnerships for one or more schools in a specific area.⁶⁰

The skills of school leaders need to be developed to engage with and build relationships with business and the community. Incentives need to be devised to encourage businesses and the broader community to form partnerships with schools.

Local health and welfare services closely connected with local school (child focused)

Integrating health services with schools creates a 'one-stop shop' for families. The services may include medical, dentistry, counselling and psychology within or attached to a school. Good examples of such integration have stable, committed leadership, local input, a focus on partnerships, a comprehensive plan involving parents and guardians, high expectations and shared accountability for results.⁶¹ Simplified access to health services helps ensure young people (especially in disadvantaged communities) arrive in classrooms ready to learn.

Families in disadvantaged communities may not know where to get support and if they are stressed may be reluctant to trust unfamiliar professionals. Centralised services at school respond to these challenges and provide a non-threatening entry point to additional supports.

Co-design is a core pillar of the coordinated system. Government has a role in convening discussions in the education and health sectors and in evaluating other schools that have achieved this coordination.

Team support must be provided for school leaders and teachers to work with health services, and teachers need to know when to appropriately involve health practitioners.

System responds to personal need and ensures optimal progress for each child each year

Young children in disadvantaged communities are made more vulnerable when support is not provided early to prevent issues becoming more complex.

The earlier that problems are identified the less costly and more effective the treatment. Cognitive neuroscience gives us better understanding to identify early signs of learning disadvantage and more evidence of the most effective interventions.

As in many of the drivers, children from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to have learning difficulties (for the health and environmental reasons described above) and so stand to benefit more from early detection and action.

In 2009, the AEDC created a snapshot of early childhood development in five areas in a child's first year of school. In 2012, the AEDC found 78% of children were developmentally on track. Unfortunately, that leaves more than 20% falling behind.⁶² Effective screening and detection are vital to determine what extra is needed.

As with early learning and health services, data sharing between schools and broader partners offers continuity of support, better handover of cases and improved outcomes. Standards must be created and maintained for how and when data sharing is appropriate. In addition, systems must allow for the data to be accessed, queried and understood.⁶³



Curriculum and assessment appropriate for the learning competencies required in future society.

A high-quality curriculum is essential for all students and must be relevant to the needs of 21st century learners and workers, covering literacy and numeracy, STE(A)M and the qualities of inquiry, independent learning and resilience.⁶⁴

A culturally sensitive curriculum aligned with the future needs of society and the economy will provide a solid foundation for high-quality learning.

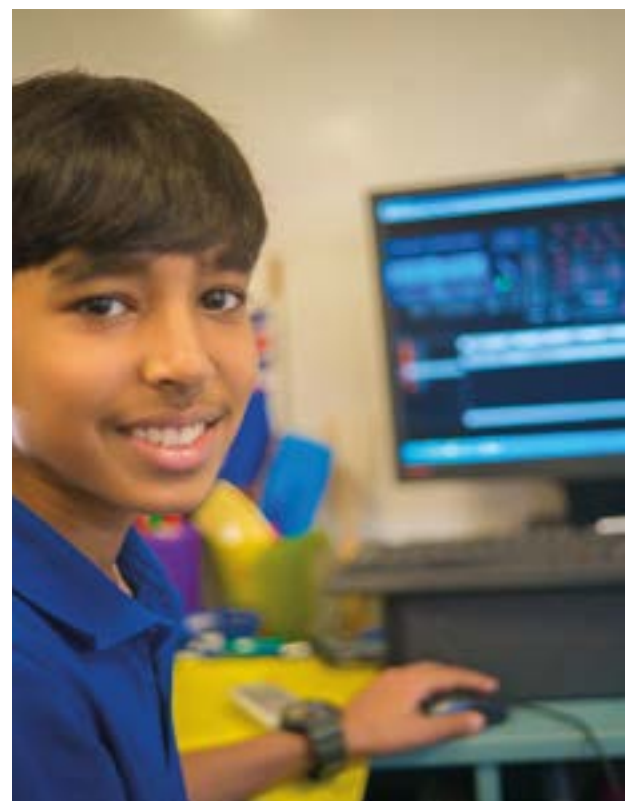
Employment conditions and the global economy demand new high-level skills and competencies in communication, problem solving, creativity, self-regulation, adaptability and cultural sensitivities. Organisations such as P21 – Partnership for 21st Century Learning – have created structures to support the shift to teaching the skills needed in this century.⁶⁵

The Assessment and Teaching of 21st Century Skills project created a partnership between the University of Melbourne, Cisco, Microsoft and Intel to produce a series of white papers on the needs of the 21st century economy. It developed modules for teaching collaborative problem solving and ICT literacy, which were seen to be the two critical skill groups.⁶⁶ ICT literacy continues to be a challenge in Australia. Between 2011 and 2014, the performance of students participating in the National Assessment Program ICT assessment declined.⁶⁷

Many low SES schools have diverse cultures, which makes accessible delivery harder but, to date, digital literacy assessments have been based on socioeconomic background, Indigenous status and geographic location. Only 20% of the assessed Indigenous students in year 10 reached the ‘proficient’ level of digital literacy, compared with 53% of their non-Indigenous peers. Similarly, only 40% of students in year 12 whose parents were from the ‘unskilled labourers, office, sales and service’ occupational groups scored at the ‘proficient’ level, while 65% of students whose parents were from the ‘senior managers and professionals’ group achieved that level.⁶⁸

Significant numbers of students from disadvantaged backgrounds fail to thrive in a school environment but can complete their education in an alternative setting. Possible alternative approaches range from virtual education solutions for remote Australians to targeted support for children with learning difficulties or disabilities. The solutions must match the needs of the particular students or cohorts. Such alternative models need to be included in education budgets to ensure all children can complete year 12 or the equivalent.⁶⁹

New teaching and learning pedagogy is needed to respond adequately to the changing needs and demands on education. It is partly the responsibility of the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) to design a curriculum that prepares students effectively to tackle the challenges of the technology-rich, global economy.





Dynamic school leadership engaging with networks to sustain a culture of continuous improvement informed by evidence

Much of the public discussion about the quality of learning is directed at the quality of teaching. School leadership creates the conditions for that to occur in each classroom. High-quality leaders perform consistently well against the Australian Professional Standard for Principals set by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL).

The institute states that effective principals should:

1. Take a systematic, standards-based and coherent approach.
2. Identify and nurture talent.
3. Match learning to an individual's capabilities, career stage and context.
4. Use evidence-based adult learning techniques.
5. Evaluate programs for impact.⁷⁰

High-quality leaders enable high-quality teaching. They build the capacity of the teaching workforce and create an expectation of consistently high performance.

Good teaching makes the biggest difference in educational outcomes in the formal institutional setting⁷¹. But teaching is practised within a school and the culture of the school

pursued by its leaders determines the consistency of practice. All schools have some great teachers getting good results but their benefit is diminished – and the teachers demoralised – when good practice is not pervasive.

With Australian schools having more autonomy since 2003, they now make 49% of the decisions and the states 51%. Schools make most of the decisions about the organisation of instruction.⁷² This autonomy further highlights the need for capable school leadership.

School leaders must ensure they make decisions that create the greatest opportunity for effective learning in students. At present they are not well supported to do this – either to know what works and why or to know how to implement evidence based programs to get the best results. There is a general lack of investment in education evidence and a specific lack of empirical evidence on educational programs in schools. This knowledge gap should be addressed.

There is also a strong need to translate and mobilise knowledge to place it usefully in the hands of busy frontline educators, in forms that are immediately actionable. And there is a need to further develop the skills and capabilities of the profession to work effectively with data and evidence to continuously improve their practice and ultimately improve student learning outcomes.

Evidence for Learning – evidenceforlearning.org.au

- **Focus:** Enabling and supporting evidence-informed practice in schools by
 - building new evidence with a **Learning Impact Fund** that commissions and reports on rigorous independent evaluations of programs in schools, including their impact on learning and the costs of implementation
 - sharing global evidence summaries of 34 education approaches through a free online **Teaching and Learning Toolkit** within an Australasian context
 - encourage the use of data and evidence by supporting educators to engage with the evidence and to build their own evaluative practices through the **Evidence Informed Educator** network
- **Achievements with SVA support:** In 2015, Social Ventures Australia worked with the Department for Education and Training in Victoria to secure sponsorship from Commonwealth Bank as foundation partner in Evidence for Learning and to fund the first project under the Learning Impact Fund.





Bright Spots Schools Connection – Powerhouse Schools

- **Focus:** This is an SVA-incubated venture working towards school leadership that makes decisions based on evidence. The aim is for all children to fulfil their potential and make the most of their lives as productive citizens. This venture seeks to encourage strong school leadership and an environment that supports great teaching, and consistently high-quality teaching and learning.
- **Achievements with SVA support:** The Connection supports leaders to investigate evidence, use it in practice, create new evidence, and leverage it to articulate and evaluate practice. The three focus areas are developing leadership and capacity in Powerhouse Schools; capturing and sharing thought leadership to boost systemic capacity, and providing seed funding for innovation projects. SVA has also used its consulting team's skills to improve the Powerhouse Schools' capacities in measuring outcomes.

Bright Spots Schools Connection – Star Hubs

- **Focus:** The Star Hubs project is being developed to support the translation of great practice to school settings. It will facilitate the creation of intra- and interstate networks of schools and provide support for exchanges of practice and learning among educators.
- **Project achievements with SVA support:** SVA Consulting worked with The Connection to describe the activities and impact of the pilot project and identify questions for the evaluation. This informed the proposed monitoring and evaluation framework for the pilot. The pilot has been scoped and costed, and the relationships necessary to start the program have been established.

Consistently great teaching delivered by respected, effective professionals

Teacher quality is the single most important school variable influencing student achievement.⁷³ Unfortunately, there is high variability of quality teaching even between classrooms in the same school.⁷⁴

The teachers' performance in the assessment can be explained through the findings of the Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers report, produced by the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group, which outlined some troubling key findings including that:

1. National standards are weakly applied.
2. Public confidence in initial teacher education needs to rise.
3. Evidence exists of poor practice in some initial teacher education programs.
4. There is insufficient integration between teacher education providers and schools and systems.
5. There is inadequate application of standards for classroom readiness.
6. Insufficient professional support is given to beginning teachers.
7. Gaps are present in crucial information, including workforce data.⁷⁵

Given this, it is not surprising that quality varies among and within classrooms.

Teachers need to work with data and evidence to understand the impact of their practice and to continually improve the way they meet each child's needs. New ways are being developed to use the data available in schools. Teachers need to be supported to share data-driven best practices within their school and between schools. Similarly, school leaders need to be continually searching for ways to reduce any negative variability in the quality of teaching.

As schools better understand their students, it becomes easier to respond to individual needs. This individualised understanding is important because research has shown that educational achievement within a single class may be spread over up to eight year levels within a single class.⁷⁶

The present system does not ensure that the most talented, experienced or skilled teachers are deployed where they are needed most. This adds to the complexity of the challenges experienced in disadvantaged schools.

Finland and the Shanghai region of China offer potential lessons in addressing teacher quality. In both locations, the teaching profession is well respected by the broader community. In Finland, rigorous research-based education programs have been developed for teachers along with supporting professional development during a teacher's career.⁷⁷ A five-year master's degree is required to teach in Finland, setting the bar quite high and intentionally limiting the number of teachers to control for quality and consistency.⁷⁸

The Shanghai region offers similar lessons. Teachers in Australia have 50% less non-teaching time than Shanghai teachers do, meaning they have less time to engage in other activities known to have a large impact on learning, including lesson preparation, classroom observation, team teaching, school-based research, giving feedback, identifying learning needs, modelling good practice and active collaboration. Teachers are viewed as researchers for continuous improvement in education and all have a mentor to help improve their practice. Classroom observations provide ongoing feedback, and accomplishments in teaching are acknowledged and lead to promotions. These frameworks focus on learning while equipping teachers to provide it effectively.⁷⁹

In Australia the most pressing need is for high-quality initial education of teachers so that they can help young people to learn.⁸⁰ Assessing aspiring teachers' literacy and numeracy is a step in the right direction but equipping them for success in the first place is more important than identifying gaps in their knowledge immediately before sending them to classrooms.⁸¹

Greater support should be given for professional learning and expertise development for teachers in schools in disadvantaged communities in recognition of the more complex and demanding role of a teacher in these settings.

Unfortunately, a report in 2010 showed teachers do not feel that effectiveness is valued – 92% said that if they improved their teaching quality they would not receive any recognition. In addition, 83% of teachers said the evaluation of their work had no impact on their chances of career advancement.⁸²

The education system in Australia struggles to attract good teachers because of the profession's perceived low status and pay. This is particularly true for male teachers who are under-represented in the profession.⁸³ The problem of perception also affects leadership recruitment. Steps must be taken to enhance the profession's reputation and improve pay rates to make it more attractive.

National Exceptional Teachers in Disadvantaged Schools (NETDS) program

- **Focus:** NETDS seeks to prepare teachers for working in disadvantaged schools. The program, set up in 2009, is an initiative of the faculty of education at Queensland University of Technology (QUT). It identifies high-achieving pre-service teachers to participate in a tailored curriculum, preparing them to teach in disadvantaged schools.
- **Achievements with SVA support:** After working with QUT to create the NETDS project, SVA helped to develop a plan to replicate it in six more universities and to secure funding for it. SVA also helped to develop and extend mentoring support for graduates and created a knowledge network among partners and graduates that emphasised research, impact and outcomes.



SCHOOL TO WORK – INTEGRATED AND EFFECTIVE TRANSITIONS

THE CHALLENGE

The school-to-work transition is a significant challenge for many young Australians, especially those in disadvantaged communities. It involves home, community and educational factors.

Social Ventures Australia, the Beacon Foundation and the Foundation for Young Australians collaborated to conduct research and present a model of careers learning, *Beyond the Classroom*, underpinned by five pillars:

1. **Integrated career learning** delivered as part of the school curriculum to provide ‘real-world’ concepts.
2. **Parental engagement** in development, goal setting and aspirations.
3. **Workplace exposure** through mentoring, internship and placement opportunities.
4. **School-industry networks** built on partnerships between schools and the business community.
5. **First job** support to create an environment conducive to learning and growing during the initial transition from school to work.⁸⁴

SVA also undertook a companion project to review the international evidence of what is required to improve youth employment published as ‘The fundamental principles of youth employment’.⁸⁵ The principles are divided into personal: young people are ready for work, and community infrastructure: collaboration to deliver employment solutions for young people. The principles are:

Personal:

- Identity
- Building aspirations
- Literacy and numeracy capability
- Employment skills
- Careers management

Community infrastructure:

- Business partnerships
- Early intervention
- Personalised support
- Alternative employment pathways
- Financial support

The report identifies activities to support each of these principles, resources required to deliver the activities and indicators of success. It also outlines recommended actions for different stakeholder groups including employers, educators, social purpose organisations, governments, philanthropists, employment service providers, and young people themselves.

This section should be read in conjunction with *SVA Perspectives: Employment*, which provides greater detail on the drivers of successful outcomes in employment.



Ganbina (SVA Venture Philanthropy)

- **Focus:** Ganbina operates in the Shepparton area of Victoria and works in partnerships with the community, schools, families and employers to help young First Australians reach their potential in education, training and employment and go on to act as 'agents of change' within their community. The program's activities focus on education, training and personal development skills – essential building blocks for sustainable employment.
- **Achievements with SVA support:** Ganbina has helped more than 950 young people, a generation of young First Australians, finish school, undertake further education or training and secure real jobs. Ganbina's Jobs4U2 program is the most successful school-to-work transition program in Australia, with a minimum of 80% of participants completing their full course activities.

Supportive home environment for work aspirations

By creating a home environment that is supportive of and conducive to normalised aspirations for a working life, young people are better positioned to make a successful transition from school to work.

Evidence suggests that informal career guidance from parents is more influential than formal guidance from qualified guidance practitioners.⁸⁶ Research also shows that while some parents think their influence is minimal, students and careers advisers frequently say that parents are a key factor in career aspirations and outcomes.⁸⁷ Children tend to choose occupational levels that match their parents' expectations.⁸⁸

Intergenerational disadvantage is perpetuated when households have low expectations and the value of work is not encouraged or understood. Messages from the home front strongly affect young people's attitudes to work. If parents have not worked or are not working, the value of having a job declines.

Children in jobless families have markedly different understandings of employment pathways and aspirations for further education and careers.⁸⁹ For this reason formal channels, including career counselling, need to be reformed and adapted and programs should be targeted at whole families, rather than individuals.

Improving the education of parents who are jobless, particularly single parents, has a flow-on effect for the long-term employment of their children.⁹⁰ Better support for long-term unemployed parents encourages more discussion of work and work aspirations in these families.

Career advisers need to give young people information about broader career options and ideas. This is especially important for children from families where work is not a common conversation topic.

Business and community support for meaningful work experience opportunities

Partnerships with businesses and communities to offer work experience and education are often developed in an ad hoc manner. This affects disadvantaged young people most, given that they have less social capital.⁹¹

In communities of low social capital, young people do not have examples or chances to experience work beyond what's done by their parents or close community members. Business support to expose young people to broader employment options can build their business literacy and adjust their career aspirations. Business partnerships and involvement with schools have been shown to improve young people's career aspirations, their work readiness and their ability to move into work after school.⁹²

Research in the US and Britain also shows that experience with employers increases young people's confidence and is a strong factor in whether, after school, they are NEET (not in education, employment or training) or non-NEET.⁹³

In many countries, the school curriculum includes work experience, work sharing, work visits and work simulations. The Business Class program in Britain shows the positive outcomes of partnerships with schools. More than 400 partnerships have been set up to deliver business education and to support pupils.

Business Class research also found five benefits to employers from these partnerships: engagement with their workforce; creating a pipeline for future talent; developing innovation and fresh thinking; raising the company's profile; attracting new business. For students, the benefits were more support for leadership and governance, enhanced management skills, better financial savings, and stronger alignment between academic activities and career aspirations.⁹⁴



Relevant careers education and experiences with in-school support from upper-primary years

Young people in disadvantaged communities often do not know what opportunities exist outside their immediate experience. Early exposure to broader opportunities, particularly those that align with phases of psychological development and perception of self, can prevent early disengagement from learning.⁹⁵

Early exposure to the options available is important for future employment and helps young people understand the relevance of what they learn at school.

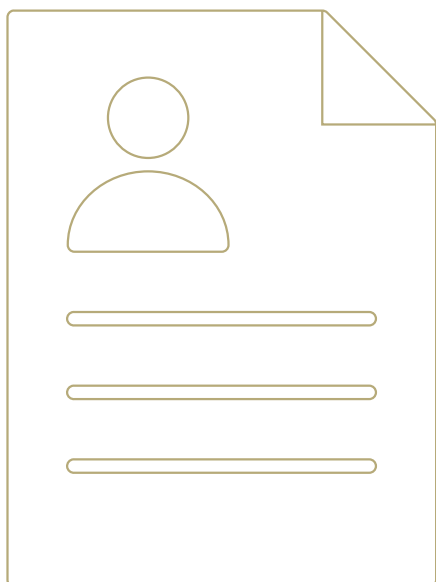
Fewer than half of young people are well informed when they choose what to study.⁹⁶ Career advice is directed mainly at years 10, 11 and 12 but should include younger children.⁹⁷ Unfortunately, only 4% of employers engage with education providers to align careers advice to their business needs.⁹⁸

One in five university students drop out before the end of their first year, and more than half say that when they chose what discipline to study they did not know which would lead to job openings and good incomes.⁹⁹

The standard of training for careers education needs to improve.

Making Career Development Core Business, a report by the Victorian government and the University of Melbourne, identified the core attributes of high-quality career development programs. These:

- Begin in the early secondary years, and use well-researched information on the full range of pathways, labour market conditions and job opportunities.
- Challenge students to do research that includes external resources and advice in conjunction with counselling and discussions.
- Include individual and/or group counselling for students who need it.
- Provide high-quality web-based resources that are linked to and used in mainstream school programs and are accessible by parents.
- Include hands-on workplace experience that is linked to school-based programs.
- Have structured links to external resources and programs that are integrated into the career development curriculum.¹⁰⁰



Accessible, relevant and affordable vocational and further education (within or closely connected to schools)

Young people finishing high school face a choice of continuing education or starting work. Tertiary education is not always the correct direction but because many careers require education beyond high school, relevant vocational education that is accessible and affordable must be available. At present, there are insufficient options in school-to-work training programs.

Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to be concerned about job prospects and consider themselves much more likely than their better-off counterparts to go to TAFE or do a traineeship.¹⁰¹

While the Australian government acknowledges that the Vocational Education and Training (VET) system is critical to economic growth and business productivity,¹⁰² the system has been widely criticised for problems such as service provider profiteering and poor quality programs and for its large cost to taxpayers.¹⁰³

The former Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency noted in a 2013 report that in higher-growth sectors demand for qualifications was expected to rise by between 3% and 3.9% on average each year until 2025.¹⁰⁴ In effect, this means that between 3% and 4% more graduates will be required every year for the next decade.

The accessibility of relevant programs is a challenge. One way to tackle this is to tie vocational training more tightly to secondary school education. This closer integration in the familiar school setting could make a big difference in encouraging students to pursue non-tertiary education.

Monitoring of the system needs to hold service providers accountable, and the business community and training organisations must ensure that content is relevant.

VET FEE-HELP is being reformed. Changes will come into effect in 2016 and a full system overhaul is expected in 2017.¹⁰⁵ As part of this process, disadvantaged students must be considered so that the system is accessible and affordable.



Improve the success rate of transition from training to work readiness

Successful transitions from education or training to work require jobs to be available and employers willing to hire entry-level workers. Young people need to have the appropriate training and be prepared to take on the roles.

The most common reasons for employer dissatisfaction with the VET system were a lack of focus on practical skills, lack of relevance of skills and the low standard of training.¹⁰⁶

Even though 72% of education providers believed young people were graduating well equipped for work, only 44% of employers felt the same way.

On the other hand, potential employees have different support needs and face different challenges, such as location, disability, low socioeconomic status, not having English as one's first language, and poor literacy and numeracy.¹⁰⁷

Without a strong curriculum and educational set-up to support the transition from school, youth unemployment figures will remain high, leading to poor life outcomes and significant future support required from social services. Youth unemployment is already more than double (12.2%) compared with the national unemployment rate (5.9%).¹⁰⁸ Young people also make up a disproportionate percentage of the long-term unemployed.¹⁰⁹

A student needs to have a line of sight between school and work prospects. This starts with evaluating the curriculum in the context of business requirements to determine the mix of skills and capabilities needed.

This line of sight is especially critical for vocational and training programs that stand at the entry to the labour market. Young people should be offered courses that prepare them for careers or jobs that are growing and provide opportunities.



Beacon Foundation (SVA Venture Philanthropy)

- **Focus:** Beacon's aim is 'an Australia that understands, cares and is motivated to support young people to successfully transition from education to employment'. Students benefit from increased aspiration and motivation and improved careers education, gain the work and employability skills businesses are looking for, and are linked with real employment opportunities.
- **Achievements with SVA support:** In 2014, 2,650 businesses engaged with 147 schools to educate our future workforce. In all, 98.7% of Beacon students were fully engaged in work, education or training nine months after year 10. This was 11.6 percentage points higher than the national average. The percentage of Beacon students who had left full-time education and were looking for work after year 10 was 0.3% – 10 times lower than the national rate. In all, 98% of Beacon schools increased their connections with businesses and 91% noted a positive change in the community perception of their school.

CareerTrackers (SVA Venture Philanthropy)

- **Focus:** CareerTrackers links Indigenous university students with private-sector employers in multi-year paid internships, giving them the experience of work and a pathway to employment. CareerTrackers participants receive year-round support, mentoring and guidance to ensure they succeed in the classroom as well as in the workplace.
- **Achievements with SVA support:** Since 2010, CareerTrackers has grown rapidly, linking 943 students with 86 employment partners and achieving an 83% internship completion rate. CareerTrackers interns complete university at a rate of almost 97%, compared with 38% for all other Indigenous students. SVA has supported CareerTrackers to expand nationally and become more financially sustainable, developing a fundraising, stakeholder management and organisational strategy and helping CareerTrackers to understand and communicate its impact.

Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME) (SVA Venture Philanthropy)

- **Focus:** AIME is a dynamic educational program that supports Indigenous students through high school and into university, employment or further education at the same rate as other students. AIME gives Indigenous students the skills, opportunities, belief and confidence to grow and succeed. The venture addresses the 'supportive home environment' and 'local business and community support for local schools' outlined in the SVA Education driver tree.
- **Achievements with SVA support:** AIME has worked with more than 3000 students and 1250 mentors in more than 300 schools and 16 universities.



Partnership Broker National Network (SVA Consulting)

- **Focus:** This network supported partnerships between schools, businesses, community organisations and other stakeholders to improve education and transition for young people. It involved a network of more than 100 brokers which supported about 1600 partnerships and more than 5000 partner organisations Australia-wide.
- **Achievements with SVA support:** SVA Consulting evaluated the social return on investment (SROI) in 2010-2013. The evaluation included five standalone SROI analyses for Partnership Broker organisations in NSW and Queensland. The evaluation captured the impact on more than 700 partner organisations and parents through about 150 partnerships. The analyses confirmed that the program was creating value for stakeholders in partnerships. This was underpinned by a high level of partnership activity. The value of social returns exceeded the cash investment of the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations by between 1.1 and 3.7 times in different regions. The program's impact also increased over time.



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