

# Preparation for post-school careers in rural and peri-urban Australia: Connections with employers and labour markets

**Professor Erica Smith and Associate Professor Annette Foley**

Federation University, School of Education

Employer Engagement Conference, 1-2 July 2021

Contact: [e.smith@federation.edu.au](mailto:e.smith@federation.edu.au) or [a.foley@federation.edu.au](mailto:a.foley@federation.edu.au)



# The research – in the State of Victoria, Australia

A research project in 2018-19 investigating how young people in six non-metropolitan areas imagine and navigate their pathways as they leave school and make choices about their future trajectories.

The project aimed to provide a **better understanding** of the transition process and develop **good practice ideas** for wider applicability by schools, communities, employers and education providers.

Research questions:

1. How do young people imagine and navigate pathways related to post-school education, training and employment and what decisions do they make?
2. Who and what are the influencers and how do they affect the decisions?
3. What could change to provide better post-school outcomes for a larger proportion of young people?

# The six communities (*chosen in conjunction with the Victorian government*)

The state of Victoria has almost the same land area as Great Britain. Population 6.5 million. Melbourne's population is 5.08 million.



# Research phases: Items highlighted were analysed for this paper

1. **58 interviews with community stakeholders who worked with young people aged 15-24, an average of 9.5 per site.** Significant stakeholders were selected according to a defined protocol, covering Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs)\*, apprenticeship intermediary organisations; employers; TAFE, RTO and higher education providers; indigenous and/or multicultural workers.
2. Interviews and focus groups at two schools at each site. At all schools, the Principal or delegate and at least **one careers staff member** were interviewed, **a total of 32 interviews**. At the government schools, separate focus groups of Year 11 and Year 12 were held, a total of **90 students**.
3. Interviews with **32 young people**, who had left school in 2017, in small groups or individually. Accessed with the help of local stakeholders and/or schools.
4. Analysis of the relevant Victorian Government 'On Track' survey reports for 2018 for each area. 'On Track' surveys young people 6 months after leaving school.

**Total: 212 people including 112 young people**

\* 'The goal of each LLEN is to support all secondary school students within its geographical boundaries, by developing partnerships which result in an increase in the number and range of school-employer engagement activities in local government areas.' (<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/Pages/llens.aspx>)

# The rural communities

	Population 2016	Distance from Melbourne Town Hall
Horsham	14,543	299 km
Sale	13,673	212 km
Shepparton	63,837	190 km



# Horsham - Employers

Horsham was a long way (over two hours) from a university campus or a major town, and so the main question for young people was: Do I stay or do I go?



Many local employers found it hard to get good staff, because young people had left town.

Retail traineeships (*traineeships are like apprenticeships but shorter*) had disappeared from the town, due to State government cuts to funding for the training

## Some employer practices

- An electrical engineering company trained apprentices, expecting many to leave once trained – but that some would return as project managers.
- An accountancy practice offered one or two full-time jobs each year, with sponsorship to study on-line at university, and time off for study.
- The local indigenous corporation worked with employers to offer suitable (i.e. part-time) work to indigenous young people.
- One engineering company that made farming equipment offered 'boot camps' in conjunction with TAFE (FE College) to highlight the 'high-tech' nature of its welding apprenticeships.



# Horsham – School engagement with industry – a tale of two attitudes

## The public (Government) high school

- An apprenticeship organisation reported that it had offered to place a staff member in the high school for half a day a week, but the high school had refused.
- The Principal thought only a one-third of students worked part-time.
- The careers teacher was focused on university entry:
  - ‘We had a few disappear off the books over summer, a whole heap of VCAL (*vocational curriculum*) boys who had no interest in being here and they were all earning enormous amounts of money working long shifts at Woolworths (*supermarket*) and three of them just decided all together not to come back.
  - ‘We had a little girl who said, no, I'm just going to go and work at KFC, school is too hard. We just kept seeing her and seeing her, and she's still here (*at school*) six months later.’

## The Catholic high school

- The careers coordinator, while having had teaching experience, had run a motel for several years.
- She knew that most senior school students had part-time jobs.
- Employers emailed the coordinator with vacant positions.
- Year 10 students had a group interview process at the end of the year. The young people found real jobs on the internet; and local employers or apprenticeship organisation staff volunteered to serve as the mock interview panel.
- The careers coordinator wanted the local hospital to be more systematic in its engagement with the school.

# Sale – a country town

## **Jobs for boys ....**

- Sale was one hour to the nearest university campus
- A lot of jobs were available in trades but little for girls.
- A very narrow range of TAFE (further education) courses.
- The major local employer (Esso) did not engage directly with schools at all.

## **Private training provider ('Registered Training Organisation')**

- Filled the gap in training for child care, aged care and nursing.
- Allowed school students doing 'VET in Schools' to undertake their practical assessments at the RTO.
- Held Year 9 and 10 workshops for half a day, taking blood pressure and so on – a free service to schools.





# Employer actions in Sale

- Apprenticeship companies tried to encourage employers to take on 'school-based' trainees.
- A special scheme for Aboriginal school-based traineeships at police stations.
- The hospital had an Aboriginal allied health traineeship.
- The hospital also nominated three or four weeks throughout the year for general work experience for schools –but the schools thought that was too limited.



The local aquatic centre employed many young people at weekends and in holidays.

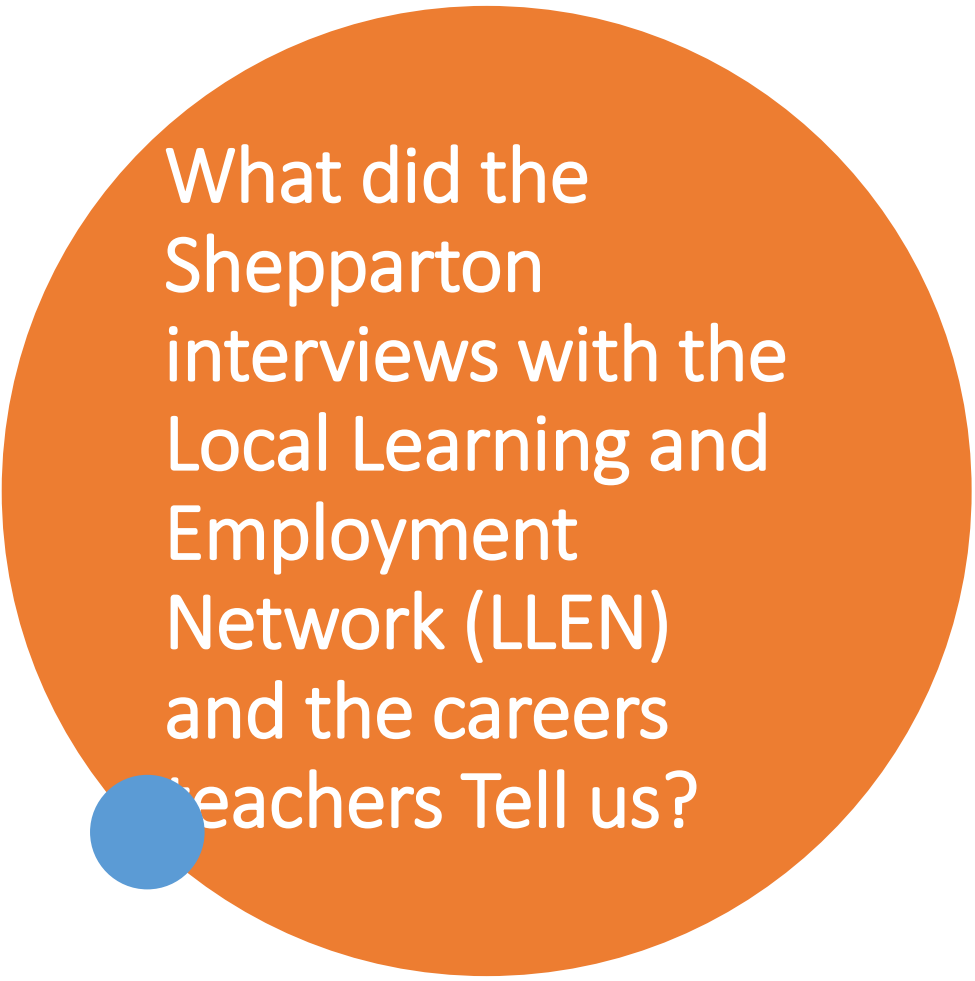
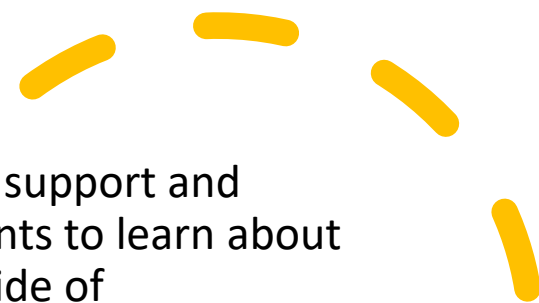
When they left to go to university, they often came back to work in the holidays.

When more experienced, they could staff pools in smaller towns nearby.

## What did the Shepparton interviews with businesses tell us?

- Schools were identified by a local council staff member as playing a big role in 'assisting young people to imagine their futures'. The local council was keen to work with schools to provide traineeships across some areas of council work.
- Parents were also mentioned as an important influencer.
- One large employer in the town was not in favour of working with the schools to provide work experience opportunities. The employer said it was too 'difficult to manage.'





## What did the Shepparton interviews with the Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN) and the careers teachers Tell us?

- The LLEN manager mentioned family support and school as significant factors for students to learn about careers options both locally and outside of Shepparton.
- Low socioeconomic factors were also mentioned as restricting students opportunities to be career ready. Reasons for this were associated with students' lack of resources to leave town and go to University or further education, thus restricting their labour market opportunities.
- According to a careers teacher at the local high school, labour market knowledge was made available though careers programs, 'Dookie (*nearby small town*) Food and Fibre day' and work experience opportunities.



# The peri-urban communities

	Population 2016	Distance (km) from Melbourne Town Hall
Berwick	47,674	46
Hastings	9,609	72
Werribee	40,435	33





## What did the Berwick interviews with businesses tell us?

- A large supermarket partnered with the local schools to provide work experience for students in the area of time management, communication skills, food safety and work safety, along with experience working with customers.
- The supermarket often hired students to work casually as well: 'We are always welcoming students from years 11 and 12 to come and do this program with us.'



## What did the Berwick interviews with the Local Learning and Employment Network and the careers teachers tell us?

- A LLEN manager explained that there were large employers in the region employing 16,000 to 17,000 employees. and only taking a few students from the schools a year. He felt that more could be done to expose the students to employment opportunities 'where the growth is'.
- One careers teacher described guiding the students into nursing and healthcare which was a need industry in the Berwick area. The local TAFE institution provided pathways into nursing at the local university campus which had been very successful.



## What did the Werribee interviews with businesses tell us?

- Work experience was mentioned by a business manager as being an important way to introduce work skills to students in the Werribee area.
- The manager of the large supermarket in Werribee described the partnership that existed between the supermarket and the local schools and TAFE institution as critical. Students that enjoyed the work often worked in the supermarket part time, starting with a few hours and building up hours as they grew in confidence.
- He described the experiences they received as helping them to understand what it felt like to work, which helped with customer service skills and punctuality, and in turn would help them with other employment in the future.



# What did the Werribee interviews with the Local Learning and Employment Network and the careers teachers tell us?

- The LLEN manager described a partnership with a university that provided pathways for students through a community based program as innovative and allowed students to learn in their local area with 'taster units' that were credited to degree programs.
- Students undertaking the Victorian Certificate in Applied Learning (*vocational curriculum*) at secondary school were seen by a careers teacher at the local Christian School as being an important way for students to gain experience in various labour market areas such as Childcare, construction, plumbing etc. 'some of them can get apprenticeships through VCAL'
- Another careers teacher also mentioned the important partnerships the secondary school had with the local TAFE campus and the University through pathway opportunities and guaranteed places for students in certain courses like nursing and some traineeships. This teacher also mentioned the importance of communication with parents who she described as influential to students' decision making about careers planning.

# Hastings – a peri-urban ‘post-industrial’ town with high intergenerational unemployment

## Careers teachers

### Prejudices

- **Government school:** ‘They think that getting \$20 an hour for the rest of their life at Kmart (*variety store*) is quite acceptable’
- ‘A student said “I’m going to go and do a course in aged care because there’s a huge amount of work for people to work in elderly homes” .... so I said “once you’ve done that you’re very much locked into working in aged care”.’ (*Aged care was the biggest industry in the region*)

### Open minds

- **School for disengaged young people:** ‘We did a hospitality taster last year ... which worked really well ... a lot of students ended up getting part time work because of the qualifications that they received.’

## Giving a helping hand

A steel mill (Bluescope) offered a special employment program in conjunction with a charity. Three months’ fully paid ‘work taster’ for long-term unemployed young people.

*They can't even look you in the eye. They come in for the interviews, that many young people I see. They come in for the interviews. They're covered in tats. They've got holes in their clothes. They don't even know they shouldn't wear runners. They don't look at you when they speak. They look down. We will look past that and give them an opportunity, but those are the brave ones ... They're the brave ones that actually come.*

- A solicitor’s office in the town offered an after-school job for school students wanting to go into the law.

# Hastings: Supermarket careers

Assistant manager keen to recruit young people into careers with Coles supermarket:

- Noticed that in Hastings few disadvantaged young people were applying, compared with a store he had worked at in another town.
- He himself had been a school-student-worker and gone on to university.
- If students move away to uni, he employs them at weekend and/or in the holidays.



Manager gave examples of current student-workers at his store:

- Engineering student at uni the other side of the city. Might continue with Coles as a weekend job when he goes into engineering
- An on-line student studying personal training but considering a management career at Coles.
- A paramedic student who works overnight and earns big money. He might carry on rather than going into paramedicine.
- An accounting student about to finish an accounting degree. But also considering a graduate career with Coles.

# Conclusions

- Some employers were closely engaged with schools, e.g. through work experience programs, but others were not.
- Some schools took the effort to involve employers, while others were very much focused on university entry.
- There was a need to align careers advice better with local labour markets. In some cases, such as nursing pathways, this worked well.
- Most young people at school worked part-time. Their work was sometimes looked down or ignored by their schools, although it was valued by employers.
- There were some very firm strategies by employers to attract and retain young people, with innovative programs.
- In rural areas, boys had more job opportunities locally than girls, as the local vacancies and training were in masculinised occupations.
- Socio-economic status also affected access to job opportunities.