



# Beyond the role of career adviser: A teacher professional development program

A case study of best-practice career development learning for students from low socioeconomic status (LSES) backgrounds



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This project aimed to critically investigate best practice initiatives in career advice for students from low socioeconomic status (LSES) backgrounds, including those from regional, rural and remote areas to establish overriding principles to guide career education provided to school students and non-school-leavers across the sector to ensure consistent and meaningful education in this area.

This document has been written by the core project team led by Kylie Austin and including Sarah O'Shea, Olivia Groves and Jodi Lamanna.

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# Beyond the role of career adviser: A teacher professional development program

A case study of best practice CDL for students from LSES backgrounds

## Introduction

The “Beyond the role of career adviser” pilot program was created according to [Best-Practice Principles for students from LSES backgrounds](#), with the aim of addressing issues in career education provision identified in the project [Higher-education career advice for students from LSES backgrounds](#). Specifically, the program sought to address problems related to a lack of ownership for career education and the need for collaborative, multi-stakeholder partnerships between universities, schools and other career-related stakeholder groups. It primarily drew on the best-practice principle “that teachers should share their educational journey and career experiences as part of their classroom teaching and incorporate careers content in the curriculum so students can connect classroom learning to potential jobs.” To this end, University of Wollongong (UOW), in partnership with teachers from local schools, designed, implemented and evaluated a high-school teacher professional development (PD) program with the aim of embedding Career Development Learning (CDL) in the school curriculum to achieve a whole-school approach to effective career advice for students from low socioeconomic status (LSES) backgrounds.

## Background

### Context

UOW is an international network of campuses and regional learning centres which proactively seeks a strong and connected presence within all its locations. UOW has a history of working closely with its communities to drive an increase in participation and attainment among underrepresented groups in higher education. These groups include Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander peoples, students with a disability, students from LSES backgrounds, and students from regional, rural and remote areas.

Each year, the Widening Participation team at UOW delivers a teacher professional development (PD) program to increase the reach of widening participation in the school setting. In 2020, the Widening Participation team, in collaboration with UOW career-development practitioners, together with local high-school career advisers, drew on best-practice principles for CDL for students from LSES backgrounds to design, implement and evaluate a PD program for high-school teachers at one school in its catchment.

### Program aims

Practitioners from the participating high school, UOW Graduate Career Development and Employability team, and the Widening Participation team designed and implemented a teacher PD program with the aim of expanding the responsibility and practice of CDL beyond that of the dedicated career adviser to all teachers. Specifically, this program aimed to achieve the following:

- Expand the responsibility of career advice beyond the “formal” role of the career adviser through enhancing the capacity of all teachers within the school to provide effective advice and embed principles of CDL within their curriculum.
- Position the career adviser as the expert in delivering CDL within the school, with support of the university. The career adviser was central to the development of the program content and also was one of the three presenters. The career adviser was also defined as a key source of knowledge and expertise within the school.
- Develop resources and tools that provide ongoing support to the teachers to continually offer CDL within the school context. Specific resources were provided, including the Australian Blueprint for career development (MCEECDYA 2010) and career websites. An opportunity was provided for teachers to collaborate and share resources; and
- Increase the networks with staff in the schools, including universities, industry, Vocational Education and Training (VET) and other schools to ensure that teachers have effective networks to rely upon to address nuanced student needs.

## Program delivery

The PD comprised of three, one-hour, face-to-face sessions at the high school. The sessions were collaboratively designed and facilitated by high-school career advisers, UOW career-development practitioners, and UOW widening-participation practitioners. The PD was NESAS<sup>1</sup> accredited to enable recognition of training.

The content focus of each of the three PD sessions were:

1. **Career decisions and influences in the changing world of work:** This session explored definitions of career development and employability including reflection about how careers develop, key influences on career decisions and the changing world of work.
2. **Career conversations:** This session focused on recognising the importance of language and questioning for career conversations as well as outlining conversation starters for class discussion.
3. **Careers in the curriculum:** A whole-school approach. Within this session teachers were provided with a range of resources and examples to refer to, followed by group work to develop an action plan for embedding careers into teaching subjects.

Each of the three sessions involved a short presentation of information, whole-group and small-group discussion, and links to resources.

The program was implemented in May 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. Leading up to the program, schools had been closed with teachers and students teaching and learning in an online delivery mode. The delivery of this program came at a time where “lockdown” restrictions were being relaxed and the program was allowed to proceed with appropriate physical distancing measures in place. These measures included holding the sessions in a large airy space, participants keeping 1.5 m apart from each other (which limited group work), and strong hygiene practices.

All teachers from the targeted school were invited to attend the PD. Participation was voluntary, and in total 19 teachers from a total of 50 teaching staff attended the three PD

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<sup>1</sup> NESAS (NSW Education Standards Authority) accreditation allows teachers to accrue hours of professional development which link to the teaching accreditation requirements in NSW, Australia.

sessions including the school principal, head teachers, a special education teacher and staff from each Key Learning Area (KLA).

## Research methods

The project investigated the effectiveness of the teacher PD in achieving its goals. This was done through a mixed-method approach which included:

- pre- and post-intervention surveys of teacher participants;
- semi-structured interviews with teacher participants; and
- interviews with staff responsible for the design and implementation of the program which explored the success of the program and the process of program design using the BPP.

The following table (1) details the participants in each stage of data collection.

*Table 1: Participants engaged in data collection*

	Pre-program survey	Post-program survey	Interview
Teacher participants	19	18	5
Design and program staff			4

## Findings

The evaluation of this CDL intervention is presented in three sections:

- Program outcomes and impact
- Assessment of program delivery
- Opportunities and implications

### Program outcomes and impact

The main sentiment running through the data is that, through the PD, teachers were awakened to the importance of CDL and their role in it. Rowan (widening-participation practitioner), recalled, “that first moment of realisation, the three of us presenting really felt there was a few “Aha” sort of moments in that session.” Specifically, survey and interview data showed that the program increased:

- Knowledge of career terms, career roles, and a whole-school approach to CDL;
- Confidence in having career conversations; and
- Attitude towards implementing a whole-school approach.

Pre- and post-program surveys showed significant differences in teacher recognition of career terms. For example, of the 19 teachers in the pre-program survey, four strongly agreed that they knew what career terms meant, two were neutral, and the others agreed or somewhat agreed. In the post-program survey, the majority of participants indicated that they either agreed or strongly agreed that they knew what the career terms meant (see Figure 1).

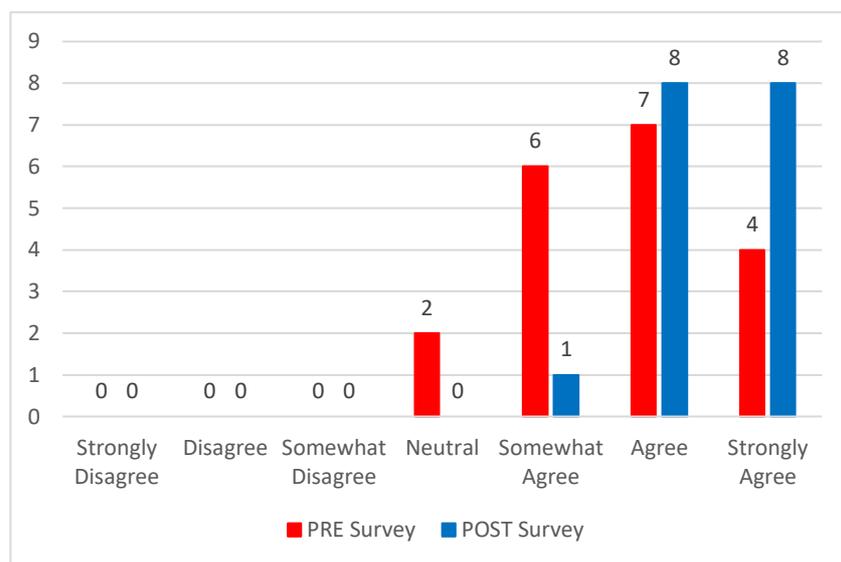


Figure 1: Recognition of career terms

The change in response before and after the PD indicates that respondents were influenced by the content of the workshops. Knowledge of career terms helps to provide a common language with which teachers and students can talk about careers.

Similarly, knowledge of career roles, and confidence in discussing career roles with students showing marked differences between pre- and post-surveys due to the PD (see Figures 2 and 3).

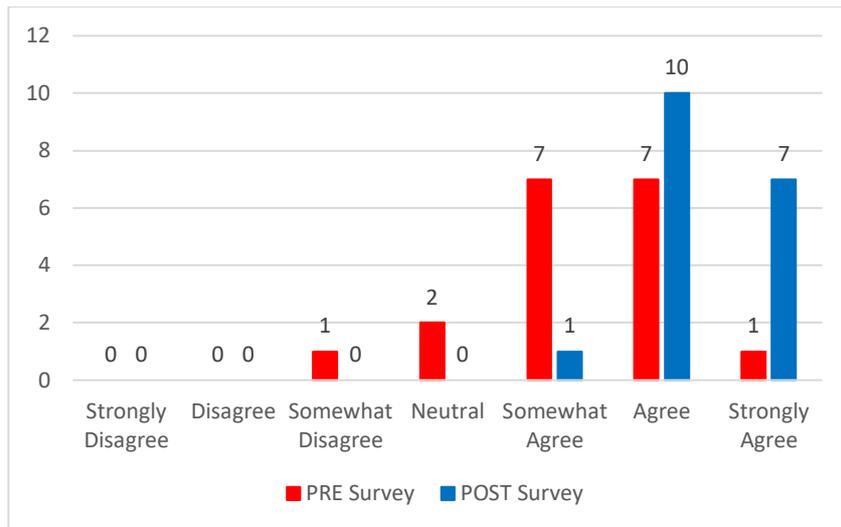


Figure 2: Knowledge of career roles

In the same way, a growing confidence in the knowledge of career roles in the school and how they work together to support students, allows teachers to effectively refer students to the appropriate sources of information.

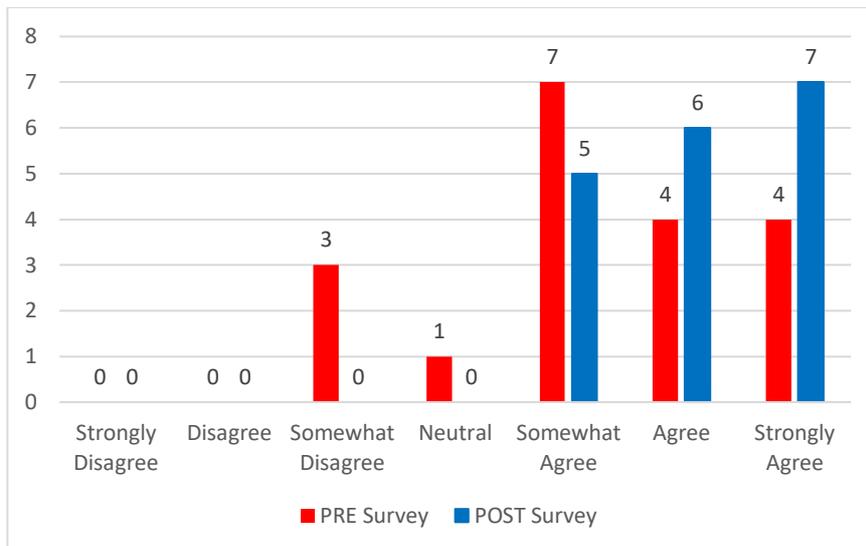


Figure 3: Confidence in discussing careers

Confidence in discussing careers with students grew as a result of the PD as shown in Figure 3. Confidence meant that teachers were more likely to speak to their students regarding CDL which in turn could provide more resources and opportunities for students.

The pre-program survey data (Figure 4) showed that ten teachers strongly agreed and seven teachers agreed about their understanding of a whole-school approach, and one teacher each

indicated either neutral, or somewhat agreed about their understanding of the importance of a whole-school approach.

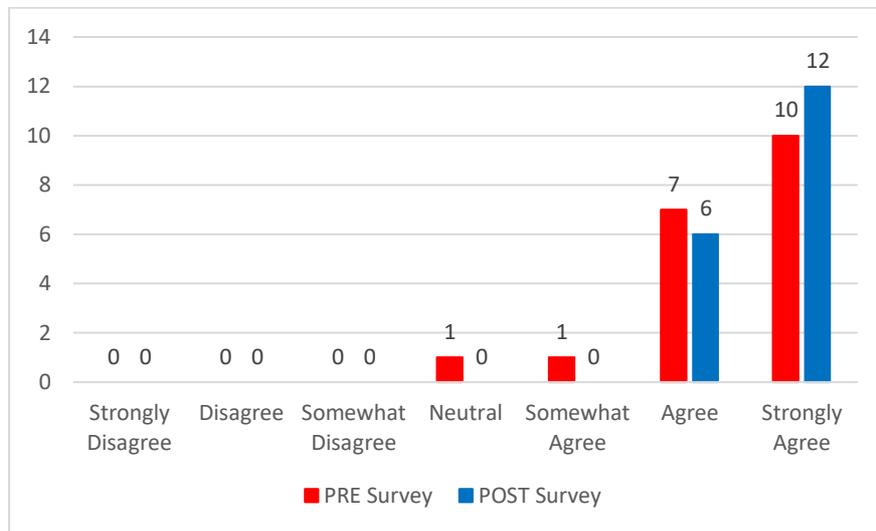


Figure 4: Understanding of a whole-school approach

The post-program survey data showed that, of eighteen teachers, there were no neutral or somewhat agree responses which indicates that the PD intervention was successful in cementing the importance of a whole-school response in creating CDL for students, particularly students from LSES backgrounds. In addition, those who strongly agreed about the importance of a whole-school approach increased from ten to twelve participants (see Figure 4).

After the PD, teachers indicated how excited they felt about their role in linking CDL to their curriculum within a whole-school approach (see Figure 5). The majority of teachers (n=9) agreed that they were excited, five teachers strongly agreed that they were excited about their role in CDL within a whole-school approach whilst a small number (n=4) conveyed that they were only somewhat excited by this role.

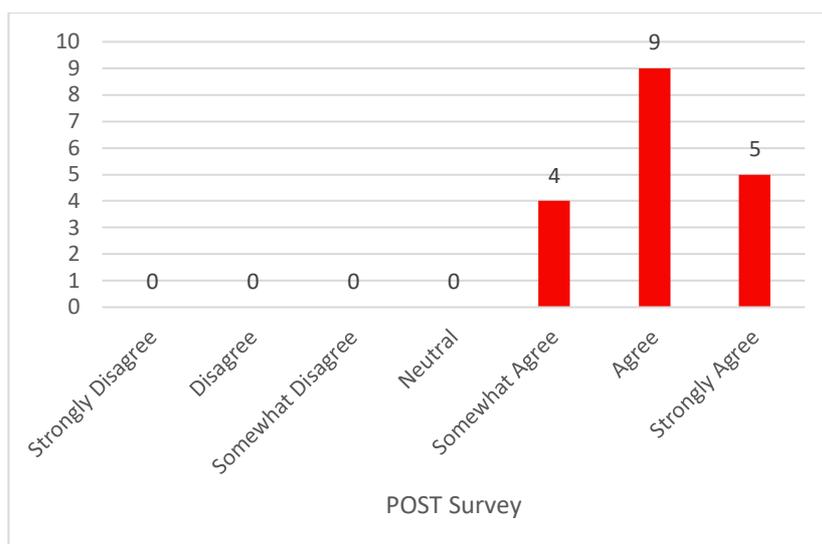


Figure 5: Teacher excitement about role within a whole- school approach

The data also indicated that teachers developed an understanding of the importance of their influence in providing CDL to students within their own classroom and key learning area (KLA). Yvette, a UOW career development practitioner, observed that as a result of the program, teachers were able to recognise “that they were such a key influence” in the lives of their students. As a consequence, teachers indicated specific changes they intended to make following the PD which included connecting classwork to careers; providing CDL resources to students; and embedding CDL in assessment and research tasks. Teachers wrote that the PD “got me thinking about [how] career choice and options can be placed within unit” (#7, survey) and that “expanding curricular approach” (#2, survey) was a way forward, along with “integrating ideas into KLA” (#8, survey).

Five of the fifteen post-survey comments focused on the importance of the classroom/career connection. Teachers wrote that they intended to connect classwork with careers through activities like referencing the workplace in the classroom; making connections between what they were doing in class with real-world careers; and encouraging conversations regarding the world of work. Charles, a classroom teacher, wrote about being mindful when having these conversations as this was a link for students in their career pathway. Charles stated:

*I remember doing one of my practicums and a student came up and discussed certain things about his career. And I think they talk more to you when it's one-on-one as well, so for me, when I did the workshop, it was good to understand that it is okay and*

*different ways that you should approach it* (Charles, Teacher, Technological and Applied Studies).

One classroom teacher (#19, survey) indicated that “my meta-language will change” and another classroom teacher (#16, survey) highlighted that as a result of the PD they will “use a different language, [use] different questions to ask”. Teachers also found the PD beneficial as it encouraged them to create informal career conversations with students. A teacher within the survey (#10, survey) wrote that the PD “inspired me to actively seek careers conversations”, and another teacher (#17, survey) indicated that the PD had “made me think about careers discussions in junior school as well as senior”. Similarly, as a result of the PD, Owen, a Head Teacher, planned to be more specific with students about how careers relate to subjects. He said, “it doesn’t have to be long, two minutes, to give students an awareness of what mathematics could potentially lead to” (Owen, Head Teacher, Mathematics).

Providing CDL resources emerged as a theme within the data with five of the fifteen teachers advising that they planned to provide further or specific CDL resources to students within their classes. As the PD sessions also highlighted the expertise of the career adviser and the resources available, teachers were introduced to the current resources and encouraged to reflect upon further resources to strengthen existing CDL for students. Resources suggested by the teachers included comment banks, posters, and videos. Owen (Head Teacher, Mathematics) confirmed that “YouTube videos of different maths career paths” would be valuable to students.

Embedding CDL in assessment tasks or research tasks was a further theme emerging from the data. Assessment tasks were important as students were likely to engage with the CDL content and spend time learning about the career or pathway. Research tasks held a similar purpose, where students were engaged in formal learning about CDL within the particular KLA. This could lead to students recognising pathways between classroom learning and careers.

### **Assessment of program delivery**

The success of the PD was central to the involvement of representatives across each KLA within the school. Ian (Principal) said “we had staff from every KLA involved and it made

them think about everything”. Having representatives across each KLA meant that CDL was a whole-school approach and representatives from each KLA could pass their knowledge on to the rest of their team for implementation.

Rowan (UOW widening-participation practitioner) noted that “it wasn’t a compulsory workshop so that’s an indicator of success to have that many people involved in it”. The success was partly due to the school principal where “whole-school involvement has actually eventuated with the principal’s support” (Rowan) and the dedicated work of the high-school career adviser, Imogen. Rowan also highlighted the impact of Imogen’s work as she had “delivered a PowerPoint to her whole staff outlining that this was a pilot program to be conducted with [university] in their school”. Imogen’s work paved the way for the acceptance of the PD within the school. Principal Ian also recognised the impact that Imogen had within the school as “she’s very proactive in lots of conversations with staff”. Yvette (UOW career-development practitioner) described how Imogen was able to provide information resources for the school staff and the program staff were able to work together to create the PD. The collaboration of program staff in delivering the PD was underpinned by the shared understanding of being practitioners in the same field and this “really worked for the teachers” (Yvette, UOW career-development practitioner).

Teacher engagement was also recognised by the amount of engagement and interaction between participants. Imogen (school career adviser) commented that the PD participants “were a very chatty group, they wanted to know more and to talk about their examples as well as to learn new things so that’s also an indicator of the success”. Rowan (widening-participation practitioner) agreed, saying that “there was really good engagement from the teachers” and this was significant as the PD was conducted as an addition to the school day, extending the time teachers were required to be at school. Yvette (UOW career-development practitioner) summarised teacher engagement by highlighting that the teachers were “a really engaged, lovely group. They had just come back to school...the timing of that in one way was actually really good because I felt they enjoyed being together”. The collegial nature of the participants was significant in the success of the PD as it achieved collaborative learning and provided the impetus for practical input in the classroom.

## Opportunities and implications

Time constraints were identified by all four program staff as a challenge to delivering the PD. The PD was for an hour at the end of a school day over three weeks (three sessions in total). Imogen (school career adviser) said “It’d be good if it was done in one day. That would be ideal, purely for the fact that you could get through all the information so then they could reflect the next day and then be proactive with it.” Rowan (widening-participation practitioner) suggested posing “questions beforehand and some straight-out discussion by us... maybe delivering some pre-set answers on the fundamental and most difficult questions.”

Imogen and Rowan’s feedback illustrated the need for streamlining the PD to allow for reflection. Amalie (School Counsellor) spoke about reflection, saying that the PD was a “good opportunity to sit down and reflect because I think we’re constantly moving in schools...there’s always something pressing to do”. Owen (Head Teacher, Mathematics) agreed with Amalie’s viewpoint on teacher “busyness”, saying it’s “how you balance all the different expectations – it’s almost impossible time-wise”. Teachers have multiple demands on their time, and by streamlining the PD teachers are more likely to have time for reflection.

A suggested additional area of improvement for the PD was the inclusion of a consistent measuring tool. This measuring tool would involve measurement at “key points and act on feedback” (Mary, widening-participation practitioner). The measurement could be tied to “some sort of check-in process or some key questions” (Mary, widening-participation practitioner). A measuring tool would ensure that subsequent PD in CDL could be provided in accordance with the data provided.

## Recommendations for practice

The following are recommendations for practice relate specifically to this pilot program. The full suite of recommendations and Best-Practice Principles for schools, school leaders, career advisers, students, teachers, and government departments of education can be found [here](#).

Best-practice CDL for students from LSES backgrounds would look like:

- School leaders facilitating the development of a whole-school plan for CDL, which articulates clear responsibilities for career advisers and classroom teachers.
- Career advisers acting as facilitators of CDL opportunities across the school, rather than the sole provider of CDL to students.
- Teachers embedding CDL into their curriculum, within individual key learning areas.
- Teachers exposing students to a range of different jobs, industries and workplaces, including those within their local communities, that are linked to the curriculum areas they are exploring within the classroom.
- Teachers sharing their educational journey and career experiences as part of their classroom teaching.
- Teachers engaging in a minimum of one accredited professional development session per year, focused on how career advice can be applied within their key learning area.

## Resources

Resources which might support the implementation of the above best practices have been made available online:

- [Lesson plans](#) for the delivery of teacher PD related to career advice.
- Short [videos](#) containing “expert” content to support schools and practitioners who might not have that expertise available. These might be used supplementary to the face-to-face PD delivery or as an integrated part of it.

## Conclusion

This intervention embedded best-practice principles for CDL in a series of PD sessions for teachers in one high school. The evaluation of the program revealed that the intervention achieved its aim to expand the responsibility of career advice beyond the career adviser through enhancing the capacity of all teachers within the school to provide effective advice and embed principles of CDL within their curriculum. Specifically, the program increased teacher knowledge of career terms, roles and a whole-school approach; increased teachers’

confidence in having career conversations; and stimulated desire to implement change as part of a whole-school approach.

The mode of delivery influenced the effectiveness of the program and future iterations will consider how to best utilise teachers' limited time to achieve program outcomes. Including teachers across each KLA is important to create a whole-school approach to embedding CDL in the curriculum so that students benefit from the holistic approach. The participants in the PD found considerable benefit in attending the sessions and indicated that they would change their language concerning CDL, embed CDL in the curriculum, and would engage in conversations with students about careers. These deliberate steps ensure quality CDL for students, and particularly those from LSES backgrounds. The high levels of participant engagement in the PD creates an engaging environment for further careers PD in that school as well as other schools in the region that support students from LSES backgrounds.

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