

Beyond damage control –  
an Academic's observations in the  
NSW Vocational Education Reform Research Collaboration  
(VERRC)

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Discussant's comments at the LH Martin Workshop on 'VET in Crisis'

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SYDNEY

- › These views are my own. While they have been developed, in part, through active collaboration with personnel in the NSW Department of Industry there should be no assumption that any of the following observations are endorsed by the NSW Government.
  
- › The views have benefitted greatly from reflections over the years with former colleagues at the Workplace Research Centre, especially Serena Yu, Tanya Bretherton and Damian officier.
  
- › Other research colleagues who have also played an important role are:
  - Other WRC/ACIRRT team members + University of Melbourne, LH Martin Institute, (especially Leesa Wheelahan + Mary Leah) and Melbourne Grad School of Education (especially Kira Clarke)
  - Ruth Schubert has played a critical role in ensuring these ideas have been widely disseminated and debated throughout all States and at the Federal level.
  
- ›

# The key facts of the collaboration

- › Motivation – move beyond a ‘damage control’ mindset in managing publicly funded VET
- › Design principle - Joint venture, ‘not contract managers’ overseeing ‘a service provider’
- › Objective:
  - Using data science, jointly define the problems and work out a better way to run vocational education
- › Organisational features
  - Dedicated research personnel in the Unis (two EFT)
  - Just as importantly – additional ‘inhouse policy research personnel’ in the Dept (ie two EFT)
  - Three strands of activity
    - 1 Piloting the capabilities approach in agriculture
    - 2 Using data science to run current arrangements better as prelude to potential reform
    - 3 Develop a new model for managing the uncertainty surrounding changing labour demand
- › Initial ‘contract’ for one year, with option to extend for two more

## Observation 1. A new policy sensibility

- › Humility on both sides
  - ‘no one knows the answer, indeed, no one really understands the VET problem’
  
- › Response reflects this sensibility
  - (a) High trust to share all information through all stages of the process
  - (b) Sensible time frames inform the planning – looking at work over years and not months
  - (c) Realism about institutional capacity – it needs to be nurture (ie moving beyond the ‘buying outcomes’ mindset)

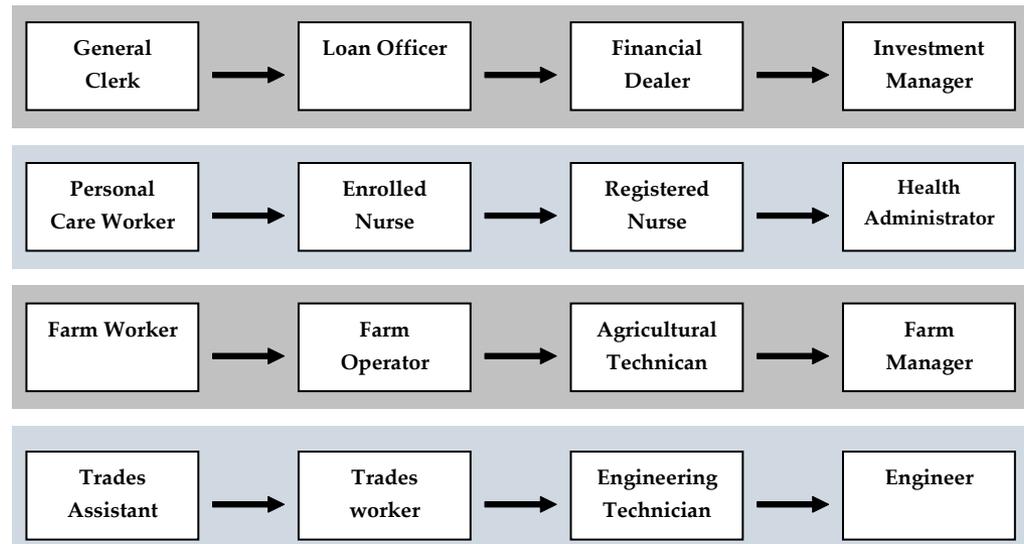
## Observation 2. Process guided by helpful not unhelpful dichotomous categories

- › Skills – beyond the ‘general’ vs ‘specific’ skills dichotomy
  - Take the notion of ‘transferable skill’ seriously  
(ie moving beyond the simple human capital framework)
  
- › Allocative mechanisms – beyond ‘markets’ vs ‘planning’ dichotomy
  - Prioritise development of ‘adaptive capacity’ not ‘right skills, right place, right time’ fantasy
  - Take seriously the responsibility of managing ‘critical occupations’
  - In thinking about the future work with scenarios  
(ie focus on planning for workforce development, not workforce planning)

Being used in two way:

- (a) predictive models for allocating current resources
  
- (b) Identifying empirically grounded categories that will deepen adaptive capacity (eg vocational streams and job clusters)

- › How do individuals move into and through the labour market?

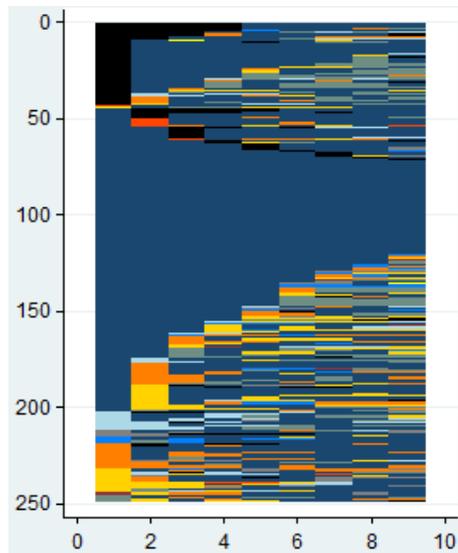


- › What are the commonalities in the trajectories of workers in the labour market?

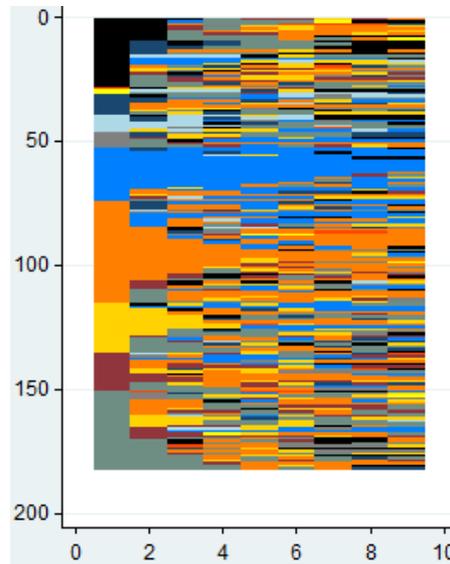
# Actual pathways very different from the olic model: The reality of segmentation (example from agriculture)

## › Example:

Farm managers

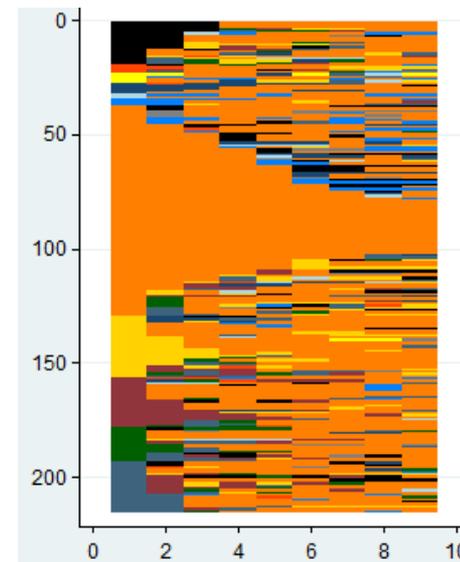
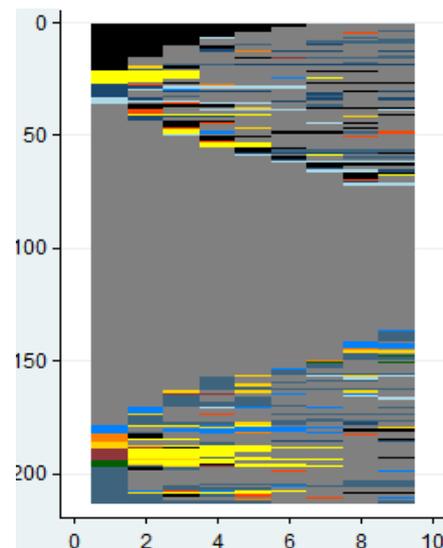


Manual workers in agriculture



# Key results – Healthcare and Community Services

- › Resource constraints inhibit career development – lack of training opportunities and/or work intensification
- › Strongly vocational narrative of care apparent amongst care workers and nurses
- › Career growth tended not to be vertical into management, but sideways into other specialisations.



- › 'when a person trains or works in 1 job, they acquire skills for 13 other jobs' (FYA/Alpha Beta 2016: 4)
- › There are seven job clusters
  - 'The Informers' (142 occupations within this cluster)
  - 'The Carers' (131)
  - 'The Artisans' (118)
  - 'The Designers' (70)
  - 'The Generators' (65)
  - 'The Coordinators' (59)
  - 'The Technologists' (10)

Source: Foundations for Young Australians/Alpha Beta, The New Work Mindset: 7 new job clusters to help young people navigate the new work order, November, 2016 <https://www.fya.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/The-New-Work-Mindset.pdf>

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