WORKING LIVES PROJECT

A TEN-YEAR COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF WORK, BENEFIT AND SKILL TRAJECTORIES OF PARALLEL COHORTS OF TRADE AND BACHELOR GRADUATES

REPORT OF STAGE 3

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Table of Contents

1.0 Introduction ...............................................................................................................................5
2.0 Background ...............................................................................................................................6
3.0 Research Methodology .............................................................................................................7
3.1 Research Design ........................................................................................................................7
3.2 A Life Course Research Design ...............................................................................................8
3.2.1 Retrospective Longitudinal Data .........................................................................................9
4.0 Findings ...................................................................................................................................10
4.1 Case Study Sample Selection Criteria ....................................................................................10
4.2 Major Overview of Influences Affecting Choices ..................................................................12
4.2.1 Personal, family, peer and financial influences .................................................................13
4.2.2 Education and Qualifications, Workplace and Career Choices .........................................15
4.3 Effects of Influences by Career Stage .....................................................................................19
4.3.1 Early Career Decisions ......................................................................................................19
4.3.2 Later Career Decisions .......................................................................................................34
4.3.3 Reasons for Job Changes: Changing Patterns of Influence Across Career Stages ............57
4.4 Ongoing Education .................................................................................................................69
4.4.1 On the job training .............................................................................................................70
4.4.2 Continual Formal Education ..............................................................................................70
4.5 Benefits ..................................................................................................................................79
4.5.1 Self Employer ....................................................................................................................80
4.5.2 Lifestyle change .................................................................................................................83
4.5.3 Self-Esteem ........................................................................................................................84
4.5.4 Skill Set Confidence ..........................................................................................................87
4.5.5 Financial .............................................................................................................................87
4.6 Gender .....................................................................................................................................89
4.6.1 Special Case Study: Melanie .............................................................................................94
5.0 In Summary .............................................................................................................................97

Reference List .....................................................................................................................................98
Appendices ........................................................................................................................................107
Individual Case Studies .....................................................................................................................107
List of Figures

Figure 1. Major influences affecting choices ................................................................. 12
Figure 2. Influences arising from personal, family, peers and financial choices ........... 13
Figure 3. Influences arising from education and qualifications, career decisions, and workplace choices ......................................................................................................................... 15
Figure 4. Workplace influences on career decisions ..................................................... 16
Figure 5. Effects of influences by career stage .............................................................. 19
Figure 6. Early Career Decisions .................................................................................. 20
Figure 7. Later Career Decisions ................................................................................... 34
Figure 8. Reasons for Job Change ................................................................................. 58
Figure 9. Benefits ......................................................................................................... 79
Figure 10. Effects of influences by gender ...................................................................... 105

List of Tables

Table 1. Data Collection, by Stage, Sample and Gender .................................................. 7
Table 2. Reasons for all job changes ............................................................................... 57
Table 3. Relative importance of methods of learning job skills – percentages of respondents indicating ‘important’ and ‘very important’ ........................................................................... 69
Table 4. Effects of influences by career stage ............................................................... 100
Table 5. Influences on Career Decisions for Higher Education and TAFE Graduates by Case ................................................................................................................................. 100
Table 6. Personal Influences Affecting Career Choices for both Higher Education Graduates and TAFE Graduates by Case .............................................................. 101
Table 7. Family Influences by Case ................................................................................. 102
Table 8. Workplace Influences by Case......................................................................... 103
Table 9. Effects of influences by gender ......................................................................... 104
Table 10. Benefits by case ............................................................................................ 106
List of Appendices

Figure 11: Wayne (Degree Graduate / Married / Stable within Field) ................................................108
Figure 12: Maddy (Degree Graduate / Married / Stable within Field) .................................................111
Figure 13: Troy (Trade Graduate / Married / Sideways Changer) .......................................................114
Figure 14: Sue (Degree Graduate / Divorced / Upward Mobile) ..........................................................116
Figure 15: Steven (Trade Graduate / Married Upward Mobile Within Trade) ....................................119
Figure 16: Simon (Trade Graduate / Married / Upward Mobile within Trade) ..................................121
Figure 17: Colin (HE Graduate / Married/ Upward Mobile within Trade) .........................................124
Figure 18: Helen (Degree Graduate/ Un-Married/ Stable within Field) ................................................127
Figure 19: Belinda (Degree Graduate / Married/ Sideways Changer) ..................................................130
Figure 20: Shane (Trade Graduate / Married/ Stable within Trade) ....................................................133
Figure 21: Maria (Degree Graduate / Married / Stable within Field) ...................................................135
Figure 22: Melanie (Degree Graduate / Married – Related Pathways Shift) ........................................138

Table 11: Summary of Wayne’s Stage Two Phone Interview ..........................................................109
Table 12: Summary of Maddy’s Stage Two Phone Interview ..........................................................112
Table 13: Summary of Troy’s Stage Two Phone Interview .............................................................115
Table 14: Summary of Sue’s Stage Two Phone Interview ...............................................................117
Table 15: Summary of Steven’s Stage Two Phone Interview ..........................................................120
Table 16: Summary of Simon’s Stage Two Phone Interview ..........................................................122
Table 17: Summary of Colin’s Stage Two Phone Interview ............................................................125
Table 18: Summary of Helen’s Stage Two Phone Interview ...........................................................128
Table 19: Summary of Belinda’s Stage Two Phone Interview .........................................................131
Table 20: Summary of Shane’s Stage Two Phone Interview ..........................................................134
Table 21: Summary of Maria’s Stage Two Phone Interview ...........................................................136
Table 22: Summary of Melanie’s Stage Two Phone Interview ........................................................139
1.0 Introduction

Australia is currently facing a situation of skill shortage: an ongoing shortage of qualified young people in many skilled occupations. Such a situation has the potential to slow growth and to undermine competitiveness in a global economy, and has become a major focus of recent governmental reforms in education, particularly as regards the vocational education sector (Department of Innovation Industry and Regional Development, 2008, p. 19). Australia’s current situation is also characterised by rapid technological change, an aging workforce, and transformations of traditional patterns of work. Given this situation, there is a surprising dearth of studies which map and compare the actual trajectories of different types of skilled workers, in terms of their labour market entry, participation and job progression.

This study begins to ask questions as to the nature of such a skill shortage: is it due to a movement of qualified young people away from certain occupations? Is it more a problem of insufficient numbers studying and entering occupations that are in demand? Or is it a complex combination of factors? To begin to unpack and address such questions, this research investigation closely examined the journeys that two groups of young people took after completing their initial qualification and entering the world of work. The two cohorts were a group of RMIT Higher Education (HE) degree graduates (N = 125) and a group of RMIT Technical and Further Education (TAFE) graduates (N = 54). This study compared the work, skill, and benefit trajectories of these two parallel cohorts, across the first ten years of their working lives. It examined the major “life events” and occupational transitions experienced by these skilled workers, both individually and as differential groups.

Initially, the project had the following four aims:
1. To analyse and compare patterns of labour market participation between and within each cohort (including occupational shifts, separations, promotions, re-entry and shifts in status) over a ten year period.
2. To analyse and compare patterns of skill and qualification acquisition between and within each group.
3. To analyse and compare benefit profiles at each job shift and at ten years after graduation.
4. To develop a new measure of education- and work-related benefits that goes beyond traditional earnings – comprising, for example, accumulated and distributed benefits (Fehring, Bessant, & Malley, 2005, pp. 35-36).

The project was undertaken in three stages. In Stage 1, data was collected in the form of participant responses to a mail-out questionnaire. These initial participant responses were then successively refined, clarified and amplified by means of a series of telephone interviews (Stage 2) and in-depth personal interviews and case studies (Stage 3).

To explore the aims of the project, data collection during Stage 1 and Stage 2 was guided by the following broad questions:

- What are the occupational, skill and benefit pathways of trade and bachelor degree completers over the first ten years of their working lives?
1.0 Introduction

- Are there any commonalities between and within the two cohorts?
- Can a transactional model, responsive to the position of the individual, be developed to explain young people’s movement in the labour market – as they move between and within enterprises and occupations, and as they accrue benefits and skills? (Fehring, et al., 2005, p. 35).

Data for the study was derived from self-completed diaries and questionnaires in Stage 1 (N = 179), and from extended telephone and face-to-face interviews (Stage 2, a sub-set of Stage 1 participants, N = 94). This data retrospectively reconstructed significant events and changes in participants’ working and social lives, and provided a detailed and dynamic portrait of the ways in which qualified workers find employment, attain promotion, develop additional skills, shape their careers and receive a range of benefits from their education or training (Fehring, Malley, & Robinson, 2008). Stage 3 of the research explores in detail the working lives of 12 study participants, in the form of in-depth case studies. This stage of the project sought to provide detailed descriptions of the motivational factors and critical events that influenced participants’ decision-making at various points in their working lives.

2.0 Background

The design of this research project has been shaped by two related developments in the literature on skill and work, both of which are highly pertinent to a situation of skill shortage. The first concerns the critical discourse surrounding “returns to investment” in education (Blundell, Dearden, & Sianesi, 2004, May; McIntosh, 2002, September). The second concerns the development of longitudinal techniques to investigate occupational progressions throughout working life (Mayer, 2000; Ruspini, 1999; Walters, 2002; Ziguras, 2005).

Public perceptions about relative job worth have traditionally been influenced by large, cross-sectional, point-in-time surveys that compare average occupational wage levels and private returns to investment in education and training. Such approaches mask the dynamism and seriation that career pathways and life courses actually exhibit; they reinforce a static understanding of the individual’s place or position in the labour market, and of the benefits and motivations that drive many to effect occupational change. Furthermore, such approaches tend to reinforce the perception that skilled trade occupations are low-wage, low-progression and of limited value and flexibility.

The present study is firmly focused on the individual, as opposed to the enterprise or the state. By tracking individual employment histories across occupations and enterprises, this study critically responds to the literature of human resource management, which often embodies an exclusive concern for the enterprise (Fehring, Malley, & Robinson, 2008; Rowold & Schilling, 2006). In contrast with discourses of human capital theory, patterns discernible in the individual trajectories examined in this small-scale but intensive study suggest that not all decisions to change employer or occupation are based on rational investment strategies (Fehring, Malley, & Robinson, 2008, p. 1).
3.0 Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The Working Lives project was designed as a retrospective, quasi-longitudinal survey incorporating Life Course methodology (Elder & Giele, 2009; Fehring & Bessant, 2009; Giele & Elder, 1998; Somekh & Lewin, 2005). The study was constructed around three interrelated themes: employment and work changes, significant life events, and skill and qualification changes. It was decided to constrain the longitudinal study to the first ten years of working life on the grounds that the decade after initial education and training frequently involves crucial, often risk-laden life-cycle transitions, such as: leaving home, entering into long-term intimate and/or marital relationships, starting families and establishing businesses. The research design was deliberately exploratory and not intended to be representative of all working life trajectories. To minimise variation, however, membership of the participant sample was restricted on the basis of the following characteristics:

- 24 years of age or under at the time of course completion;
- an Australian resident or citizen;
- having completed her/his course between 1994–1996 at the same institution (RMIT); and
- having obtained vocational qualifications in broadly comparable fields (of: construction, electronics and electrical, health, hospitality, and, for the bachelor graduates, certain other fields of applied science).

Data gathering occurred in three stages. Stage 1 data collection occurred in early 2007 via a mailed self-report questionnaire, providing retrospective descriptions of education outcomes and employment journeys with respondent explanation as to why and how particular occupational or life events occurred. This process yielded a total of 179 respondents, comprising 54 former apprentices and 125 higher education graduates. In Stage 2, additional data was obtained from a sub-sample of Stage 1 respondents through an extended telephone interview with 29 former apprentices and 65 degree graduates. From Stage 1 and 2 participants a small number (N = 12) of intensive case studies were undertaken. These case studies facilitated in-depth exploration of the interactions between job histories, patterns of skills development and other life events, during Stage 3 of the research.

Table 1. Data Collection, by Stage, Sample and Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Apprentices (TAFE)</th>
<th>Degree graduates (HE)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>Females*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1 respondents</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2 respondents</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 3 respondents</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The number of females in the sample of former apprentices is very low. Hence, in all of the results tabled in the subsequent section of this document, the column for female apprentices has been excluded, when reporting results as percentages of the samples by gender.
3.2 A Life Course Research Design

The *Working Lives* project adopted a Life Course research design in order to collect rich, in-depth data on the dynamics of working lives, with a view to identifying significant transitions and social risks that impact upon skilled workers’ career trajectories and patterns of labour-market participation (Fehring & Bessant, 2009). The concept of the life course denotes “a sequence of socially defined events and roles which people enact over time” (Giele & Elder, 1998, p. 22). Viewed as a social phenomenon, the life course may be defined as “the intersection of social and historical factors with personal biography” (Elder 1985, cited in George, 1993, p. 358). In this respect a Life Course perspective emphasises both the importance of social and historical influences on people’s lives and, conversely, the importance of human agency and the interactivity of individuals with their settings. Life Course research recognises that “any point in the lifespan must be viewed dynamically as the consequence of past experience and future expectation as well as the integration of individual motive with external constraint” (Giele & Elder, 1998, p. 19). Life Course studies thus not only seek to identify constraints on individual decision-making in relation to life choices, but also to examine the variability of such decisions made by individuals under similar conditions. Furthermore, Life Course research is concerned with the ways in which micro outcomes affect configurations at the macro level, i.e. the evolutionary dynamics of social structures and institutions (Mayer, 2003).

Two key concepts for Life Course research are *transitions* (discrete occurrences such as changes in employment status) and *trajectories* (longer-term patterns of stability and change, often encompassing several transitions). For instance, careers may be said to be life course trajectories comprising transitions such as job shifts (including both vertical and lateral moves, as well as movement in and out of the labour force) and other, interrelated life events (George, 1993).

Life events are the basic building blocks for descriptive and explanatory analysis. The data required for Life Course research are “events combined in event histories or trajectories that are then compared across persons or groups by noting differences in timing, duration, and rates of change” (Giele & Elder, 1998, p. 3). According to Giele and Elder (1998, 2009), data collection for Life Course research should encompass:

- historical context (*location*)
- relationships in family and work and other social settings (*linked lives/social ties*)
- health, wellbeing and subjective aspects of meaning and satisfaction (*human agency*), and
- event histories in the major domains of activity (*timing of lives*).

Within each functional domain – such as family, occupation and residential moves – both the chronological time of incidence and the duration of events needed to be recorded. These four substantive aspects of Life Course theory provide a sound framework for data collection in the *Working Lives* project.

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1 In contradistinction to Life History research, Life Course research tends to focus on real time – the ongoing present – and aims to capture the life in process, often through successive interviews, in order to examine complex relationships (Bieta, Hodkinson, & Goodson, 2005; Somek & Lewin, 2005).
3.2.1 Retrospective Longitudinal Data

A longitudinal framework is regarded as essential for Life Course research (Elder & Giele, 2009; Giele & Elder, 1998). Longitudinal data are repeated observations of a set of characteristics or events over a period of time (Fehring & Bessant, 2009). Interest in longitudinal studies has increased because of dissatisfaction with attempts to analyse dynamic social processes using static cross-sectional studies. The latter are inappropriate for studying patterns of change within cohorts, and cannot be used to resolve issues of causality (Dale & Davies, 1994; Ruspini, 1999). Longitudinal analyses can include dependent variables measured not at a single, arbitrary point in time (corresponding to the time at which a static, cross-sectional survey was conducted), but over different time periods, resulting in a dynamic profile of development and change (Elder & Giele, 2009).

For Life Course research, longitudinal studies offer three distinct advantages over cross-sectional, point-in-time surveys (Mayer, 2000). The rich and detailed data they yield facilitates greater understanding of complex (yet frequently overgeneralised) life phases such as youth and middle age. A second advantage is that longitudinal data sets potentially overcome the fragmentation of studies focused on particular life domains – such as education or work or family – by revealing the mutual interpenetration of these various domains. Thirdly, longitudinal data may provide a more comprehensive longer-term view of life patterns, thereby allowing a shift from a focus on smaller transitions to the identification of longer-term effects, including persistent and cumulative advantage and disadvantage (Fehring & Bessant, 2009; Mayer, 2000).

Longitudinal data may be collected retrospectively or prospectively. Prospective panel studies outline the trajectories of individuals and households through time, gathering information about them at regular intervals. These panel studies often also include, in the first instance, relevant retrospective information. The research design of Working Lives may be characterised as quasi-longitudinal, in that it employs a cross-sectional survey of cohorts to retrospectively collect longitudinal data (Fehring & Bessant, 2009). Advantages of a retrospective longitudinal design derive from the fact that it can cover a longer time-span than a prospective panel study, and that it can do so relatively quickly. As Dempster-McClain and Moen (1998) observe: “It is cheaper and quicker to do catch-up samples than to launch a panel study and wait 30 years for the data” (1998, p. 150). However, there are also potential disadvantages, as evidenced by concerns about the quality and reliability of data collected retrospectively (Dex, 1995). Recall bias is a major concern. While the collection of retrospective data can refer to apparently simple, factual recollections of events in the past, it can also involve the respondent reflecting, reviewing and effectively revising that past, prompting concerns over circular causality and the difficulty of disentangling respondents’ current attitudes and behaviours from the effects of her/his previous experiences. In relation to the dating of transitions or life events, Scott and Alwin (1998) found that some respondents’ memories can be influenced by the reference period used in the survey instrument itself. Furthermore, respondents may find it difficult to accurately recall the timing of changes, especially changes in attitudes, motivations and feelings, which tend to be gradual processes rather than discrete events (Blossfeld & Rohwer, 1995; Karweit & Kertzer, 1998). One empirical study that compared retrospective and prospective data from a large sample of adolescents cautioned against the use of retrospective reports of psychological variables (Scott & Alwin, 1998).
Awareness of such limitations and possible sources of bias can assist in improving the quality and reliability of retrospective longitudinal data. The fact that retrospective data are, in a sense, always already current (i.e., influenced to a greater or lesser extent by present conditions) can and should be factored into the research design and findings of longitudinal studies such as the Working Lives project.

4.0 Findings

The results of Stage 1 and 2 have already been documented and published on the RMIT GSSSP CASR website (Fehring, Malley, & Robinson, 2008). The main findings in the current document pertain to Stage 3 of the study, namely to the 12 in-depth case studies. The case study participants were chosen on the basis of their career trajectories over ten years since graduation.

A comparative analysis of TAFE (N = 4) and Higher Education graduates (N = 8) did not reveal any consistent differences on the basis of (i) the influences on career decisions and (ii) personal influences affecting career choices. Therefore, no further analysis was undertaken in relation to these attributes (refer Table 5, p. 99 & Table 6, p. 100).

Neither was it possible to undertake a comparative gender analysis of the two cohorts, because there were no female TAFE graduates in the Stage 3 sub-sample. Therefore, no further analysis was undertaken in relation to this attribute. (Refer to Table 1, p. 7; Table 9, p. 103; & Figure 10, p. 104). Nevertheless, gender differences need to be highlighted in this report. The participants in Stage 3 of this study raised a number of gender issues which are of profound importance to contemporary working lives. Section 4.6 addresses the specific issues of gender raised in this study (p. 88).

4.1 Case Study Sample Selection Criteria

The sample selection was based on maximum variation purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002). The selection process involved examining the participants’ career trajectories and categorising the two cohorts of individuals as follows.

**Trade Graduates (N = 4)**
- Upwardly mobile out of trade: graduates who had sought promotion in occupations outside their initial qualifications
- Upwardly mobile within trade: graduates who had sought promotion within occupations related to their original qualifications
- Stable within trade: graduates whose career trajectories had remained within the initial occupational choice after graduation
- Sideways changers out of trade: graduates who had sought career pathways in occupations unrelated to their initial qualifications

**Degree Graduates (N = 8)**
- Upwardly mobile within field: graduates who had sought promotion within occupations related to their initial qualifications
4.0 Findings

Related pathway shifts: graduates who had sought a career pathway related to their initial qualifications
- Stable within field: graduates whose careers had remained within the initial occupational field chosen after graduation
- Sideways changers out of field: graduates who had sought careers in occupations unrelated to their initial qualifications

Choosing case studies that reflected maximum variation in terms of career pathways, the research team anticipated that participants would articulate richly detailed descriptions of the reasons for major occupational changes and career trajectories. Such detail would thus enhance the interpretation of Stage 1 and 2 data.
4.2 Major Overview of Influences Affecting Choices

The range of influences affecting career choices of all 12 case study participants, both TAFE and Higher Education, are shown in Figure 1. Note that these seven sets of influence are not amenable to hierarchical ordering.

![Diagram: Major influences affecting choices]

Figure 1. Major influences affecting choices

Each of these influences manifested with some variation between the initial or early part of the ten year period, when compared with the later part.

1. **Education and Qualifications.** This initially referred to participants obtaining a qualification post-Year 12 with a view to seeking employment as a skilled worker. Later in participants’ working lives, this referred to upgrading and/or changing qualifications, or obtaining on the job education in order to maintain and/or enhance job prospects.

2. **Career Decisions.** Initially all participants, post-Year 12, made decisions about studies based on the career they saw themselves embarking upon. However, after being in the workforce for a number of years, participants’ decisions about their careers were impacted by other influences. Such influences were not necessarily directly related to their chosen careers but affected their career pathways.

3. **Workplace.** This was a particularly interesting and diverse influence because initially some participants indicated the influence that work experience had exerted on their post-Year 12 decisions. Later on in their careers, participants report the effects, both positive and negative, that workplace situations had had on their career changing decisions. For example: being made redundant because of the changing technology of the 21st century; becoming disillusioned with
4.2 Overview of Influences

the career chosen post-Year 12 and wanting to change occupations; and the influence of very long work hours and its affect on career changing decisions.

4. **Financial.** Once again, initially this referred to post-Year 12 study decisions that were made based on whether or not a student received a scholarship or funded place in higher education. Alternatively, for some students, TAFE careers were chosen because it allowed them to work and study. Later career decisions were influenced by financial influences as the participants entered into relationships involving partners, families and home purchases.

5. **Family.** This influence encompasses parental and sibling influences on post-Year 12 career decision-making and then the later influences of partners and parenting.

6. **Peers.** This influence refers to how friends and personal networks impinged on the participants’ career decisions.

7. **Personal.** This theme is an interesting collection of decision-making influences that encompasses a range of issues. For example: the personal health of the individual, the desire to travel overseas and thus stop working in Australia, or the need for a lifestyle change because of a variety of reasons impinging on individual participants. This influence is discussed further in Section 4.2.1 and Figure 2 (p. 14).

These seven types of influence on career choices are expanded and illustrated in the following sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2, in order to explain their significance to the 12 case study participants.

4.2.1 Personal, family, peer and financial influences

![Figure 2. Influences arising from personal, family, peers and financial choices](image)

- 13 -
4.2 Overview of Influences

Personal
The category labelled personal consisted of several interlinked influences. Some participants spoke about the confidence they had in their own skills which gave them the self-assurance needed to take on new challenges associated with occupation change. Belinda exemplifies this confidence, in relation to prospects such as maternity leave:

Whereas now I think, yeah, that’s easy. Or if I don’t do that, I could actually do a whole lot of other things, because I have that skill set behind me. I’ve sort of got to that point now, where it doesn’t matter when I leave or what I do, if I need to I can always come back to it. Belinda (HE).

Other participants spoke about the self-esteem they had in relation to a desire to maximise their abilities. Sometimes this meant moving to new and more demanding jobs. The desire to travel overseas and experience the world before having a family was important for a number of the case study participants. The desire to be one’s own boss was a personal consideration for a number of participants. A desire for lifestyle change affected some participants’ career pathways, especially later in the ten year period since graduation. Belinda commented on this:

I think I’m at an interesting point now, where, y’know, I’m getting to be mid-thirty and work is not everything. I’ve worked very hard to get where I am, but I don’t know if I could do this for the next ten years. And so now for me it’s about looking at other things that can give me the lifestyle, rather than just working hard every day. Whereas before when I was, y’know, building my career, it was so important to work hard! Whereas now it’s not the be-all and end-all. Belinda (HE)

The personal health of some participants influenced their occupational changes. Personal choice simply relates to a perceived need for change and in one case entailed a decision to undertake further studies.

Family
The category of family encompasses the advice, support and guidance offered by both parents and siblings in the immediate post-Year 12 period, and, later in working life, consideration of the needs of partners and children. It also includes, almost exclusively for women, taking family leave in order to care for children. Family considerations had significant career impacts, especially among female participants in our study.

Peers
The influence of peers includes instances in which friends had assisted participants to find a new job and change occupations. Networks refers to the ways in which social relations influence career choices and trajectories. Maddy, for example, commented on the influence of networks and peers:

our world is very small, in my profession, so as soon as someone knows that someone’s on the hunt for a job, they know who you are, they know what skills you have, and … word goes around. …Your reputation precedes you wherever you go. Maddy (HE)
4.2 Overview of Influences

Financial

Financial considerations affected career decision-making differently at various points of the ten year period. For example, some TAFE graduates reported that they chose TAFE studies because they could work (i.e., earn an income) and study at the same time. Later in their working lives, financial considerations often involved such transitions as getting married, becoming a parent, buying a home, or setting up a business. The pressures such transitions place on the working lives of case study participants are discussed in more detail in Section 4.3.1 Early Career Decisions (p. 20) and 4.3.2 Later Career Decisions (p. 36).

4.2.2 Education and Qualifications, Workplace and Career Choices

Figure 3 expands the remaining three categories from the seven outlined in the major overview section 4.2 (p. 12). These three categories are labelled: education and qualifications, career choices and workplace. They consist of a range of reasons affecting participants’ career decisions as documented in this study.

Figure 3. Influences arising from education and qualifications, career decisions, and workplace choices

Education and Qualifications comprises a complex mix of the secondary school expectations of peers and family in terms of participants’ choice of tertiary qualification. This category also includes Year 12 results in VCE (Victorian Certificate of Education) and their effects – enabling or constraining – on participants’ choice of an occupational pathway. In one case, the availability of a scholarship was a determining factor, as Wayne explained:
I guess one of the things that actually convinced me—or one of the reasons I went to university was, I actually got a scholarship from RMIT, so it was a new course that they were offering when I was doing it, and I think there was some government grants that were given out to, I think about half a dozen students—so that paid like half of the fees for the year. Wayne (HE)

One participant commented on the influence of teaching staff at RMIT and its effect of orienting students toward a greater variety of available occupational pathways. Ten years after graduation, a number of case study participants had decided to return to study, typically because either their present or their prospective occupation required postgraduate qualifications.

The *career decisions* category relates mainly to influential secondary school experiences. For example, some participants reported having negative experiences with career counsellors. Some expressed an initial uncertainty as regards choice of career. Others exemplified forward-planning, thinking “into the future”, and commented on having considered the “portability” of some occupations relative to others. A number of comments related to the influence—whether negative or positive—of work experience while still at school. *Previous work experience* refers to participants’ comments on their early work experiences, post-graduation, and their effect on occupational change. Some reported being bored at work, and thus in need of change. Others reported that their previous work experience gave them the confidence and skills to try new and more challenging occupations.

The *workplace* influence (see Figure 1 and Figure 3) refers exclusively to the post-graduation, ten year period which is the main interest of the study. Figure 4 below expands this category to illustrate those aspects of career influence nominated by case study participants.

![Figure 4. Workplace influences on career decisions](image-url)
The workplace category consists of a complex set of interrelated influences on career and occupational decision-making:

i) **Working hours** – long working hours, inflexible working hours, and shift work all have impacts on skilled workers and their families. This influence refers to the long working hours a number of the participants spoke about. It also refers to the effect of shift work on the workers themselves and the impact on their families. A number of participants referred to the effects that the inflexible working hours imposed by some occupations have on both the workers themselves and their families.

ii) **Redundancy** – Several participant spoke about the impact being made redundant had on their self-worth and ability to secure another job.

iii) **Family leave** – The females were the main case study participants to speak about the availability of family leave and the consequences on their working lives and occupational changes. Maria sums up the effects and speaks of the potential for change as follows:

   I know when I was at xxx they never took people back part-time. It was full-time or nothing. However, after I left they had to start thinking about that, because they were suddenly getting very short-staffed, and ... quite a few people in senior roles ... were having babies. And they did come back part-time, and they suddenly realised that part-time workers were actually sometimes better than their full-time workers, because they enjoyed it more and they weren’t entrenched in it. So they had a bit of a culture change there, and learnt a lot from that. Maria (HE)

iv) **Work mentors** – Most participants referred to the effect a work mentor had on expanding their working lives skills and opportunities.

v) **Industry policies** – This was an influence that referred to industries that did not have EBAs and the impact that such a workplace could have on a worker. For some women wanting to take family leave and then some form of part-time work the impact was devastating and necessitated an occupational change.

vi) **Changing workplace** – This influence refers to the constant changes occurring within different workplaces and the effect such changes can have on workers’ occupational expectancies. In Stage 3 this influence manifested as change brought about through such things as workplace restructure or change to workplace after maternity leave.

vii) **Changing technology** was a direct influence on career pathways and can be regarded as a sub-set of changing workplace. This influence refers to the changing nature of work in the 21st century. Changing technology and practices has had a significant effect on some of the case study participants, for example, in Troy’s words:

   I first started out in the printing industry and could see big things coming from it in the early... nineties. And, probably within about five years I sort of realised that the technology was changing and computers were being upgraded, and I could see that, on the printing side of things, that a lot of people were printing their own materials because of the computers and the printers - they could buy and have access themselves. So, I sort of realised then that the trade was dying off, particularly in the industry that I started off in, which was the off-set industry. Back then a whole lot of stationery was getting printed...
through us printers, printing machinists. And then all of a sudden once the computers became upgraded and technology... business started to slow down a bit... Troy (T).

viii) **Promotion**- Some participants referred to the influence of (internal) promotion on remaining in a job because the culture was to promote from within owing to the occupational experience advantage. However, other case study participants spoke of the need to change occupations to gain promotion.

ix) **Job shortages**- This influence refers to the impact that lack of available staff can have on certain occupations and the different working arrangements that need to be put into place to cover the workload. In the words of several Stage 3 participants, job shortages also referred to the possibility of achieving preferable conditions when there’s a lack of staff competing for positions (for example, Maddy was able to achieve the part-time hours she sought at one workplace, largely because they ‘really needed staff’).

x) **Company loyalty** - This interesting influence referred to the existence and non-existence of the concept of company loyalty in the 21st century. Wayne, who is categorised as ‘Upwardly Mobile within Field’ spoke very highly of the company he worked for and how they retained his loyalty by providing for the various needs and professional development of their workers to keep the skill within the industry. However, Belinda experienced the opposite and had no company loyalty at all: “There is no loyalty at work... there isn’t. Everyone’s here to make a dollar. And at the end of the day why should I give my loyalty up if I’m not going to get it back?”
4.3 Effects of Influences by Career Stage

Figure 5. Effects of influences by career stage (Refer to Appendix Table 4)

The 12 case study participants were asked to reflect on the reasons for their early career decisions. The following categories of response describe the reasons given for career decisions made at school, university or in other contexts prior to (or soon after) entering the workforce.

4.3.1 Early Career Decisions

In terms of the types of influences that came to bear on participants’ early career decisions, there were five main categories of response. These five categories, as illustrated in Figure 6, are: Family (incorporating parents, siblings and parenting); Peers (friends and networks); Education (including factors such as Year 12 results, scholarship opportunities, tertiary teaching staff influence); Specific career influences (such as the advice of a secondary school careers counsellor, the impact of work experience programs at either school or university); and Financial factors. Figure 6 diagrammatically summarises the relationship between these descriptors for all 12 participants. The following sections illustrate these categories of influence by quoting from the participants in detail.
Figure 6. Early Career Decisions

4.3.1 By Stage: Early Career Decisions
4.3.1 Family

4.3.1.1 Parents

Two of the case study participants illustrate the influence of family – specifically parents – on early career path, in what might be termed an “expected” sense; that is, the participants felt an affinity with the paths their parents had chosen:

I’d grown up in an environment where tertiary education was pretty common, y’know, with my dad, and with my dad’s peers, and with my sister and her friends – they were all pretty-much tertiary people, and --not many that weren’t really. Colin (HE)

Well I always wondered why I chose science... I chose medical radiation [initially], so I chose something that actually had a real application that I understood, you know, like – in a medical area – and ...my sister’s a doctor, my mum’s a nurse – so I’d always had a level of exposure. Melanie (HE)

Another participant, Troy, spoke of the influence of his father on his early career decisions, in what might be termed an “unexpected” sense. He explained that his father’s wishes that he and his siblings go to university were made explicit, but were ignored. Troy also explained that, in hindsight, his father had come to see the value of Troy’s brother’s business skills, and to recognise trade qualifications as a valid alternative to university education:

[My dad] wanted all three of us kids to go to uni... he pushed us at a young age to go to uni, to get the big jobs... but now he’s noticed, through my brother’s business, that the ...tradies...and what their capabilities of earning [are]... and he’s said, ‘I just can’t believe this’... hehe, he said, ‘I’m dumbfounded’ – cause he went to uni and got his qualifications... because...what he had to go through, to study hard to do what he’s done – achieved... He goes ‘Now... [you] don’t have to go to school, if you do that apprenticeship and’... basically what it revolves around now is just networking... Troy (T)

Wayne reported his family as being supportive, but also – notably – as not having provided a model for him to follow, as his parents did not have a university background. Wayne had chosen his own path, which was to go to university. He explained this in the context of being offered two career pathways: a cadetship and a place at university.

When I finished high school, I wasn’t sure whether I wanted to go to university, I was offered a cadetship at Coles, to go into management – do a two year cadetship to go into management ... back then I was head casual, it was like: do I take the money now? Do I go to university? And I wasn’t sure what I wanted to do. Yeah, never had an inkling – I was the first person in my family to go to university, so didn’t have actually have an inkling that I had to go or – was actually the first person in my family to finish high school! So, it was – I didn’t know exactly what I wanted to do... My family, they
said, ‘If you want to go to university, go to university, we’ll help support you. If you don’t go to university – the main thing was, you don’t sit at home’; hehe. ‘If you get a job, you get a job’ – like, my older sister she finished in Year 11, got her apprenticeship and she went into hairdressing. And they were fully supportive, and as they said to her, ‘You don’t want to do Year 12, but you need to finish – if you don’t have a job, you go back to school’. And pretty much the same – they said, ‘Look, apply to university,’ they said, ‘Look, see what it’s like, you’ve still got – you can fall back on the cadetship if you really wanted to – Go to uni’. Wayne (HE)

4.3.1.2 Siblings
In Belinda’s case, she commented on the particular influence her older sister had, in conjunction with her parents, in relation to her early career decisions:

[My parents] wanted me to go to university, and they saw [hospitality as] something I could actually do, whereas they were concerned if I had chosen a language, or other things like physics, I just wouldn’t have had the skill set to do them. So they were comfortable with hospitality... And part of it is because my older sister put it on her list of preferences as well. And if you look at the things that we did growing up, she did something, I did something and it sort of stepped up, so when she put it on her preferences the year before me, I put it on my preferences as well– because we’re so close in age and so I was only one year level behind her at school so...we were always doing the same things... I had no idea about the course, but she looked at it, and it sounded pretty glamorous.... Belinda (HE)

Belinda was able to laugh about the fact that neither her sister’s potential career path in hospitality, nor her perception of the course as glamorous, came to pass.

4.3.1.3 Parenting
Although parenting was an influential factor in many participants’ later career decisions, only one participant expressed the influence of (future) parenting on her early career choices. Maddy, who chose a path of radiography, explains:

... I suppose, you know, if you really know in yourself that in the future you want to have a family and all of that bears on your mind. Maddy (HE)

In terms of later career decisions (see below), two participants make similar comments. This variation reflects the fact that parenting is not only something that women “factor in” to their career choices in their twenties, but also in their thirties and beyond.
4.3.1 Peers

Sue spoke directly of the influence that her workplace peers exerted on the shape of her burgeoning career in hospitality. She said that although her parents indirectly had an influence on her career, peer influence had a powerful, direct impact:

...but I think mainly [my career direction] came from, I would say, it more came from being inspired by peers ... Yeah in my first few years in the workforce. Sue (HE)

Belinda, to cite another example of this kind of career influence, was motivated to undertake an MBA partly because she felt compelled to “keep up with” her peers. Many of her peers were working in professional areas (as lawyers, doctors etc.) and she felt that by adding an MBA to her Applied Science Degree (in Hospitality) she would “prove to herself” that she was as good as her peers. (For detail, see section 4.3.1.3.5 Future postgraduate Studies on p. 27 below)

4.3.1.2 Friends

In Simon’s case the influence of a family friend was instrumental in gaining him an apprenticeship as a plumber. In Simon’s words:

But yeah, the only reason I got into it was, a friend of ours had his own roofing company and said, ‘If you want an apprenticeship, there’s one there for you’. Simon (T)

Simon reveals that in fact other reasons underpin this seemingly simple offer from a friend. The contextual circumstances of his early career choice include an economic recession and the fact that he was in “limbo” after failing to achieve the final Year 12 grades he had wanted (these factors are discussed below, in the section dealing with Year 12 Results).

Similarly, Troy’s path into an apprenticeship came through the offer of a family friend, and by virtue of having been made “no better offer”. When asked who was the biggest influence on him doing the course of a printing apprenticeship, Troy answered:

One of my best mates, his dad owned the business and ... at the time I was landscaping before that and... he said ‘Do you want to do an apprenticeship?’ and I said, ‘Why not, I’m not doing much at the moment’. So I took that up and... I saw it through...Troy (T)

In quite a unique case, Sue described the formative influence of her specific friend and peer, her business partner of eight years. Now the co-owners of a hospitality ‘empire’ – four businesses with a fifth on the way – Sue explained:

I think my partner has pushed me, he’s a lot – I would say he’s more entrepreneurial than me, definitely, and I question, if he wasn’t that way, whether we just would have only had [one café], because I’m not really the one that goes out hunting...Yeah, [it’s
a] very, very, very strong partnership. Yeah – we’re both very lucky but I think we both recognise that, that we’re both very lucky so, you know, we just respect it and I think that both him and myself treat the partnership like... gold... because we know what we’ve got is gold and we can’t afford to make it any other way. And so I think that’s the main reason why it’s worked so long, you know... Sue (HE)

4.3.1.2.2 Networks
In Colin’s case, his very early career moves after graduation were influenced by the network of employers that he was in contact with:

… so once I realised that the terms that I was going to be employed under [after graduation], that’s when I just made a few calls to people I knew and sniffed out a couple of prospective employers ... And because the [building/construction] industry is such that, everybody does keep in touch with everybody else and people do move around a bit based on workloads and what not, it was a pretty ... wasn’t anything amazing that I was doing, I was just seeing what else was out there. Colin (HE).

In discussing their later career influences, several other participants speak of networks in similar terms (see Later Career Decisions, Section 4.3.2.9 Networks, below p 53).

4.3.1.3 Education

4.3.1.3.1 Secondary school expectations
One case study participant spoke explicitly of her private schooling as having engendered an expectation that she should choose a career path that included university:

But I think being at an independent girls school, we were always expected to go on to university, and have a career. Belinda (HE)

Conversely, Troy’s experience of having being private schooled – even in conjunction with the explicit wishes of his father that he should attend university – did not mean that he would, as a matter of course, undertake a higher education degree:

[My dad has] seen as us all change and evolve because he wanted all three of us kids to go to uni, because we all went to private school, and ... we we’re pretty, I don’t know, opinionated and said, ‘We don’t wanna do that’ – hehe – but, I s’pose we all went through [school] and...did what we had to do, but we didn’t push it any further [into higher education]. Troy (T)
4.3.1.3.2 Year 12 results

The assumption that school results determine career choices is not reflected in the responses of our case study participants. However, one TAFE graduate response would seem to conform with the stereotypical view of trade apprenticeships as a ‘second rate’ option – a career pathway for those who ‘can’t get in to university’. Shane explains his post-Year 12 predicament in these terms:

...because I knew I didn’t quite do well enough at Year 12, so I had to look at my options and... blame football for that, ... but... I knew that I ... had to do something... I knew I wasn’t going to get into the course I wanted to ... and I just saw the ad in the paper [for a printing apprenticeship] and I thought... I’ll give that a go...and was fortunate enough to get it... I needed to do something, and that was it... and I was going to do my Year 12 over... but...umm, I wasn’t really keen on going back to school... for another 12 months... Shane (T)

Simon, now the co-owner of a highly successful roofing business, explained his (hitherto unintended) entry into a trade in terms of post-Year 12 contingencies – rather than directly as a consequence of his final grades:

The only influence I had was the fact that there was a recession ...and I sort of took anything that I could get, basically. I mean I - to me when I was at school, the last thing I was gonna be was a tradesman. I was never gonna be a tradesman, I always wanted to be a chef or to work in sports management or something like that. ... And at the time, because I had applied for some courses through HSC, but I hadn’t got them in in time ... I was sort of in limbo for that year, so I thought, well, yeah I need to take some work and it’s a recession and I need to do what I can, so – and they said it’s a good opportunity for you. So I just took it from there. Simon (T)

This sense of ‘missing the boat’ regarding university entrance – and so ‘taking what was on offer’ – also informs the story of Colin’s early career choices. In his case, he sampled university life, not in his “first preference” course, and soon recognised a need to change tack. Although Colin would eventually graduate with a higher education degree (in building and construction), his career began as a labourer, an option taken, again, in light of particular circumstances, namely ‘needing a job’ in the here and now:

It was funny because, I s’pose, at the end of school, because I hadn’t managed to ... I think at the time, well I remember at the time of finishing Year 12... at that point I think ... my main focus was on trying to get into journalism. And so I went to get into the journalism – there’s a course at RMIT which I went and sat an exam for... and didn’t manage to get into that, so at that point I wasn’t totally discouraged. I remember applying for a number of journalism cadetships with regional newspapers, so I took that fairly seriously. But, it didn’t come to anything – I didn’t-- I didn’t manage to make any – get any traction... so then I thought, well, I’ll do Arts, and
then, from an Arts Degree I can keep up that... option, and maybe transfer into the journalism down the track a little bit... So ... I think it wasn’t really until I got to uni – and that was a bit of a wake-up for me actually – I thought well, okay, this is ... this is... not overly interesting and I can’t really see – at that point I think it was probably one of the first times in my life really, where I, by myself, had to make a decision to change – to make a significant change in my direction, take the – take the, you know,... recognise the reality of the situation and make some positive move, and leave, and get a job. Do something else. So I did. And... so...after a few weeks... maybe five or six weeks of not... after I’d finished the semester at uni of looking around, I just came to realise that I was gonna have to get a job. So that’s why I just went and got a job locally and that’s when... [my] eyes were opened to the building industry. Colin (HE)

Although not directly related to Year 12 results, Steven (like Simon, co-owner of a successful roofing company) explained that plumbing wasn’t his first preference in terms of career choice. He had already started an apprenticeship with a plumber when he sought entry to the police academy – which, he had thought, was his ideal career:

I always wanted to be in the police force, so I ... went and had a go at that... Sat the entrance exam; but I stuffed up one part of it; there was just one part I didn’t read properly and stuffed that up... I didn’t actually ask for my [plumbing] job back, they said, ‘Look we’re prepared to take you back on’, so – which was ... lucky I suppose, with the way everything has worked out. Steven (T).

4.3.1.3.3 Scholarship
For one participant, being offered a scholarship was a decisive factor in his choice to attend university. Wayne was offered both a cadetship at Coles and a place at university (Applied Physics). His thinking at the time indicates financial considerations – “do I take the money now [Cadetship] or go to university?” – and indeed, his decision was ultimately swayed by the offer of a scholarship to offset the fees associated with the university course (as noted in the overview of influences above):

And I guess one of the things that actually convinced me—or one of the reasons I went to university was, I actually got a scholarship from RMIT, so it was a new course that they were offering when I was doing it, and I think there was some government grants that were given out to, I think about half a dozen students – so that paid like half of the fees for the year. So I thought I’ll go and do university and see what it’s like! It’s like-what have I got to lose? Wayne (HE)

4.3.1.3.4 RMIT Staff
Two participants spoke emphatically of the early career influence exerted by staff members during the course of their initial degree/diploma. Again Colin – whose path into the building industry began with labouring, then a diploma, and later a degree – explained the key role of a passionate teacher:
4.3.1 By Stage: Early Career Decisions

[One of my] key influences... would be... the TAFE lecturer that ran the Building and Construction Associate Diploma – definitely... ’cause he really put a positive spin on the whole industry and career path and made it seem exciting, which not many of the other lecturers or teachers or anything that I’ve had have managed to do – none of them have managed to do as successfully as he did.... Well, there’s not too many in life really is there? He was a ripper! Colin (HE)

In Belinda’s case the influence of an RMIT staff member entailed the provision of guidance and information as to the ways in which she could add to her qualifications in order to carve out a path for herself. Nearing the end of her first degree in hospitality, Belinda explained a feeling of dissatisfaction:

*But I finished my degree because I was expected to finish a degree, heh, and, y’know, at the end of another nine months I would’ve had a qualification, so that’s what I did. But I remember just coming back from [a period of placement] and just thinking differently: I wanna do something else, but not really knowing what it was. And in that fourth year, I had a discussion with one of the RMIT lecturers and he started to talk about what I could do – and at that stage I still didn’t know what I wanted to do – but what was possible, and actually having a Business Degree in there as well, and that’s when I decided to go back and do the Business Degree, on top of the Applied Science Degree. So it wasn’t until that fourth year that I started to get a feel for where I could go. [And that conversation was significant because] I was making the conscious decision that I wouldn’t actually narrow down my skill set but I’d try to build it horizontally by taking a management focus and doing the Bachelor of Business Administration to actually try and achieve, I guess, that horizontal skill set... And it was really because the lecturer at RMIT gave me that idea, and I sort of hung onto it and I can see the value in doing it. Belinda (HE)

4.3.1.3.5 Future Postgraduate Studies

To continue with Belinda’s case, she not only earned two undergraduate degrees, but had also – within five years of being ‘out in the workplace’ – commenced a Masters of Business Administration. She discussed the value of qualifications to her career path and, when asked if her double degree was worthwhile, explains:

*Absolutely, I think if I had stayed in hospitality I wouldn’t have– I wouldn’t have progressed in my career as quickly. Because I didn’t have an understanding of anything outside the hotel industry, because that’s where I’d worked... so... I guess, doing the Business Degree just sort of opened me up to how other businesses worked.

As to her MBA, her reasoning was more personal and less clear in terms of career path. As noted in the overview, when asked what she thought she would gain from this additional qualification, Belinda was candid:

*I had no idea. I remember at the time –coming from hotel – I mean a lot of my friends were working as doctors or physiotherapists or lawyers, and they were in professional
4.3.1 By Stage: Early Career Decisions

– well, more professional than hotel-school, and so –... I was interacting with a
different mix of people and there was always my complex ... ‘Gee, am I as good as
what they are? I didn’t go to the same school, I didn’t, y’know, do law, I don’t
understand that sort of thing’, so part of doing the MBA was proving to myself that I
was just as good as anybody else out there, but I don’t know what I expected to get at
the end of it, apart from a qualification... I thought of it more of getting my
qualification than ‘Gee what would that add to my salary’. Belinda (HE)

Two other participants, both graduates of a Bachelor of Applied Science in Medical
Radiations, pursued specialisation in their field within three to five years of graduation. In
Maria’s case, specialisation was in CT, and in Maddy’s case, ultrasound. When asked why
she pursued specialisation early in her career, Maddy’s response revealed a financial
motivation:

Because I knew I could get a Grade Three out of it ... I would be able to work less
hours for the same money. [The] thing is, with this profession, if you have your
qualifications, if you can demonstrate your knowledge and skills, you get rewarded.
There’s no: ‘Oh sorry, there’s no money in the budget this year’ or ... you don’t have
to keep fighting and arguing, you don’t have to keep you know hassling or trying for
promotions, or trying for this... it’s just, you’ve got the qualifications, you’ve got the
skills, there you go: now go and do it. Which is great ... Maddy (HE)

For Maria, on the other hand, specialisation was seen as a route to more “interesting
work”:

... when they gave me the position, ... no-one ever discussed the pay side of it, which
was probably naïve of myself too, but it was also, you know -- to be in that position
was exciting, so you took it regardless, and then worried about the details later. Maria
(HE)

4.3.1.4 Specific Career Influences

4.3.1.4.1 Job Portability

Two participants used this term – “job portability” – to explain their early career choices.
For Maddy, the concept referred both to a qualification that may be taken with her as she
moves geographically (and indeed, she worked overseas in her field for 12 months in her
early working life) and to a job that can be “put down and picked up again” as personal
circumstances warrant. As regards the latter, Maddy commented on the prospect of
becoming a parent:

If I’d chosen something else then I’d have to probably have chosen maybe, I don’t
know, some sort of maybe business or accounting type of thing, or maybe
engineering...Again, maybe engineering would’ve been fairly portable, but – most of
... the friends that I know that are engineers, do have sort of projects that they have to do for certain amounts of time. And I thought well, I enjoy doing this... I know that this will be most portable for me and there’s always gonna be a job out there, because we burn out so quickly... So I know there’s always gonna be something out there and... it’ll be hopefully easier to do some job-share or some part-time, once I have a family. So, that was very strong in my mind. Maddy (HE)

Colin also cited job portability, referring specifically to the ability to travel. He described portability as one of key benefits of his field – building and construction – and yet, largely due to family circumstances and a personal preference, a benefit which he had not (yet) exploited:

... in the building industry, there’s always an option, there’s always somebody that needs someone that might be paying a little bit more, that might be doing a little bit more exciting job, that might have an opportunity in Sydney or in London or whatever, you know, it’s such a portable career that if you’re bogged down and stay where you are, then you’re kind of missing out on one of the really fun aspects of it. Colin (HE)

4.3.1.4.2 Uncertainty about tertiary choice

Many participants expressed confusion and uncertainty about their careers at the point of leaving school and embarking upon tertiary studies. Melanie exemplified this uncertainty, explaining that she did not receive a tertiary offer in her first preference – Medical Radiations – but instead, in Applied Physics:

And I just didn’t know what to do when I got Applied Physics because I only had Applied Physics down as my fourth or fifth option – I only had Applied Physics down because it was linked to Medical Radiation – they were the same department, effectively, so I thought I could transfer up to that afterwards – but, yeah, so I didn’t really have the passion for science when I started Applied Physics, it was more sort of, ‘well, what else do I do? I got into this one, I don’t know what I want to do, you know, maybe I’ll do this for a year and then transfer, cause it’... so it wasn’t really ever for the passion of it- Melanie (HE)

“Passion” is a term that peppers the case study transcripts (see section 4.5 Benefits particularly). Another higher education graduate, Helen, described much the same scenario as Melanie:

I knew it wasn’t my passion. When I chose the university course [Geological Engineering], I chose it because it offered the potential to go into mining or... salinity or civil works or environmental. And no other course interested me that much. But it wasn’t like: ‘This is what I want to do for the rest of my life’. It was like, ‘Well this is the best so’...Yeah and basically it gave the lifestyle similar to what I grew up in, farming... And I wanted to go into mining... so it was a way of getting there. Helen (HE)
Wayne, whose story was touched on above (in relation to his choice between a cadetship and university), describes an ongoing uncertainty throughout his university years. He described a year-by-year approach to decisions about further study:

I thought well, I’ve done one year; I might as well stick out a second year and see what it’s like. So did the second year, finished second year and thought, okay, I’ve done two years now, I’ve only got one more year, I can finish this off in another year and – it’s no use in stopping now I’ve done two years I might as well finish it off. But I still, at that stage, didn’t know what I was going to go into – what I was going to do. Whether I was – I was actually looking at research jobs, so – and back then there was actually – we only had six or eight students that actually passed the course, and they had I think ten Masters by Research on offer from… companies. So, they… sort of went, ‘Well, look, come back and – if you don’t get a job we’ve got all these Masters by Research – we’ve gotta fill these up, do you want to do a Masters?’ I said, ‘Look, I’ve been at school for a long time now, I’ll see what happens getting jobs’. Wayne (HE)

These observations reflect a number of trade graduates’ sense of having ‘fallen’ into an apprenticeship because it was the only thing on offer at the time (see comments by Simon and Shane, above). When reflecting on their working lives across the whole ten year period, many participants – both TAFE and Higher Education graduates – commented on the unplanned nature of their careers.

4.3.1.4.3 Careers Counsellor (Teacher)

Contrary to expectation, only one case study participant commented on the influence of their school-based careers counsellor – and even then, the reference was a “negative” one (i.e., the career counsellor’s advice was something to be ignored). In terms of the early influences on her career path Belinda stated:

I’ve thought about this a few times. We had a careers counsellor at school, and when I sat down and said what my preferences were to getting in to university… it sort of came back as… ‘Look at nursing, and look at teaching’, and some of what you probably call the softer professions, and of course I didn’t do that. I did my work experience in a hospital and went ‘No I don’t wanna do that, I want to just follow a more structured and business-oriented career’, and yet I ended up doing a Hospitality Degree. So, where I am now sort of didn’t relate to where I was back there, at all…Belinda (HE)

Although Belinda undertook and completed a degree in hospitality, the “business-oriented” career she foresaw for herself was certainly where she did end up.

Another Stage 2 participant who specifically mentioned the role of a school-based careers counsellor was Charles. Although not included in the final 12 case studies, Charles had a great deal to say about the formative, and perhaps arbitrary, power of a careers counsellor:
... when I was deciding what to do at the end of Year 12, that, biggest decision, your biggest life-determining decision is made at that time... with not a great deal of assistance available – or, maybe I didn’t seek it out. ... we did have a careers teacher where we could go and discuss our options, and that was... like... that particular person was the one who said to me, well you’d be suited to that type of field ‘cause you like sport and stuff like that, .... And it was mainly based on that advice, is why I went back and did Year 12 again to get in and do the course, it was not that I was following a passion or anything like that. So, it’s interesting --

Q: So it was the influence of an external person who got you thinking?

B: Yeah, absolutely... [a person] who I didn’t even know. Who got me thinking...So it’s a real crossroads in life that can either make for a wonderful career and satisfying -- or could potentially be a wrong turn as well. Charles (HE)

Later in his interview, Charles reflected on the power of that counsellor:

... I think there was a decision at that time, back in Year 12 when I could have taken a trade route, if the opportunity arose. If that careers teacher had said you’d be a perfect electrician I would have been an electrician, I suggest. Charles (HE)

4.3.1.4.4 Work Experience (during school/tertiary studies)

Colin, having started an Arts Degree and then taken up work as a labourer, found his career direction in building and construction, via his work experience. Wayne too describes the beneficial grounding he gained from his part-time work with Coles, which he undertook in conjunction with study in his later years of school and through university. The people-skills he gained from this experience, he recounted, were beneficial to the managerial roles he undertook later in his career.

Similarly, Sue’s story, with its elements of entrepreneurial risk-taking, is one that bespeaks the influence of early work experience. On her confidence to run a business, she commented:

I think it came from experience a little bit, as in being young and having a good few years of experience over ... Overall in a hospitality based environment, I knew that it wasn’t out of reach to be able to run a business for me – it wasn’t unrealistic whereas if I had have only just worked as a waitress and, you know, hands-on restaurant manager, for example it might have been a bit more like, ‘Oh God, I wouldn’t even know where to start’, whereas because I was managing a venue that had functions, had a kitchen, a lounge bar, a public bar and you know I was looking over the payroll and all sorts of areas of the business, I think it was within reach... Yep. I would say... yeah the work experience that I had in my first couple of years of uni were very influential, because I think that a lot of my fellow students didn’t have that good a jobs or – you know were quite, like, ‘Oh my God, do you manage a hotel?’ or whatever –
4.3.1 By Stage: Early Career Decisions

and I think I breezed through a lot of uni because, in that way, because I had a really strong practical experience and I think that that was influential. Sue (HE)

4.3.1.5 Financial

The following comment from Colin gives an indication of his thoughts when contemplating his career immediately after graduation. Having worked for the same company through the last years of his degree, he came to evaluate the experience he had gained across that time in monetary terms:

... you know at some point you’ve gotta say: well, I think that – that I can do better and I’m not going to be doing myself a disservice by changing, moving here... And, look – it was a hard decision... but it wasn’t that hard, I mean at the end of the day, they’d offered me a 30 thousand dollar package, which, at the time was alright, but it was nothing special and... but the main thing was, it was exactly the same as they were offering to the guy or the girl that had stepped straight out of uni and had no experience. And I knew that this was when I’d just successfully completed an entire project for them, and I thought, well there’s gotta be some recognition of that... it’s just wrong, and if I accept this, then what message am I sending to them, and if I’m accepting this, well, am I saying that I’m going to stay here for the next ten years, and am I gonna be a whipping boy forever? Colin (HE)

One feature of the financial motivation of participants, in general, is that this influence changes across time. As an early career influence, comments about financial concerns tend to centre on the need participants felt to “set themselves up early”. In general this implied a willingness to put up with less than ideal conditions in the short term, in order to make the future easier, financially. Two participants expressed this very clearly. One is Maria, whose later working life involves providing support for her husband’s business. In describing her early working years she spoke of them as being dominated by thoughts of establishing their future business:

... it was a funny workplace – but hey, they were paying me good dollars to do very little, so that was the only reason – and it was a good year, because we needed as much money as we could to get the clinic up and running. Maria (HE)

Another participant, Shane, mentioned the advantages of becoming financially independent early, giving him and his wife the freedom to make other decisions. He described having tolerated a less than interesting job – but one that paid well – because it had been in his interest to save for what he saw as an inevitable period of retraining to come in the future:

The best thing that we did was to set ourselves up early... we owned our first house before we were 25 and we’re going through investment property...and the [my job’s] Super has always been fantastic, think it was rated the best corporate fund in
4.3.1 By Stage: Early Career Decisions

Australia...so I’m well over ... for 32... there’s quite a bit in there... so those things... we’ve done well to do that – not knowing that I wanted to change, ten years ago, but that’s given us the opportunity to do that if I wanted to...Shane (T)

This urge to work hard ‘while you can’ (i.e., in the early years), seems to permeate the thinking of many participants, at least insofar as they were able to reflect on their working lives. In later years, these same participants make it clear that when family considerations assume a greater importance in their lives, they feel less willing to put in long hours or to tolerate less than satisfying employment. But in her early career, says Maddy:

But look, at that time, I was happy to cop it, because I was getting married that year and I did a lot of overtime, anyway. So they were offering, if you were working more than forty hours a week, if you could do an extra day, you’d get that double-time, so I thought, I’m not gonna complain. Maddy (HE)

Maddy reflected on some of these longer hours she did in her early working years, forcing her to impose more hours of childcare upon her daughter than she felt totally comfortable with, as something she regretted, but ultimately became reconciled with, because of this drive to think of the future:

... because of those years, we’re now at a point where we can - one of us can say well look I can only work part-time or maybe both of us can do four days a week, or something – so, in that respect we knew we were heading towards this and so... I can’t be upset about it; because I know it actually got us to where we want to be, so...Maddy (HE)
4.3.2 Later Career Decisions

Figure 7 shows in diagrammatic summary the range of reasons given by all 12 case study participants for their later career decisions. These decisions were made after entering the workforce, and thus in light of work and other experiences.

Figure 7. Later Career Decisions

The following sections address the range and interrelationship of influences affecting participants’ later career decisions.

4.3.2.1 Family influences

In terms of participants’ responses in relation to early career choices, “family” most often denotes the influence of parents and siblings. Later in participants’ careers, the influence of “family” often comes to signify the needs and demands of partners and children.

Family concerns feature very heavily as an influence on the later career decisions of participants. Frequently such concerns centre on financial issues (as expressed by Troy below), and yet often the family–financial nexus incorporates other factors such as employment conditions (working hours, the availability of leave, the perceived need for a more balanced life, etc.). In this sense, family concerns are often difficult to disentangle from other kinds of career influences.
4.3.2.1.1 Family-financial

When looking back on his early career, Troy recognised the change that having his own family had on the way in which, more recently, he has thought about his career and its financial implications:

*I’ve pretty much got my immediate future set up with my partner and kids and a new house so... all I’m looking towards is basically securing that and getting the financial security behind me, so if that means me changing jobs and looking down other avenues, I’ll definitely take it.*

*Q: So family comes first in that sense, in terms of jobs and ... career?*

*Definitely. Whereas before that you could say I had tunnel-vision, I didn’t really sort of mind staying where I was at the time, particularly if you look at the printing industry... the money I was earning back then was...nowhere near what I’m getting now – but back then it didn’t really bother me what I was earning because I didn’t have my own place, I didn’t have other mouths to feed or... whereas now it’s a bit more – it has come down to financial...reasons for doing particular jobs I suppose. You know that’s probably one area I’ll always look at, if I can get somewhere else and do something for the good of the family I’ll take it.* Troy (T)

As Troy continued, it became evident that concerns for family underpin all of his career decisions. Indeed, he made this explicit:

*Yeah...So, that’s probably one of the biggest decision factors I’ve got...when I’m making a decision is, what’s happening in – what’s good for the family and our financial stability.... Troy (T)*

In Maria’s case, this family–financial nexus is given a slightly different emphasis. In the course of explaining changes to her own career – namely stepping out of radiography in order to be a parent and to support her partner’s growing business – she claimed:

*I suppose the other benefit is, if I wasn’t doing it [minding our children] we’d have to pay somebody to do it, so our income would decrease significantly.* Maria (HE)

Parenting and its implications – including but not limited to financial considerations – is persuasively expressed as a far-reaching, and in some ways quite negative, influence on career – particularly by three of the female participants: Maria, Maddy and Melanie. (Although outlined here, further detail as to the impact of parenting, particularly on the careers of the women participants, is discussed in the Gender Section 4.6 below).

For example, Maria describes her decision to step out of her career for the sake of her husband’s business and her children, in terms of having “given away something”, namely a sense of job satisfaction:

*I don’t know many people that haven’t given away something to have a family, and it depends on how much that means to you. But I think it is a fallacy if you believe you*
can have both, I don’t know… other people may have more skills, be more resourceful and be able to manage it better, but yeah, I do believe it’s very hard to have a job that you feel very satisfied in… that’s very job-satisfying, that you worked up to, and has any kudos, and have a family and have that time with that family. I know all of my friends have given up some element of their work to raise their family. Whether they go back to it, they might, I don’t know, but, yeah. Maria (HE)

Like Maria, Maddy also believes parenting to have had the “biggest impact on her working life”. She too describes shifting from a “career” to merely “a comfortable job” in order to accommodate the demands of parenting. Being a parent, for a number of the women in this study, meant settling (even temporarily) for a job that is less demanding of their time, and of their “self”. Maddy discloses this in discussing the prospect of further specialisation (her “ideal” career move), which she sees as being currently (albeit temporarily) impossible:

But – this [job] is fairly comfortable. Yeah, so … what I’m doing now is… I’m happy with. Yeah, if it was just for me, if I was looking at my own career structure and I had oodles of time, I would love to do that [specialise further]. That would be my ideal. But – look, I do a little bit of it [specialist related work] the private practice and … a tiny bit of it at the … hospital, and look, you know, I’m happy with that – that’s fine. Maddy (HE)

While the influence of parenting on career trajectory is most apparent in the transcripts of female participants, this is also raised by several men – notably Troy (above), but also Colin, Wayne and Shane, each of whom express varying degrees of impact or concern. Shane, for example, described waiting for his wife’s maternity leave to expire so that he could “take time out” to retrain (as discussed further in the Redundancy section, 4.3.2.6 below). Wayne, who expressed a desire to travel in the near future, acknowledged that family matters (such as the needs of his school-age children) will impact the scope and timing of such plans. And Colin clearly acknowledged his wife’s decision – sacrifice even – to step out of her career in order to be a full-time parent to their children:

My wife… doesn’t work now … and she’s… you know, she’s got a hard road to hoe, she’s at home with the kids and… it’s difficult. She’s doing it really well, and she enjoys it, and she’d rather be doing that than anything else at the moment. But yeah, I mean, I’d rather be doing what I’m doing than that, to be honest… It’s a difficult job, and it’s a pretty thankless job too. I mean I can get home and say she’s doing a great job and all that, but really there’s nobody else-- the kids don’t thank you for it…. Colin (HE)

Since becoming a parent, Colin described a new awareness, both as an employee (who ensures he makes time for his family) and as an employer:

I’m usually home … in time to… help feed [my son]– have a bit of time with him, and give him a bath… and put him to bed. Which is very important for me too.

Q: Do you have staff that have families? Do you take that into account?
Yeah, yeah absolutely, we do, I think... Well, I tell ya – it’s interesting because you gotta weigh up the ... the desire to get the most out of your staff with your – I mean, I have a bit of ... I’m gonna say guilty complex, it’s not that, but I can’t think of the right word... a bit of a ... a sort of an obligation, I feel, to do the right thing by anybody that’s working for us... as much as possible. And... ‘cause we work in an environment that’s pretty anti- that sort of thing...it’s pretty resist – I mean, we don’t have a maternity leave policy but, on the other hand, we’ve got one of the fellas here, he’s got four kids and his marriage broke up a couple of years ago and he is – he’s a super guy, really very... dedicated – he’s a good employee ...we value him. And his four kids are... all still at school, and he has them on weekends, but he also has them two nights a week, and he’s asked me if he can go home early, pick them up from school and then come in late the next day after he’s dropped them off and ... I must admit, I have to be honest and say that... I was a little bit ... reluctant or not quite sure how to handle that -- because... I thought...well, hang on, am I being weak – a bad employer – by just saying, ‘Yeah, yeah do whatever you want’ and... But then I thought about it and I thought well, this is a guy that – that’s more often than not the last one in here anyway, and I mean, there’s no question at all about his dedication, and look at what you can– how you can help. So yeah, and it’s been really successful... Yeah, so, we don’t have any official policies or anything like that, but also – any, any of the guys that ever come to me and say... ‘Oh, can I come in late tomorrow cause we’ve got an ultrasound or whatever’, it’s no problem, y’know, we’re pretty flexible like that, and that’s because I s’pose ... I kind of... think how would I like to be dealt with like that. So yeah, I s’pose we’re pretty helpful. Colin (HE)

4.3.2.1.2 Partner

In quite the opposite sense to that expressed by Troy (above), who on the basis of his family was more willing than ever to commit to working hard, Belinda explained that having a partner, in the later part of the ten years since graduation, had changed her attitude to career, adopting one that is now more detached:

I can walk home and not think about it. I don’t have to do the work on the weekend, in fact I know I’ve got a lot of work to do, but I won’t give up my weekend to do that. And I just have that detachment now that I haven’t had before. And I think part of that is getting married: there is someone else in my life that needs me more than what work needs me. Work’s always gonna be there. Whereas I haven’t had that sort of attitude before. It’s always been ‘Work’s so hard, because you’ll get the next step on the career rung and keep going up’, yeah... whereas now, I think there are fewer steps for me to take in my career as well, so it doesn’t matter if I get it today or I get it in ten years .... Belinda (HE)

However, the potential impact of having children of her own brought Belinda to concede that further change might well be ahead for her:
I guess, we’re starting to plan a family, and what that might bring, and... I don’t know. I can’t see myself though working like this [full-time] for the next ten-fifteen years. Don’t know what that leaves for me, but I can’t see it. Belinda (HE)

4.3.2.2 Workplace Influences

4.3.2.2.1 Work Mentors

The impact of mentors, particularly in the later phases of participants’ careers, was evident in most of the 12 case study interviews. In some cases, mentoring was formal and organised through the workplace, as Wayne described:

They actually brought people in from other industries to mentor a number of us...[the mentors] used to come out once every month and spend a day with us and talk about issues and what was going on and give us tips on what to do. Wayne (HE)

In other cases, mentoring was more informal, involving imitation of the style of admired managers and peers, as expressed by Steven:

... A lot of business skills I’ve picked up from being around blokes who owned their own businesses.... [I] just stand back and have a look. And also, obviously, going to the offices of the construction companies to sign contracts and VET notes and all that sort of thing. Just basically standing back and looking around and taking a few things in. Just trying to replicate that, so, it seems to be working... Just try and basically mimic what the successful people are doing and how they’ve done it.... Steven (T)

Colin also described this informal mentoring relationship based on emulation:

I mean, it’s human nature I suppose, we don’t like to reinvent the wheel if we don’t have to and ...if you’ve learnt [a skill] from a particular person who you hold in high regard, then... you – well I personally, I s’pose that’s something, that’s a concept that I adhere to pretty strongly where, you know, there’s been certain people who’ve mentored me, to varying degrees in the past, and I often reflect on how they would deal with a particular situation and try [to emulate that].... Colin (HE).

Indeed, Colin has quite a lot to say about mentoring in his career. During the interview, he mentioned, in passing, a specific mentor: “I’ve got a friend who has also been a bit of a mentor, he’s a bit older than me, somebody I worked with in my first job”. And he also spoke generally of the influence of many individuals with whom his career pathway had intersected:

... any of my employers really. They’ve all -- maybe not the company in general -- but individuals within the companies I’ve worked for have mentored me... Look, no real surprises there I suppose. I’ve had good supervisors – I’ve had bad ones too – but, and y’know sometimes the bad ones can be just as much of an influence on you, in terms of
picking up their bad habits, which sometimes we do, or knowing what to avoid. Colin (HE)

Colin described the building industry, in general, as one that was willing to “share experience” in a co-operative way, but also recognised that there were exceptions, when dealing with “direct competitors”:

Certainly with people who aren’t direct competitors… I personally find that there’s a lot of sharing of experience… and that could be something as simple as a friend ringing me up, who does a similar job to what I do at a different company – in terms of the actual productive work, rather than the overall management work – who might say, ‘Hey, I’m having a problem with a particular contractor, I know you guys use them, what do you reckon? Are they alright at the moment?’ – or something like that, just sharing experience. Or it might be – I’ve got another close friend who works … in a project management company that don’t do contracting, but manage the sort of work that we all do, and I see a fair bit of him and we talk about various different things, whether it’s the difficulty in techniques in employing and keeping good staff, that’s something we’ve covered off together often, over the last few years – whether it’s …different consultants, or… different projects, that -- I mean we work in very different fields in the industry, so there isn’t any direct competition at all, which makes it easier for us to talk frankly about certain things. There’s another friend of mine that works for one of our competitors and he’s a good friend, but I am very guarded about what we talk about in terms of… business, because you know, to anybody, a little bit of information can be very… useful, in terms of self-advancement, so you’ve – you know you’ve gotta be … cagey and tactful, just gotta protect your own position I think. Colin (HE)

Another participant who spoke of informal mentoring was Melanie. She listed individuals at various jobs who had influenced her career decisions:

[In one of my roles] … there was a couple of good scientists there and they influenced me in knowing that I wasn’t going to be doing pure physics, like, that I wasn’t cut out for the science and academia part of it, that it wasn’t enough for me, like I wanted sort of, a bit more so I guess that [clarification] was what they provided me there. In terms of [another position], the boss was a really big influence on me, in that he had faith in me – in a real sense, in a real working sense, like I’ve always had, you know, people that like me – but in the Applied Physics sense he was probably– and the ability, y’know, to manage people at a young age and all the rest of it and stuff, he- he was a really big influence on what my self-worth was as far as that was concerned. And at [another job] there was an excellent guy who took me under his wing and was my mentor and he was a real influence in that regard – and was very even and non-sexist and – so he was a really big influence as well… Melanie (HE)
In two cases, mentors were cited (by Sue and Helen) as helping at points of “career crossroads” to clarify decision-making and help identify pathways to career progress. Sue explains how her mentor (a business associate of her employers) offered a profit-sharing solution to what had been a point of frustration and “questioning” in her career:

... I think ... I basically started to question [my job there, ... my friend from one of the other businesses], he was always a bit of a mentor for me, so I had a chat to him about it, and I said you know, ‘I’m thinking like, maybe it’s my time’ – and again he talked – he was like, ‘No way, you’re not leaving – like, I’m not getting you out of it’, and he sort of suggested maybe pulling me in as a small share-holder so that I felt the financial benefit of the, you know, of the stress and the pressure that I was feeling, at work... Sue (HE)

This “solution” was instrumental to Sue’s achievement of the financial independence necessary to begin her own business.

In another case, also involving a “career crisis”, Helen explains how a formal mentoring situation, facilitated by a professional career counsellor, had enhanced her decision-making. Helen explains how her mentor helped crystalise, or helped her to visualise and believe possible, the shape of a future career she wanted, but had hesitations about:

... there was a few contacts that [the Career Counsellor] put me on to... but one of the key ones, was one he put me on to as a mentor. ..... [This mentor] had been Vice President [of the company] and he said, ‘This is a guy who ‘gets’ Business Improvement [the field you want to specialise in]. I know you’re still not convinced there’s really roles out there. Talk to this guy, he made it as a Vice President.’ And so [he] ... became a bit of a mentor for me. Helen (HE)

Only one case study participant, Belinda, was – literally – silent on the role of mentors:

[Silence] ... I don’t think I’ve worked for any – fantastic leaders? Maybe they’ve been good at their job, but not so great at leading people. ... I’ve never had that relationship .... Belinda (HE)

4.3.2.2 Changing Workplace

This category incorporates various aspects of workplace change, such as internal restructuring (Belinda), privatisation (Maria), and enforced status changes after maternity leave (Maria and Melanie).

Belinda describes a case of internal restructuring:

I got an inkling about 12 months before that they wanted to change the structure, and I strongly resisted that [re-] structure because I knew it would mean taking a demotion, and I was not going to do that. I had worked way too hard on my career and on my qualifications to take a step backwards because they wanted to change the structure – and I said I’m not going to do that. Belinda (HE)
Maria describes the impact of privatisation on staff of the public hospital system where she worked, and her “stress” and “confusion” during this time of change:

*It was when they were talking of privatising the Radiology Department at the [hospital] and we actually went on strike. And, as a twenty-two year old, ... I had no idea about all that sort of thing. Very green. When I think of it now. That was bizarre. It was good life experience, fantastic life experience – don’t regret it... It was stressful at the time because you didn’t really understand it... People were making you worried about your job – older people if that makes sense – emotive – because quite a few people that had been there a long time that don’t want to see change or that. And there was a very strong view that the private world was evil, so to privatis [radiography] in a public hospital [was bad news]....Maria (HE).*

Maria went on to explain that working in the private world wasn’t nearly as “terrible” as she’d been led to believe – “because you were rewarded for your work” – but again workplace restructuring generated considerable uncertainty:

*... We went through so many restructures in terms of who owned us... And [at one point] ... we didn’t know until about four weeks before[hand] what was happening to us... whether we were stuck working for [the same company] at a different site, [whether we] would be relocated, or whether [the new company] would take us on, and whether we’d hold our current positions... [We were] kept in the dark. I think, for a good three or four months, there was a lot of conjecture and speculation about what would happen

Q: So what would you say was your reaction to the way management handled the whole situation?

*I think they used it to their advantage because they created a lot of uncertainty, and I think they were trying... to weed out ...what they could. And I think a lot of it had to do with money, on assuming our liabilities our ...long service leave, all those sort of things had to be nutted out. So I think it was from a purely economic thing.... Maria (HE)*

Other manifestations of changing workplace came as a result of taking maternity leave. Both Maria and Melanie lost positions of seniority as a direct result of taking maternity leave. For Maria, who took two periods of maternity leave, there were two stages of change: the first saw the loss of her seniority/specialisation in CT because the employer would not consider part-time work in this section of the hospital. When asked why not, Maria replied:

*I think because on their part it’s easier if they’ve got their CT supervisor there full-time.... I think [being full-time has] always been assumed it’s part and parcel of the nature of the job. I know when I was [at the public hospital] they never took people*
back part-time. It was full-time or nothing. ... But yeah, there is this cultural thing that you need to be there full-time to have a position of charge. ...Maria (HE)

However, Maria felt she could not take full-time work, and so because of her family commitments, was forced to move sideways, into another field. Although accepting of this change, she also spoke of regrets:

Yeah I was still relatively happy, but I got bored very fast. And that’s when I realised, ‘Oh! I was a bit short sighted there.’ But, it was at a hard time in life when you’ve got little kids and your husband is building his practice and that sort of thing, so in a way I didn’t want something demanding or something that had too much responsibility.

Maria (HE)

For Maria a second stage of workplace change – culminating in her resignation – occurred after her second period of maternity leave:

I wasn’t particularly enjoying work either; it was quite different when I went back after having had my second child. ... I received no training when I went back, and a colleague then got training -- and I got an email saying, ‘Oh, training up to you’.

Maria (HE)

Melanie described a similar situation. Fundamental changes to the workplace and her role in it had occurred during Melanie’s absence during a second allotment of maternity leave. She describes the situation as follows:

I’ve come back to work and I haven’t got any work to do and I have lost all my clients which have been reallocated to other people and ...so there isn’t really a role for me to come back into, so I guess that – that’s been difficult and...as I said, all my clients, that I’d built up, are now reallocated as a result of my maternity leave .... Melanie (HE)

Melanie explained that resigning seemed her only option, although that too was fraught with difficulties. It depended on:

how much maternity leave I have to pay back...I’d have to pay back maternity leave payments if I leave within a year. Melanie (HE)

The impact of parenting on the career trajectories of women, in particular, is discussed further in Section 4.6 Gender.

4.3.2.2.2 Changing Technology

Changing technology was an inherent aspect of workplace change. For two members of the trade cohort, Shane and Troy – both printers – the deskilling of their profession due to computing technology has had an enormous impact on their careers. Shane highlights the effect on his own career as follows:

[Printing holds]... no challenges... because the problem-solving [of it], a lot of it’s done for you by the computer, and the all the getting the... ink and water balance correct, is all done for you... so it’s a bit frustrating... [Printing is] something I don’t
want to continue to do. I just know, with new technologies with the internet, I don’t see a very long lifespan for newspapers... going forward... maybe six or ten year probably lifespan...that’s where... I’m looking at my other options...out there... Shane (T)

As noted in the overview of influences (Section 4.2 above), the impact of changing technology was expressed similarly by Troy:

I first started out in the printing industry and could see big things coming from it in the early... back in the early nineties. And, probably within about five years I sort of realised that the technology was changing and computers were being upgraded, and I could see that, on the printing side of things that a lot of people were printing their own materials because of the computers and the printers – they could buy and have access themselves. So, I sort of realised then that the trade was dying off, particularly in the industry that I started off in, which was the off-set industry. Back then a whole lot of stationery was getting printed through us printers, printing machinists. And then all of a sudden once the computers became upgraded and technology... business started to slow down a bit... Troy (T)

For both of these trade graduates, technological change in their field has made career change inevitable; for Troy it has already happened and for Shane it is imminent.

4.3.2.3 Family Leave

Many of the excerpts from the case studies that are relevant to this section and the next (Working Hours) have been covered in previous sections, namely those relating to the influence of Family–financial. Many comments applicable here also represent direct Reasons for Job Change and so are discussed in that section (below). This section will therefore be brief, focusing only on the mention of “Family Leave” as a direct influence on later career choices, in three instances.

The first is from Troy, who considers the provision of family leave as an important working condition in his current job:

But now I’ve noticed with our work, down at [the supermarket warehouse], is that ... in our EBA it’s written that if someone’s sick in the family you can take that sick leave... Troy (T)

Maria also offers relevant comments, as part of her description of the transition from radiography to the family business. When unable to take the annual leave she wanted, she brought forward her maternity leave:

Let’s see: I took eight weeks off ... and then I went back for five or six weeks and I was going to finish at about thirty-five weeks, ’cause I was pregnant at this stage, I was going to finish about thirty-five weeks, but we wanted a week off in March and my boss
wouldn’t give it, so I moved my date forward, so I finished before we went on holiday!
Maria (HE)

In the third instance, Belinda – who said she was planning a family within the next few
years – identified maternity leave as an important consideration in terms of her subsequent
career trajectory:

I guess the hottest topic for me would be looking at maternity leave and being able to
support somebody going through that, to give them the option. Belinda (HE).

4.3.2.4 Working Hours

As noted in Figure 4 (above), concerns raised by case study participants concerning
working hours included long and/or inflexible working hours, and shift work. Family
considerations are, again, often present in discussions of working hours.

4.3.2.4.1 Long Hours

As noted in the section on Early Career Choices (above), a number of participants
commented that they had been happy to put in very long hours during the early part of their
careers. Wayne gives an example:

[During that period] I had [that] team for two years, [we] launched [another major
initiative], [and then the next] two years was just a blur – my whole life was a blur for
those two years because it was pretty much – like I was at work at 6.30 in the morning,
every morning, I’d get home 6 o’clock, have couple of hours with the family, they’d go
to bed at 8pm, I’d work 8pm til 12, and get calls from [work] between 12 and 6am
again – during the night... And that was pretty much 7 days a week. So, yeah, the whole
two years was a blur. Wayne (HE).

Later in his career, although his working hours had not been dramatically reduced, Wayne
commented on having learned to manage his time in a more family-friendly way (for detail
see section 4.5.2 Lifestyle Change where Wayne comments: “I’m still working the same
hours but I’m breaking it up so I can spend time with the family now” p 83).

Maria similarly explained a hectic period in her earlier career and its negative impact on
her health:

... I remember doing a thirty-eight hour week, and earning forty hours of overtime in
pay [on top] ... and that was in three nights of call, in a fortnight, and yeah – I think I
resigned a couple of weeks after that! But I kept getting sick; those hours didn’t agree
with me. Maria (HE).

At this later point in her career, Maria said, she was unwilling to work the long hours she
previously had; juggling work commitments and childcare was difficult, and she had no
desire to be reliant upon her own parents for assistance with the latter.
In contrast to Maria, Belinda spoke of working longer hours in her later years – despite her comments (above) that she had developed a level of detachment to work, because of her partner. As she explained:

*At the moment, I am working longer hours than I’ve ever worked because I’m two people down in my team. And we haven’t managed to fill those positions yet, so for the last four, five, six weeks I’ve been working 7.30-8am to 7.30-8pm. Belinda (HE)*

Belinda, as was also noted above, is yet to have children, and commented that her current working hours might change when and if she and her partner have children.

Another respondent who spoke of long hours, even in later working life, was Simon, who expressed a willingness to invest time and effort, together with his brother Steven, into the building of their own business:

*... we both work pretty hard, we work some long hours. And, it’s a matter of just making it work. Putting the time and the effort ....Simon (T)*

### 4.3.2.4.2 Shift Work

While shift work was often reported as an unpleasant but necessary and sometimes lucrative part of early working life, for most case study participants shift work had become simply intolerable or impossible. For Maria – with two children and a busy working partner – it was now virtually impossible for her to do shift work at all.

In Maddy’s case, she expressed relief at being able to put shift work behind her in the later years of her career, thanks largely to her specialisation:

*Q: In terms of the benefits of work, what would you say have been the most important to you?*

*Not to have to work shift hours and not to –*

*Q: - In the early days you had to work shift....?*

*Had to, you had to. ...one week on, on day-hours, in a various part of the department, and one week you would definitely be on shift – whether that was night-shift, afternoon... whatever, or a combination of both. You would most definitely have to be on shift.*

*Q: So without a speciality, the shift-work is [inevitable] ...?*

*Well, look, even with a specialty, you could be on shift; however, it doesn’t work out for them financially....*
4.3.2 By Stage: Later Career Decisions

But... you know, you get to a certain stage where other things become so much more important and...definitely the hours, and the fact that I knew I wasn’t going to do shift, wasn’t going to do call. Maddy (HE)

4.3.2.4.3 Inflexible Hours

Maddy offers one further comment in relation to working hours and her parental responsibilities. Inflexible working hours might have made finding a new job difficult, she said, had there not been a shortage of professionals in her field:

For my husband he could work anywhere really – any hours – but my stipulation had to be that ... I needed to finish at three o’clock to pick up my little girl... It was challenging. It was really difficult to find people who would accommodate those hours. And I suppose I’m lucky that there is a little bit of a shortage of people in my profession, so that way I could sort of negotiate that. I’m sure if there was a glut of people pretty much everyone would’ve said no. Maddy (HE)

Further comments expressing an unwillingness to work long, inflexible or shiftwork hours in the later years of participants’ careers are considered in the section Lifestyle Change (below).

4.3.2.5 Promotion

When case study participants mentioned “promotion” as a consideration influencing career decision-making, it was typically in very general terms. Promotion as a reason for job change – in the sense of participants leaving one job and seeking another with better prospects – is discussed in the subsequent section, Reasons for Job Change.

In her current role as a parent with a less demanding job, Maddy explained that promotional opportunities were no longer a part of her thinking:

I’m happy where I am now, so it suits me fine. If I wanted to do... if I wanted to move up in say management or something like that, I probably would’ve chosen different places to work for, where I knew that ... opportunities might be available. But, I’m happy where I am, they’ve given me the hours, they’re paying me a decent rate and I’m-- returned the favour in kind – so it’s a good relationship. Maddy (HE)

In Shane’s case, he had deliberately not chased promotion during his time as a printer, favouring other elements of personal development instead; such as spending time working at his local cricket club. He explained:

... I made it through a couple of stages of the interview process [for promotion]... And I did quite well in that ... then I got to a point where other things were changing in my life and I decided not to pursue that any further.
4.3.2 By Stage: Later Career Decisions

I’d just been elected President of the local cricket club... so I just thought, oh I’ll do a year doing this – cricket club - then I’ll get back into my work, but I didn’t realise how much time it does consume... because the club was in a pretty bad situation when I took over... but... it took a lot more time than I expected... and eight years down the track now I’m still doing it... Shane (T)

4.3.2.6 Redundancy

Being made redundant shaped the career trajectory of three of the 12 Stage 3 participants. The stories of these three are explored in detail in section 4.3.3 of this report. However, in short, for two of these three participants – Belinda and Melanie – the experience of being made redundant was described as “devastating” and “traumatic”. In complete contrast, for a third participant, Helen, redundancy was seen as something of a “gift”. She explained:

No, it was definitely worth waiting to get the redundancy... and I decided to wait because I was gonna work just one more year in mining and then try and move, so the fact that the redundancy happened was a gift because it just helped me move back down to Melbourne and gave me the time to make the switch. Helen (HE)

This view of redundancy as potentially offering the financial freedom to allow sideways change was reiterated by several participants. Shane, for example – a printer with the same company for the whole ten year period – described himself as “hanging on” for redundancy, in order to make his transition out of printing (which he considers inevitable) financially easier:

Ah, [I’ve] been thinking about it a lot the last 12 months, and I’ve been looking at... employment, I know I needed... further studies to achieve what I want to do ...just we’re... my wife and myself just had a baby, so I’m waiting for her to settle back down and head back to work and then...we’ll identify whether I do that... further study and financially, whether that’s okay, but definitely... will be...hanging on [in this job] for a redundancy which could be very close... three to six years... and then that’ll give me...close to 20 years service, which I’ll be... I’ll only be 37 or 38 [years old], and that still gives me plenty of opportunity to pursue something further, and... it’s definitely looking at something else... because I do not enjoy...this...trade anymore.... Shane (T)

Wayne, also employed by the one company for the whole ten year period since graduation, similarly considered redundancy as something that would, he says, “push him” to seek career-broadening roles despite otherwise feeling very satisfied with his career at present. He described a whole nexus of factors that underpin his thinking about redundancy, in view of his field, Information Technology:

I know the retrenchment package [in detail]... I’ll have, by [the time I return from overseas] ... ten years [with this company], so I’ve got another three months long...
4.3.2 By Stage: Later Career Decisions

service leave... you start to add it up...[at] the lower tax-rate, you walk out with – two
years pay.

... what you’re not guaranteed of is... if there’s a big down-turn, say, next year –this
year – say the whole global market dies, you might find you come back and you can’t
get a job for 6-12 months. Like, in the tech-wreck it took three years for things to pick
up. But that’s ... I mean, if that happened, then I’ll do what I need to do – it was
something that we [as a family] discussed and ...but, even at the moment I’m not
guaranteed – they could turn round tomorrow, and say, ‘We’re gonna do all pre-sales
centrally [overseas], and every market unit: retrench your Presales staff.’ Bang!
You’re out of a job now. There’s no guarantee in the industry anymore. So as I’ve said
– and I’ve said to my wife, ‘Look, by the time I get back from [overseas] I’m gonna be
either 13 or 15 years [with this company], and it is going to start looking like I’ve been
here a long time. So if I get the package then, I’ll probably look at a new opportunity.’
Wayne (HE)

Wayne’s concerns that “it is going to start looking like I’ve been here a long time” imply
that too much career stability is not necessarily a positive. He describes an inherently
unstable field of employment – despite his own longevity with the same company.

4.3.2.7 Qualifications

Particularly in the later part of their careers to date, participants felt a need to upgrade or
change qualifications, or to undertake on the job education, in order to maintain and/or
enhance job prospects. General comments to this effect were noted throughout the
participant interviews; Shane, for example commented: “I know I need … further studies to
achieve what I want to do”. A number of comments were made in passing, such as
Melanie’s description of herself as being “trapped”, career-wise, by a combination of
family commitments and a first degree in Applied Physics:

[The degree.] I don’t think it equipped me with a lot of skills to progress in business –
not business, but progress in jobs and to understand stuff and to, you know, all that sort
of things, so, I think very few skills were translatable…. [But] I can’t see where else I
can go, at this point in time... I’ve got two young boys... in terms of where I’m skilled –
I don’t wanna do further study at the moment, I have absolutely no interest – I see it as
inevitable that I have to do something, but right now, there’s no way I want to....
Melanie (HE)

Ongoing study, and multiple formal qualifications, are a feature of the career trajectories of
both Helen and Belinda. Helen, who considers herself a lifelong learner (“I don’t ever want
to stop learning”), recognised within six months of finishing her first degree that further
study was a means of fine-tuning her career, with respect to her original engineering
qualification. She explained:
And so yeah, I was just bored [in mining] and within six months I started studying again because I knew ... I wouldn’t be happy doing that for the rest of my life. And I knew that, by then, that I didn’t want to do engineering either. And I knew business improvement was what I wanted to get into. Helen (HE)

Both Maddy and Maria, who had moved in to specialised areas beyond their first degree, also considered further qualifications essential to their respective career trajectories. In Maddy’s case, the quality of the ongoing training (in her specialist field) had actually been a reason for her staying on in a public hospital – despite other inconveniences of the job such as distance of travel to and from work and consequentially long days in childcare for her young daughter. In her case, the quality of ongoing education outweighed these other factors:

... it was always the promise of the ultrasound training – so, I thought I’d probably get a better base – a better understanding of, you know, quality of training. Looking back, I probably should’ve moved to [a more local hospital], because it would’ve been easier. Maddy (HE)

One respondent, however – Troy – opined that further qualifications were virtually irrelevant to his later career. He quoted his father, who subscribed to the belief that “you don’t have to go to school, if you do that apprenticeship and… basically what it [career/business success] revolves around now is just networking…”.

Steven, a trade graduate, also expressed what he saw as the limited benefits of further qualifications. He had done one short course subsequent to his apprenticeship, but was dubious about the benefits of further formal education:

I did a small business management course ... at RMIT, I had a bit of extra time. But that was a long time ago and there’s a lot of stuff I don’t remember from that. Yeah, a lot of business skills I’ve picked up from being around blokes who owned their own businesses...Steven (T)

Furthermore, in relation to formal education and on the job learning, he observed:

Ah...you could probably pick it up off the jobs and through the networks, I think; I can’t see the need to go back to uni or TAFE unless there was a course offered, maybe a 5 day course or something like that to obtain tickets for say, scaffolding or something like that, so if that’s the way – which is good to have, if you’ve got blokes that’ve got that sort of thing, then definitely yeah, send them back to do a 5 day course, it’s always good to have, but generally the most of it can be done on site or as they go.... Steven (T)

Colin, who indicated that he had experienced very little by way of formal education or on the job learning in the ten years since graduation, did not see an immediate need to undertake further qualifications:

[A while back] ... the company put me through a little... management course, personal management course, aimed at people that were at my level of, sort of, mid-level
management: reporting duties, supervisory duties, planning and all that sort of stuff... And there’s certain things that I got out of that that I still use and will always use. Had I not done that course, I wouldn’t have those skills. Simple stuff – seemingly simple stuff – but, it’s a bit like driving a car, if nobody shows you how to do it, you can’t do it. So yeah, I think you can teach that stuff...

I’ve done very little [other training]. But I actually see myself ... by and large, as a good manager.... And I don’t know whether I could be a better manager – I’m sure I probably could given the right training and whatnot, but I’m not sure right now that I need to be a better manager than I am....

I don’t see my career development changing or growing a lot. And I think that... in time, that may be an issue for me. It’s not right now, but I suspect it might be, and I don’t know whether I might deal with that by-- I certainly don’t imagine that I’ll step away from this place... but I wonder whether I might deal with it by doing something in addition to what I do here... And who knows what that’d be... who knows... could be anything... but something that gives me a different set of goals, and a different way to stretch my brain, or whatever it is, but something that’s structured...but I’m talking something that’s more going to push me... I don’t what it might be, but I’m talking maybe in five, six, seven years time maybe I dunno. Colin (HE)

4.3.2.8 Previous Work Experience

Several of the negative comments made in relation to further qualifications– such as those made by Colin and Steven (above), who both saw little career benefit in further qualifications – imply a corollary belief, namely that an individual’s skill base is consolidated by work experience. This was an insight articulated by Shane, for example, who in the ten years since initial qualification had experienced a considerable broadening of his skill base:

I’ve been a Leading Hand, when I was [younger, with the company] but... I gave that away... once we moved [premises]...because there was a different process... [of] going for the jobs there... And I’ve also been out in the... loading [bay] ...or... the publishing room...where ...[we load] the papers to the trucks... and just a bit of the manual work out there, just to do something different because I was getting a bit bored. And I’ve also done the computer delivery system of newsprint to the press as well. Just to get a variety of roles. I’ve done all the colour [setting] and running presses and... all that... Leading Hand stuff... and I’ve done all that.... Shane (T)

Wayne, who has similarly held many roles within the same company across the ten year period since graduation, concurred with Shane’s assessment. He remarked:
4.3.2 By Stage: Later Career Decisions

[This is] a large company, so I’ve worked in many areas over the twelve years [with them], and I’d had enough of [the area I was in], wanted to get out of it for a little while, so thought I’ll have a change… If somebody asked me to write a book on everything I know…well, it’s like… you can’t write it down because you need to live it, you need to do it, you need to learn – and you’ve gotta have the right attitude to want to do that… so you’re constantly learning new skills, constantly mentoring…Wayne (HE)

Although Wayne had participated in a great deal of “in-house training” he did not see the need for further formal qualifications in IT at this stage. This view reflected two situations, firstly:

... different managing directors have different philosophies. The last managing director we had: [said you] had to have an MBA. The one before that, I used to work with [said]: ‘Everybody’s got an MBA, pretty much … I wanna know what you can do. You can have an MBA and not be able to do your job.’ So, he actually said, ‘Doing your job is more important than the piece of paper.’ So, different management people, different company leaders, have got different views of things.

And secondly,

[Because a lot of IT] people seem to grow out of the technical – and go, ‘We can’t go any further in technical, we can go into management.’ Wayne (HE)

Another participant, Sue, attributed her success – evidenced by a burgeoning business empire – to on the job experience.

4.3.2.9 Networks

Wayne described networks as being very powerful in his field: “in [my company] it’s not what you know, it’s who you know, to get things done”. Wayne even described the process of changing jobs, almost as if jobs “came to him” on the basis of networking, by virtue of the fact that people within his company (and more widely within his field) already knew his strengths:

I was recruited to flip between the two [managerial] areas because I was seen as the best fit that had the skills to do that…. After that, I was seen as somebody who could do… customer support…the manager said, ‘I want you to apply because you’d be the perfect candidate’… And unfortunately I’m seen now, after a year, as the … expert, the senior person in the team….Wayne (HE)

Wayne spoke of his field as a “close-knit community”; comments like these were echoed by other case study participants. As noted in the overview section (Section 4.2), Maddy
spoke of the field of radiology as a “small world” where “people know” your capabilities even before you are interviewed. As mentioned above, in Maddy’s words:

The thing is, our world is very small, in my profession, so – as soon as someone knows that someone’s on the hunt for a job, you know, it’s sort of, they know who you are, they know what skills you have, and so… word goes around…. Your… your reputation precedes you wherever you go, so … someone usually knows someone who knows you. Maddy (HE)

Simon said that in very practical ways, networking had been vital to the growth of his small business, and thus to the shape of his and his brother’s careers. Helen said she was a strong “believer” in networking, especially in terms of job-seeking. Having had her ‘fingers burnt’ by a misleading job advertisement in the later years of her career, Helen responded: “basically I don’t think I’ll ever apply for a job again; I’ll do it all through networking”.

4.3.2.10 Confidence in own skills

This category includes: job satisfaction arising from confidence in an established skill set; a desire to continue to enhance a skill set; and loss of confidence in an existing skill set caused by absence from work or changes in the work context.

In Simon’s case, confidence in skill set was explained as one of the motivations for establishing his own business, together with his brother:

So … we just got sick of him [our former boss] and we were doing most things [ourselves] and thought we should have a go ourselves…. Simon (T)

In the example below, Belinda explains that, for her, confidence had come with experience and that this had better equipped her for dealing with a second redundancy:

I think the second time around [facing redundancy] I had a better network. I just had more confidence to be able to pick up the phone and call someone and say ‘Great, you’ve been recommended because – this is what I want’ and then just follow things up. Whereas the first time around I was – I would get leads and then I’d be too scared to phone someone, why do they wanna hear from me? Whereas now, it’s like, I can do this, and I just did. Belinda (HE)

Melanie, on the other hand, described a “stagnating” skill set, and expressed a desire for skill growth, having taken time out from work for maternity leave:

I want to develop…more skills, I don’t wanna be stagnant and staying in the same kind of– just doing the job day-in-day-out, so I wanna know how to be better… Yeah, I’d say that’s probably the main thing, that’s what I want. I don’t wanna stop…. Melanie (HE)

Conversely, Belinda speaks of having such a high level of confidence in her skill set that she would now even consider taking maternity leave – though previously she had thought
that it would be very difficult for her to exit and re-enter the workforce. As noted in the overview section (Section 4.2), her skill set has given her the confidence, in theory, to do just that:

And that’s the bit that always frightened me before, that if I left work to have a child, would I actually get back into the workforce at the same level? Whereas now I think, yeah, that’s easy. Or if I don’t do that, I could actually do a whole lot of other things, because I have that skill set behind me. I’ve sort of got to that point now, where it doesn’t matter when I leave or what I do, if I need to I can always come back to it. Belinda (HE)

It is this very scenario which Melanie claims has halted her career progress. The contrast is remarkable. In Melanie’s experience no “industry will allow you to stand still”, even for maternity leave:

I have two small children that I will have- y’know, until they’re at school-age and even then some - but until they’re at school age they’ll be a large part of my responsibility and stuff, and so I see, that’s what it is. I can’t- I don’t have certain options in terms of career and choices in terms of that sort of stuff, so, y’know, I – yeah, I guess, I see it as temporary, but who knows what it’ll be like in five years time – I’ll be, if I’m not developing, then I’ll still be behind the game, like you have to continually develop, you have to continually grow and stuff, otherwise you’ll always be behind the game... and I don’t think any industry will allow you to stand still, for five years, hehe! ...so, I don’t really know, I can’t see past, y’know, right now at the moment, I just – like I can’t see a future where I’m back on track, career-wise, I’d say.

In light of Melanie’s experience, perhaps Belinda’s hypothesizing is optimistic. Or perhaps, because Melanie lacks the confidence in skill set that Belinda has, she has found herself “trapped” and unable to further expand her skills. Melanie’s particular “case study” is addressed in the Gender Section 4.6.

4.3.2.11 & 12 Lifestyle and Financial

Participants’ comments concerning “Lifestyle” as an influence in the later parts of the ten year period are strongly linked with comments that relate to “Financial” matters – these two influences are therefore discussed in tandem. The influence of financial considerations in occupational decision-making is increasingly complicated, it would seem, as careers mature. The seeking of a better salary would seem to be the most intuitive driver of career or job change. And yet, when analysing the comments of case study participants as regards the influences on their later career choices, it seems that financial concerns are frequently subsumed by other considerations, such as family. Many of the recorded instances of monetary concerns pertaining to later career stages involved consideration of the needs, constraints and interests of family (whether actual or potential).
4.3.2 By Stage: Later Career Decisions

Many case study participants explicitly stated that concerns “other than money” are currently driving their working lives. In several cases, participants acknowledged that it is only when one achieves a certain level of financial independence that one is able to make such an assertion as “money is of no concern to me” (See Life Style Change Section 4.5.2).

Particularly in relation to later career decisions, a number of case study participants commented to the effect that money had shifted in their priorities, having now become secondary to ‘lifestyle’, particularly in relation to family. Maria described just such a change, having taken a ‘job of convenience’ in place of what had been “a career”:

*But it’s more about lifestyle, it’s a lifestyle job, and I don’t think I could turn my back on that because it’s given me so much that you can’t measure with money.* Maria (HE)

Some of Maria’s priorities included: spending time with her growing children (“they’re only little for a short period of time”); spending time with her extended family (including a sick relative); having time to slow down and lead a less complex life (“It was just too many fingers in too many pies… it was so much nicer not to be so tired, so run off my feet and just rushing”); and greater flexibility – again, in the service of family:

*The thing I like about it is that I come and go as I please. In that, I go and pick up Sam from kinder and take him to my Mum’s and I can drop him off at kinder...on the whole, I can be there for my kids and that’s really, really the most important thing on our agenda at the moment.* Maria (HE)

Helen expressed a similar shift in response to influences “other than money” in the later years of her career. In her case, personal satisfaction, rather than family, is the underlying motivation:

*Yeah, the dollars – look, I could – if the dollars were important to me, then I’d be working in the mining industry. But ... I don’t find dollars personally satisfying, like - I’d like to have them ... it would get me to my dream shorter. But I can’t sacrifice... like, life-satisfaction, I guess, because it’s more than just being in a job. Like I said, at [one of my former jobs] had a great lifestyle, really crap job: the balance was so out of whack – I was just unhappy overall. I can’t do that again, it just doesn’t suit me. So for me it is about the balance.... So money is not an incentive. Career positions is not an incentive. I’ve never been worried about status, I don’t care what people think of me or where I am or...or even how I’m dressed most of the time kinda thing, you know... So...it’s all been more personal satisfaction and also what I can give to people – that’s probably the other thing – what I really enjoy in my job is... being able to help people. But I also like challenging them. I like taking them out of their comfort zone and getting them to accept change and to own that change, and that’s really what makes me enjoy my job and love my job.*

This element of career satisfaction – “being able to help people” – arises in the words of several participants and is discussed in the Benefits Section 4.5.
Belinda describes a ‘sea change’ in her attitude to income – as already noted above:

*Now it just pays my mortgage but there’s so much more to me than work... when I was a bit younger it was ‘work, work, work’. Belinda (HE)*

When asked, Belinda acknowledged that income is not exactly irrelevant, but that it is only one among several factors:

*Q: Looking at work, what are the things that are most important to you in terms of what you want to get out of work?*

One of it is being able to contribute to others, so if I have someone in my team, being able to impart some of my skill or knowledge, to help them grow and take steps in their career. Y’know, if we’re not getting out of something personally, then why are we all here? So, being able to do that. Being successful - I don’t know if that’s about making money - but it’s still important for me to say that I’m successful at what I do...I would’ve said maybe even twelve months ago money was the main reason, but, ... it’s more about getting something out of it and I need to be able to walk away saying I’ve done something and I’ve gained something for it to have been, y’know, worthwhile having spent the last twelve months doing it. That’s the hardest bit, where you can’t see either one of those, and its like: what am I doing? Belinda (HE)

This acknowledgment – that money, while less of a concern than it was earlier in her career, nevertheless still is a consideration – points to the fact that it takes a certain amount of prosperity to be able to say that “money is not important”. Colin, for example, spoke of a sense of growing “detachment” from career and its financial benefits, once he had “reached a certain level” of financial stability:

*I’ve noticed really recently, in the last couple of projects I’ve done, that I haven’t quite got the same mental commitment to the actual project at hand that I once did, and that’s – that was a slightly scary realisation for me, actually...because it makes you think, ‘Well, if that’s what I’m like at year ten, what am I gonna be like at year twenty?’ – ‘cause I honestly see, that, we’ll – all things being equal – still be here operating this business in another ten years, and maybe another twenty. I mean, I’m thirty-five, if I can keep this thing going til I’m fifty-five - well, fantastic, be brilliant. ... [But I know] we’re gonna have to work very hard to keep it going. And y’know, we always wonder – well I always wonder sometimes – I am going to ... ever, am I gonna wake up one day and think, ‘Oh its all too hard, like y’know I’ve paid the house off now, I’ve got the kids through school ... will I go and get a job, y’know not have to worry about all this other stuff’. I don’t think I --I think that I’ll always ... keep going in the same direction, because it’s so good for your ego, if nothing else. And really, once you get to a certain level of income, it doesn’t make any – it’s ignorant for me to say it doesn’t make any difference – it does. But in terms of your wellbeing and your happiness, I don’t think it does. I really don’t. And I feel that now I’m past that level.... Colin (HE)*
This changing attitude to money – and its role in the nexus of career and life satisfaction, particularly in the later part of the ten year period since graduation – is also mentioned by Shane. Again, having attained a certain level of financial stability (having “set ourselves up early”), he is in a position to be able to reassess his reasons for working. Having “hung on” to a job in printing – a job which promised a steady wage, but increasingly low levels of personal satisfaction – he had come to view differently his motivations for working:

... definitely looking at something else... and something in sport and leisure because I do not enjoy... this... trade anymore... The best thing that we did was to set ourselves up early... so those [financial] things... we’ve done well to do that – not knowing that I wanted to change, ten years ago, but that’s given us the opportunity to do that if I wanted to... so...... I think it’s just to have an enjoyment of what I actually do again...
Shane (T)

Sue is one of several case study participants who claimed not to be driven by money, but rather by satisfaction in her work. In a part of her interview which included some comments from her business partner, they both offered comments about the relatively minor role of financial considerations:

Partner: I think one thing that doesn’t really affect us is money, not saying that we’ve got the privilege of money ... it does inspire—

Sue: -we don’t have the pressure of money—

Partner: but money isn’t important to us—

Sue: ... the most rewarding bit is getting the system right, or the development right, or the procedure right or the service right or the food right or whatever it is -- and then the money comes—

Partner: — it’s with anything—

Sue: And I think you get to that point and you feel like, ‘Look at what we’ve achieved’ and you can look at it and go ‘Wow’ and it’s so rewarding and so fulfilling, and then you get the money that comes too, so it’s like, it’s almost like the cherry on top, kind of thing, you’re not driven by that first. Sue (HE)
4.3.3 Reasons for Job Changes: Changing Patterns of Influence Across Career Stages

Reasons for job changes were documented in Table 20 of the Stage 1 report (Fehring, Malley, Bessant, Montague, & Robinson, 2008, p. 26), reproduced as Table 2 below. In the table, each response represents a job change during the first ten years of working life, so the percentages shown are percentages of all job changes that were reported.

Table 2. Reasons for all job changes (percent of responses, from Stage 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for Change</th>
<th>Apprentices - TAFE</th>
<th>Degree graduates - HE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>Persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To use qualification</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broaden experience and skills</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enable study</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working hours</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking better conditions</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissatisfaction with the workplace</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For a change</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be own boss</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redundancy and unemployment</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment not ongoing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better prospects</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To pursue alternative career</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family formation</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total percent</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

Table 2 indicates that job changes for reasons of either further study or promotion were proportionately greater in the higher education sample than in the trade sample. Within the higher education sample, there was a noticeable gender difference in the percentages of job changes attributed to promotion: 30 percent of all job changes for males were due to promotion, whereas for females the figure was 16 percent. While seven percent of job changes among apprentices were attributed to respondents’ desires to be their own boss, the same was the case for just 1 percent of graduates. (Interestingly, this percentage of graduates as self-employed changes in regard to the Stage 3 data – that contained in the in-depth interviews – where a high proportion of both TAFE and Higher Education graduates are self-employed, see Section 4.3.3.1.2 Self Employment, p. 59 below). An obvious gender difference occurs within the higher education sample relating to the issue of family formation: among females, family formation accounted for 15 percent of job changes, whereas among males it was less than 1 percent (however, instances were reported of males changing jobs specifically to accommodate increasing family responsibilities).
In Stage 3, case study participants expanded on their reasons for job changes, and their responses are represented in diagrammatic summary, in Figure 8.

Figure 8. Reasons for Job Change

There were fewer comments that directly pertain to one discrete reason for job change, than there were for participants’ more general thoughts regarding “career decisions” – both early and later ones. Most often, in practice, it seems that participants change jobs for a combination of reasons. When case study participants did identify a singular reason underlying a given job change, the most popular category of response was that of “Personal Influences”, and specifically, “Personal Choice”.

4.3.3.1 Personal influences

4.3.3.1.1 Personal Choice

Participants frequently cited “boredom” and the desire for further challenges as a reason for job change. The career trajectories of Wayne (HE) and Shane (T) exemplify this kind of job change; in both cases, these workers had stayed with the one employer for the whole ten year period, but frequently changed roles internally.

Maria and Helen also cited a need to be mentally challenged as a key reason for job change. Maria described her decision to seek re-entry into the field in which she had
obtained her initial qualification (radiography), after a period of absence from work due to child care and helping out with her husband’s business. She explained:

I was looking for something; I needed some balance in my life. I mean I was enjoying my child, I was — not bored, but my brain needed extending. I was doing the books for [the clinic], but it wasn’t at that level [where it could be considered ‘my job’] yet. And we also decided that the steady income outside of the business would be nice too. To have something, particularly while we were building the clinic, just to have something coming in regularly, that was fixed and solid and not going anywhere would be nice and not fluctuate. Maria (HE)

Notice that financial reasons underpin Maria’s decision — ostensibly, for reasons of mental stimulation — to re-enter the workforce.

In other cases more specific personal reasons were given for job changes, such as in Melanie’s explanation of her decision to leave a job, during a particularly difficult period of her life:

... there were lots of factors that contributed to it, but I think after I came back over here [home to family for a visit] I kind of got some confidence back and — to some degree, and then just decided I had to do it, I had to come home…. so — yeah I just decided it was time [to resign]. Melanie (HE)

This point in Melanie’s working life, which is discussed more comprehensively in the Gender Section 4.6, represented a “low point” where she felt she needed to emotionally rebuild; she described the need to get “some confidence back” in order to have the courage to resign.

### 4.3.3.1.2 Self-employment

An interesting feature of the Stage 3 case studies is the proportion of career trajectories that had been directed toward self-employment in one form or another. As might reasonably be expected, two of the trade cohort – plumbers Steven and Simon – started their own business. But, perhaps more surprisingly, three of the higher education cohort did so as well: Sue (hospitality entrepreneur); Colin (co-managing director of a successful construction company); and Maria (part-time co-principal of her husband’s clinic). During his interview, Steven spoke candidly of the transition to self-employment:

...there was about 4 of us and we decided that there was too many of us working altogether so we ... [My brother] and I hooked up. I remember, we sat on a roof one day ... and we just sat there and said, ‘What are we doing here? Why are we doing this for somebody else? It’s bloody ridiculous let’s have a crack. You know, you don’t wanna die wondering, so let’s have a crack, we reckon we got a few contacts to get started on and see what happens. Why work our butts off to earn all this money for this bloke? Let’s have a go’. Steven (T)
4.3.3 Reasons for Job Changes

In Maria’s case, the decision to step into a part-time role as bookkeeper for her husband’s business – and so to suspend working in her own field – was primarily for reasons of providing care for her children. She described a sense of relief at moving in to the family business:

*We were exhausted and I wasn’t particularly enjoying work either... when I went back [to radiography] after having had my second child. The thing I like about [working for the family business] is that I come and go as I please ... in that, I go and pick up Sam from kinder and take him to my Mum’s and I can drop him off at kinder... And I love the flexibility at the moment of being able to – the thought of being able to work nine to three, and if the kids are sick I can go and get them or if there’s something on at school or help out at school and be a part of their lives. Maria (HE)*

4.3.3.1.3 Health

Maria’s transition to self-employment, as described above, indicates the pervasive influence of family; it also exemplifies job change for health reasons:

*My mother-in-law got cancer and she was actually babysitting my children on the day that I worked at the hospital. So I took five weeks off without pay while she had her surgery and I never went back... And, I think they knew at work that that would happen; but – just made me revaluate that life is short... I myself had been ill during the year; I’d had a funny episode -- ended up in hospital overnight. And, luckily that resulted in nothing, but it was enough to sort of – yeah and we just found that life was hectic and busy and fine but there was no room for anything to happen. It was just too hard – so we were struggling the minute one of us felt slightly sick or not up to a hundred percent. Maria (HE)*

4.3.3.1.4 Desire to travel

In the context of early-career decision-making (Section 4.3.1 above), job change due to a desire to travel was evident in Maddy’s case. Another Stage 3 participant who cited the desire to travel as a reason for job change was Wayne, who explained his most recent career moves with a view to travelling:

*...Doing sales gives you a lot of global interfaces – you’ve got to talk a lot with a lot of other market units, so you get a lot of global contacts as well. And gives you opportunities then, to actually get contracts overseas and go and travel. That was actually one of the reasons I took the role, was to build more of my global contacts... And one of the things I said to him when I took it, I said, ‘One of the reasons I’m taking it is, I only want to look at doing it for 12 months or 2 years, I want to look at taking a job overseas when my kids are young. So, I want to take a contract, see a bit of the world’... Wayne (HE)*

It should be noted that Wayne’s career (and travel) plans relate to the fact that he has school-age children – and so family considerations, once again, may be seen to inform other influences.
4.3.3 Reasons for Job Changes

4.3.3.2 Workplace influences

4.3.3.2.1 Redundancy

For three of the 12 participants – Belinda, Melanie and Helen (all HE) – redundancy was a reason for job change. In Belinda’s case, redundancy shaped her career trajectory not once, but twice over the ten year period since graduation.

In two of these cases, the participants described the job from which they had been made redundant as an “ideal” job, their ‘once in a lifetime’ career opportunity. With respect to the first of two instances of redundancy, Belinda described the job she had to leave as “the bee’s knees” – a position with a company with whom she had sought employment for many years:

... It was my ideal organisation, if you could’ve painted a picture of who I wanted to work for, [they] would’ve been it. And it was in a lot of ways because it could provide, I guess, a lot of benefits and it was a defined career-path, and all those sorts of things that you’d want in an organisation, [they] had. They were very progressive...Belinda (HE)

Belinda described in detail the process of “grieving” after being made redundant; a process she experienced twice. Although still a sorrowful experience for her the second time around, it was a process she understood better, and felt that she dealt with better, in light of her previous experience. The first time it happened to her, she explained, her being made redundant was part of a very public “collapse” of her ideal organisation, an external factor that added to the shock, and took control out of her hands:

[Redundancy is] a traumatic event in life and you still go through the whole grieving process that you do as when someone dies or divorce – whenever there’s a major trauma in your life, you follow that – the grief process of denial, anger, all the way through to acceptance, and you do the same with redundancy as well – and I was a classic – even though I knew all of that the second time I was made redundant, I didn’t skip any of those steps-

I still went through everything, even though I already knew: I’m gonna get angry, I know I’m gonna be in denial – I still did it, and yet I knew that was going to happen, but I guess it’s just that human process that you go through, to get to the other end, you have to go through that trial of getting to the point where, yep, I’m okay again, let’s go look for a job.

...[As regards telling people] I was in control the second time, whereas the first time I wasn’t, the media was...Belinda (HE)
4.3.3 Reasons for Job Changes

Melanie – having found herself a position within her field, seemingly just the right position for her, only to be made redundant – tells a similar story to that of Belinda. She described the experience of being made redundant as “devastating”:

Yeah, that was the best job I’ve had... it was a great job – you know, it was a ‘right place-right time’ kind of scenario in that, as I said, there are just no jobs [in my field], there’s no development companies in Melbourne and at the time this company was setting up and I just happened to see it on ‘Seek’ – interview and got it, and then they sent me off overseas [for training] ... So, it was a really exciting job and it worked, and it was – and I had autonomy and I had- y’know the boss believed in me as well...So, the company, the parent company, was a share – you know – listed company, and so, they started losing money on the development side of things, you know, they weren’t sure if they were going to reach targets, and targets started to get pushed out, and so the share-holders kind of started acting up and then they kind of cut off [our arm of the company] entirely – so, but it was a slow death in that we knew for a long time they were planning it and yet we were still trying to get projects up and running so- then I got retrenched I was devastated because the project had just worked and I’d just got it into manufacturing... [And] so there was a point when I thought: ‘No, no, look, I’m a project manager they’ll keep me on and they’ll get rid of some of the junior staff...’ - and maybe they’ll just down-size for now, or maybe they’ll just find a way, or maybe once we prove, which we did prove, that they’ll manage to keep it on, and all that sort of stuff but – there was talk about it for quite a while – but yeah, so I guess there was a point – but then I sort of thought it was inevitable and it was all gonna happen and .... I was devastated, absolutely devastated ... Melanie (HE)

Both Melanie and Belinda bemoaned the inadequacy of support systems in place to deal with workers who have been made redundant. While in Melanie’s case a part of her redundancy “package” included assistance from an “outplacement agency”, she nevertheless described this service as too generalised to be of use for her highly specialised expertise. An almost identical critique of government services, such as Centrelink, was proffered by Belinda, who described a system unable to “categorise” her particular skills and unable to understand her level of seniority. Belinda describes her time dealing with this agency as one of “the worst things I’ve been through”. As she explained:

But one of the hardest things for me at Centrelink was they tried to assess my skills, and at this stage I had two degrees, done a couple of different courses... but my form, when I walked away from Centrelink about my skill set, was blank, because they didn’t know how to categorise my skills, and they said to me: “What’s an MBA?” and I had to explain - and she said, “Well there’s no box for an MBA”. I said, “Well that’s my qualification, that’s what I’m working towards at the moment, I’m paying three thousand dollars a semester to finish my MBA”. And so when I walked away with a blank piece of paper essentially, they said, “Well, we can actually offer you a training course” I said, “Oh, what would that be?” - Cash register skills. And I said, “I don’t want to offend you, but I have done this degree, [and] this degree, I’m halfway through
4.3.3 Reasons for Job Changes

an MBA, I’ve done all of these skills before in previous roles, how do you think that’s going to help me actually get back into the workplace?” And she didn’t have an answer; she said, “That’s all I can offer you”. And that was probably the most distressing thing: having plucked up the courage to actually go there in the first place to get some assistance, then to be told “Sorry but you don’t fit any of these little boxes here that I can tick” – but the person not understanding what the levels of qualifications were, but yet, you got preferential appointments because you were [part of this public collapse] but they weren’t equipped to handle… some of the senior people, or people that actually were qualified… It was awful. It was one of the worst experiences I think I’ve been through.

... It was all too hard and it just made me feel worse than what I already did. And, you’d have to go and get certain jobs, and you’d have to apply for certain jobs, so you had to use their job agencies – and I’d walk into the job agency going “I’m here to register, because I have to”, and they’d just say “We don’t have jobs for you”, I said, “I don’t care. I have to register with you to be able to get a payment from the government”, but - “We can’t find you a job”. And I did that four times I think, with four different agencies, because I had to register and I had to apply for so many jobs....

Belinda (HE)

At the time of her second redundancy, Belinda explained, conditions were still bleak; but she saw ‘lessons’ to be learned. She could readily identify the extent to which redundancy support systems were lacking:

...when I think about it, nothing was any different from [from the first redundancy]. I didn’t go to Centrelink this time, I thought I’m not gonna go through that. I thought I’ll- fortunately this time I did get a redundancy payment but... nothing like I expected, and that’s given me a wake-up call to read the fine-print on your employment agreement before, you sign it.... So I wasn’t going to go to Centrelink this time, but there were still no other support agencies out there. So there was no-one to help me in the community. So, luckily, I was married... and yeah, I had [my husband] to get me through it. I had a honeymoon to take my focus away- but even on my honeymoon, I wanted a job, so I had recruiters calling me in Thailand, would you like to interview? I was doing interviews over the telephone, trying to get a job, and I think, that’s the one time in my life – on my honeymoon – I didn’t need that, but I still did it because I still wanted a job. ‘Cause I still had a mortgage and I still had a wedding to pay for. So there was still- there was no more support the second time than what there was the first time. Belinda (HE)

Belinda considered alternatives to government assistance the second time around; however, the experience was just as unsatisfactory:
... I couldn’t afford to pay the money that they were asking [recruitment agencies], in terms of giving you that career guidance. I could’ve done an out-placement program, but it would’ve cost me upwards of four thousand dollars. When you’ve been made redundant that’s really hard to part with that money, when you’re still focused on your mortgage. So I didn’t do the out-placement ... Belinda (HE)

Both these case cases point to a gap in the provision of support services for skilled workers when they are made redundant. Belinda and Melanie’s redundancies were followed by periods of joblessness and transitional (temporary, casual and out-of-field) employment. Melanie explained how she felt over that period, expressing her sense of being “trapped” in a field where there just did not seem to be job opportunities:

Yeah I was really depressed. I was just – because I thought I’ll never get into another job again and I was doing lots of applying for jobs in project management, across different disciplines and stuff – because I was trying to transition out from where I was [Applied Physics] – and, because I didn’t have the experience in the other disciplines I wasn’t getting anywhere and I was trying to- and I just didn’t know what I was gonna do, and you know, just- I was in crappy jobs and like crappy sort of casual sorts of jobs and stuff and I just thought ‘I’d come from this to this’ so... yeah, I was really low...

Melanie (HE)

Presenting a starkly contrasting picture of redundancy, however, was Helen. For Helen, being made redundant – losing a position in which she was highly dissatisfied – came as “a gift”, one that gave her the financial freedom to re-assess her career trajectory, to step back and take the to pursue her career “passion”. This benign aspect of redundancy was also mentioned by both Wayne and Shane, whose comments are included above, in Later Career Decisions Section 4.3.2.

### 4.3.3.2.2 Industry Policies

In three cases, inflexible industry policies led directly or indirectly to job change. For Maddy, an unwritten policy of disallowing job-share meant that she felt forced to leave her job of more than ten years – a position she enjoyed, with a team that was a “very close-knit group, [who] all worked well together”. There was no formal policy, or even reason why her role could not be job-shared, but her manager’s opinions on the matter prevented it:

...at the time the general chief was not happy to do job-share. I think – I don’t know whether he’d had other people try before and it had not worked out in relation to holidays, sick leave, all that sort of thing – I think he just felt it was all too complicated, so ....

... there would be nothing preventing us from doing that [job sharing] – which is one of the reasons, as I said before, why ... I chose this profession because I knew that [job share] would be something I could do quite easily in the future. I think, look, it’s just you know some people are fairly stuck in their ways and don’t want to change. Now, I
4.3.3 Reasons for Job Changes

understand that there is a little bit of job-sharing going [at this workplace], and people are quite happily doing that – so that’s great… Maddy (HE)

Maddy’s lack of ‘hard feelings’ towards her manager belies the impact of an inflexible workplace policy on her daughter’s early years. Maddy expressed considerable “regret” and said that she felt “very, very, very guilty” about the long hours in childcare that the lack of a job-share position had meant for her daughter.

In Maria’s case, inflexibility of working hours precipitated job change. Echoing Maddy’s complaint, Maria explained that work in a public hospital lacked the flexibility of working hours to accommodate working mothers. For Maria, whose words were noted in the overview section above, a part-time position entailed the loss of her ability to work in her specialised field (CT). As she explained the situation:

I know when I was at [that public hospital] they never took people back part-time. It was full-time or nothing. However, after I left they had to start thinking about that, because they were suddenly getting very short staffed, and there was quite a few people in senior roles that were having babies. And they did come back part-time, and they suddenly realised that part-time workers were actually sometimes better than their full-time workers, ‘cause they enjoyed it more, and they weren’t entrenched in it. So they had a bit of a culture change there, and learnt a lot from that. In the private world there’s always a lot of part-time workers, an awful lot of mums. Maria (HE)

Troy’s comment further suggests that industry policies, or the lack of appropriate industry policies, can contribute to skill loss:

... basically because…it’s a…the new EBA, there’s no union over there at the moment, so there was no bargaining power between the ...management and the union, to get the pay and conditions up. Troy (T)

A common feature of Maddy, Maria and Troy’s experience with inflexible workplace policies is the way in which they responded. Maddy and Maria both expressed a reluctance to “cause trouble”, an unwillingness to “force” change by taking formal action. In Maria’s words, she “could have threatened legal action” (to achieve a part-time role) but was “not willing to go down that path”. In Maddy’s case, she “didn’t push too hard” for a job-share position, opting to resign instead, adding that she was “not going to cause any trouble” (refer also to Gender Section 4.6).

Another ‘victim’ of industry policies – the ineffectiveness of, or failure to implement, policy – is Melanie. Her experience of sexism and harassment in the workplace is discussed in the Gender Section 4.6.

4.3.3.2.3 Internal Promotion Possibilities

This final workplace-related category of reasons for job change would seem one of the most intuitive: better promotion opportunities. In practice, however, this reason for job
4.3.3 Reasons for Job Changes

change does not feature heavily in the transcripts; Maria briefly mentioned a job change because of better “prospects”, while Troy outlined his experiences as follows:

... the money’s good here, you can climb up the ladder and work yourself up – which is what I’m doing now... we have probably every third month – probably every six months we have jobs going on offer at our work. They’re all in-house, whether [it] be through management or ... assistant production ...so, it basically all comes down to how long you’ve spent at the company and the experience you’ve gained...so, they don’t sort of take on people that haven’t gained that experience, so... I basically just have to bide my time there to gain that experience. I’ve gained the experience now of doing leading hand work, above that comes management...because we have so many managers leaving our warehouse, to go to other warehouses across Australia, there’s always opportunities to step up and to take the next step. Troy (T)

One of the case study participants who laid greatest emphasis on promotion is one who had never changed companies, Wayne. He explained that prospects of an internal promotion, as well as financial interests, had kept him with the same company for ten years:

... I’ve been offered jobs outside [this company]. But I’ve looked at what I’ve been offered... the risk, I’ve looked at what I’m giving up and what I’m gaining and...pretty much always I’ve decided that ... what I’m being offered... any new job when you’re being offered it you get automatically a 20 percent pay rise. It’s pretty much expected – if you want me to move, 20 percent more... and I’ve been offered even more than that. But I’ve looked at it and thought, ‘Well wait a second, if I work hard [here], I look at a new role, I can make that up in two years time anyway, ...pretty much all of them were smaller companies, so not as many opportunities, only one was a global company but even they were still smaller than [this one].... One of them was a really senior position: it was a VP of services to the Asia-Pacific region that I got offered a role for, but it was a small company, it was like, what do I do after five years of doing that role, or four years? Where do I go, what do I wanna do after that? And maybe if I got something in [one of the] bigger global company I might consider it, but there have been a lot of the smaller companies saying we want your skills... and it’s like, but I do that role, I’m still young I’ve got 30 years to go... so... why would I leave [here] where I can go and do ... what you’ve offered me there I can do in five years time, and after I’ve done that I can go and do something different in another country; I can go here or there. So I guess one of the reasons I didn’t leave [this company] is opportunities... Wayne (HE)
4.3.3 Reasons for Job Changes

4.3.3.3 Family influences

Occupational and career decisions influenced by family considerations were predominant among responses from the 12 case study participants in Stage 3 of this study. As noted above, Troy’s words typify this influence of family on career decision-making:

…So, that’s probably one of the biggest decision factors I’ve got…when I’m making a decision is, what’s happening in – what’s good for the family and our financial stability… But, you know, I’ve always enjoyed challenges, I’m always open to them, so I’m not afraid to make a move. Troy (T)

4.3.3.3.1 Partner

In Shane’s case, as was noted in the Later Career Decisions Section 4.3.2, he needed to ‘wait his turn’ within the family before he could take time to re-train. He also explained that his steady income and low-demand job (even though he no longer enjoyed it) had helped out his partner in the past:

Yeah, I … helping her… with my wife, when we first… she’d just started with her…degree at RMIT in the city, doing Accountancy and through her CPA, and I know, that’s probably taken up eight years of that, but… she’s very good at what she does, and…just supported her along,… she wanted to make sure she had those qualifications, and she can work anywhere in the world now, basically…

…we both throw the ideas around and see what’s the best…and… I know I needed… further studies to achieve what I want to do …just we’re… my wife and myself just had a baby, so I’m waiting for her to settle back down and head back to work and then…we’ll identify whether I do that… further study and financially, whether that’s okay…. Shane (T)

Maria’s case – which, again, was discussed in the Later Career Decisions Section 4.3.2 – involved her decision to step out of her own career, in order to help her partner build his private practice and to provide care for their children. She described this situation as “just evolv[ing]”. She explained the difficulties of maintaining professional registration in her own field, when her husband’s training needs have to come first:

… I don’t have time to spend all Sunday at a seminar, [my husband’s] got enough like trying to keep his education going, with doing conferences and seminars and workshops and staying up to date. For both of us, it just means we wouldn’t have any family time.

… I don’t think we ever made a decision, I think it just evolved, and sometimes that’s hard ‘cause you think, ‘Hey do you realise … I’ve given up my … and that’s probably one of the drawbacks of working together. Maria (HE)

But, like Shane, Maria can also foresee a time when it might again be ‘her turn’:
4.3.3 Reasons for Job Changes

I can often see that, once [my husband] starts to wind down his podiatry, I suspect he will go into more research later down the path – that I will go out and do something then and we’ll have a bit of a role change. Well that’s what I’d like to see happen then, if I’ve got the energy for it by then. [Maybe when I’m around] 40 / 50 [years old]. Yeah, but I can definitely see that – I’d like to do something later. There’s definitely that there, and it’ll be very different from radiography. Maria (HE)

4.3.3.3.2 Start Family

In one case, becoming pregnant directly precipitated a job change, albeit from a job that Melanie described in terms of “a really unstable workplace”, with a tyrannical boss. She offered context:

... it was a really unstable workplace, like people just, y’know, were terrified of him [the business owner] and I just found him and joke and that sort of stuff, but when I found out I was pregnant I just knew it wasn’t an environment, cause they paid fantastically, but I just knew it wasn’t an environment for me, like I thought nah, I’m not gonna be in this stressful sort of situation and all the rest of it.... Melanie (HE)

Less directly, however, the impact of family formation on job change has been seen throughout this section: for example, on Maria and Maddy’s decisions to leave their respective positions in radiography because their workplaces, at the time, could not accommodate part-time or job-share hours. This impact can also be seen, albeit more subtly, in the working life stories of the male participants: for example, in Wayne’s timing of his transition to an overseas job.
4.4 Ongoing Education

The Working Lives project was interested in exploring participants’ opinions in relation to lifelong learning and further education. Respondents were asked to consider their current job skills, and to indicate how important each of a number of ways of acquiring those skills had been over the preceding ten years – as reported in Section 4.2 of the Stage 1 and Stage 2 findings (Fehring, Malley, Bessant, et al., 2008, p. 31).

Table 3 below (from Table 24 in Stage 1 and 2 report) shows that learning on the job and teaching yourself were regarded as either very important or important by the overwhelming majority of both the trade and higher education samples. 82 percent of apprentices and 78 percent of graduates rated learning on the job as very important. 60 percent of apprentices and 60 percent of graduates rated teaching yourself as very important. Employer-provided training programs ranked next highest in importance, for both samples; a combined total of 83 percent of apprentices and 78 percent of graduates indicated that this method of gaining skills was either important or very important. Less frequently cited as being of importance were formal learning and participation in short courses available through organisations such as trade or professional associations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methods of learning job skills</th>
<th>Apprentices (TAFE)</th>
<th>Degree graduates (HE)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very Important</td>
<td>Important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning on the job from workmates, colleagues and others in the business</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching yourself (through problem solving and thinking, reading, using the web etc)</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courses and training programs provided by employer</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal learning (another TAFE or university course that led to a qualification)</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending short courses not provided by employer (eg through trade or professional association)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the in-depth Stage 3 interviews, case study participants gave more detailed comments in relation to on the job training and continual formal education. These more comprehensive views are summarised in the following sub-sections.
4.4 Ongoing Education

4.4.1 On the job training

On the job training refers to informal training opportunities and short courses accessed from the workplace. Stage 3 participants were asked as to whether such forms of education had impacted on their working lives over the last ten years. The views of Helen and Shane, expressed below, reflect the practical nature of such on the job training:

Yeah, in [mining] … I did [some training], and the other thing is, there was a one week block of accelerated change training, called ACT for short, and basically that is all the tools you can possibly imagine to manage the people side of change. And that was much -probably much more useful, in a practical term, than doing the Graduate Certificate in Change Management - which is a lot of theory, you know typical uni stuff: you’re given a theory, you’re given a case study, you say how you’d improve it or you take what’s happening at work and work on how you’d improve it….Helen (HE)

In my printing job -- they had an excellent training program, run by … some really good people that helped me out throughout, and their system of training was excellent, … because they had so many people... not[from] a trade background they needed something in place… when they went to litho… and they had set something up really well there… so it was different, and it was continuous… and there was something -- I think we had something every month… in a classroom and then the rest was on the press, so it was… done really well there. Shane (T)

In contrast to these positive experiences of on the job learning, other participants expressed dismay at the lack of formal structure witnessed in some workplace training programs:

I find learning in organisations very difficult; because no-one really knows what it is that you’re gonna get out of it at the end. So… you might go on a training course, and they’ll say this is what we’re going to do, but the actual application back to your workplace I find is very grey - so I don’t put a lot of value on them. Definitely not as much as what I would a more structured university program. Belinda (HE)

4.4.2 Continual Formal Education

Continual formal training refers to structured training opportunities and courses offered by tertiary institutions, professional organisations and similar authorities. The responses below indicate how such formal education has featured in the first ten years of participants’ working lives.

When reviewing her formal education – which includes two undergraduate degrees and a masters degree – Belinda commented on the role that formal education has played, she believes, in ‘keeping her options open’. Her views were also noted in the Early Career Decisions section:
[When I took on the second degree] I was making the conscious decision that I wouldn’t actually narrow down my skill set but I’d try to build it horizontally by taking a management focus and doing the Bachelor of Business Administration to actually try and achieve, I guess, that horizontal skill set. Because from there I truly believed that I could go forward in any way, shape or form ... which my career has sort of done.

Belinda (HE)

When asked what aspect of her past – formal education or on the job learning – had contributed most to her skill development, Belinda offered the following:

I think from... a practical sense and understanding a lot of the business basics around organisational theory and ... behaviours and all that sort of stuff, definitely got the framework from university. But a lot of the competency-based stuff, until you actually do it, you don’t know... you can’t really rate what your skills are gonna be. And that stuff I’ve developed along the way... but I couldn’t have actually got to that point until I understood what the big picture looked like and that’s what- perhaps what university gave me... So I knew what to expect; it didn’t always happen like they said it would happen in the textbook, but at least I could look at it and ... understand what was happening. But the competency stuff I learnt [on the job]... Belinda (HE)

This sense of formal education providing “the big picture” or a “framework” is reiterated by Helen. She holds a similar view to Belinda’s of formal tertiary education, which in her experience instilled “thinking skills” rather than practicalities:

I think, rather than give me practical skills in the workforce... [My degree has] opened my mind to different ideas and taught me how to think about things in certain ways, or challenged how to think about things as well. [But] ... I can’t think of anything that I’ve taken from any of the courses that I’ve actually used - you know, like- even my economic analysis, the financial markets didn’t cover that, it was broad stuff, taught me how to think about markets not how to actually run economic analysis. I had a friend teach me that... So I think [formal education] teaches you how to think -- which is very important... and I don’t think I’d be as successful in my particular role, ’cause if I wasn’t broad-minded then I don’t think I’d be able to do my role --very effectively. But, the practicalities ...in my role I don’t use any tools that I’ve learnt from most of them.

Helen (HE)

Helen commented that she “didn’t ever want to stop learning”, adding that shorter courses – such as a Change Management Graduate Certificate, and a course called “Six Sigma”, a statistical-based method of business improvement – had imparted very useful workplace skills. A Graduate Diploma in Financial Markets, Helen adds, had an effect of further enhancing her thinking skills:

That really made me learn...I grew up on a farm, but apart from the weather, which is obviously a major driving factor, I didn’t understand world markets and how that impacts on business or prices or anything like that... So that was really relevant,
because until I did that course I really didn’t understand the full impact of how world markets drive business, like I understood boom-bust cycles, but not the economic drivers behind it and that kind of stuff. And that totally impacts on how companies operate and what decisions are being made at certain times, and that, so it just broadens your mind to different possibilities and understanding of what’s going on -- which I think is very relevant no matter what job you do, but particularly key in mine because transformational change, you’re trying to overcome whatever challenges markets are setting for you at the time. Helen (HE)

Wayne, when asked about the mix of formal education and on the job learning in his working life, offered the following anecdote:

So when I first started [in my current job] we had an in-depth – what was it, forty days, it was, training – so pretty much it was like, you went to university, you got your degree, you learnt the basics of programming certain languages, then [the company] brought you in and said, ‘Okay, you’ve learnt the basics at university, you’ve proved you can learn – that’s all we wanted you to do, so forget everything you learned at university, now we’ll train you. Wayne (HE)

Wayne added that during ten years with his current employer he had been paid to attend a total of “50 to 60 internal courses”.

Maria and Maddy, both trained in radiography, believed that their degree had provided them with a good preparation for working life. Clinical placements, the practical component of their formal education, contributed to both radiographers’ sense of confidence and professional competence. When asked whether her degree offered good preparation for her first job, Maria answered:

Yeah because you had a lot of – we used to do two days a week clinical, so I had been to [that hospital] as a student and I had been there as an intern so you pretty much walked in with your eyes open, yeah. Maria (HE)

Maddy answered:

Oh absolutely! ... Very, very happy with the degree. The kind of work we do is very hands-on, so the part of the course is actually – from your second and third year you do pretty much half your time in a clinical placement, so you know pretty quickly whether you’ve done your study properly or not. Maddy (HE)

Beyond the degree, however, Maria felt that her on the job skills development had been somewhat ad hoc. When discussing the skills she needed as a supervisor, she commented:

There was no formal – there’s nothing out there, it was all on the job. ... We were never taught how to train people, it was just trial and error... Maria (HE)
Both Maria and Maddy expressed negative views regarding the introduction of compulsory ongoing learning required in order to maintain registration. Some negativity related to uncertainty and change. Maria offered context:

... Under the government they restructured it all for the health fields, the registration side of it. It’s going to involve some continuing education, but they can’t tell us what, they can’t tell us if we let it lapse for too long what we have to do to get back into it.... So it’s created a lot of angst and it was when I – I think I had just decided to resign and I went to a wedding for a radiography friend in October last year and I couldn’t believe how much anger there was out there about the whole issue. I thought I was just, myself... the only one. But everyone’s up in arms about it, quite bitter....And our registration fee went from fifty dollars to two hundred and fifty dollars a year. And we once just used to have to pay it and that kept us registered...we didn’t have to do anything else, could just go back and work. But now we don’t know. We know that we just can’t pay it and keep it, we have to work towards keeping it through some sort of continuing education, but nobody can tell us who, what, when, how, why, how much, what happens...So, the biggest issue is ...it’s a really understaffed industry.... and given if they are gonna kick some of us out without registration — if we ever want to go back.
And it doesn’t make you want to go back; like I’m quite happy to have shut my door on it for the moment. Maria (HE)

Maddy offers a slightly different perspective on this issue of ongoing education, as a requirement of registration:

There’s always – the profession always runs, like, weekend courses or weekend seminars, which you’re quite welcome to attend...

... There is a number of points you have to get per triennium or something like that. So, there is now, there never used to be. But, certainly if you felt that you could benefit from ... a little bit of extra in trauma work, or ... you know, some vascular or pediatric or something like that, then you could. And they still run it, but this time you’ve got a certain number of points allotted to certain things, yeah, and you have to submit them ...However, I don’t think it should be compulsory because people who are in the country or part-time mums just don’t get that ...time. When I’m a full-timer I feel fine in going up to the department and saying, ‘Look, it’s been two or three years since I’ve been to a conference... I’d like to go to this one in Melbourne or that one in Sydney ... would you mind paying the entrance fee, you know... ’ And that’s fine, but if I’m only there, like, six hours a week, I don’t really feel comfortable in going up to them and saying... ‘Pay my seven or eight hundred dollars, here, for me to go and attend this conference.’ [However]...., if I don’t get my points... I won’t be accredited. Maddy (HE)

Colin, whose educational pathway incorporated both public and private secondary schools, and both TAFE and university based tertiary education, was able to offer special insight.
Having experienced the field of building and construction via a TAFE course and then a university degree, he offered the following comments in relation to both systems.

... the differences... are pretty, oh well, I won’t use the word profound, but it’s pretty significant, in the sense that... at university it’s presented to you for your consumption, whether you choose to or not, but it’s not enough, you’ve gotta go and do your own, extra – if you want to do well – which I was lucky, I mean I was working and I had a lot of contacts and whatnot, and I managed to ... pad out the information I was getting at uni with a lot of experience and whatnot as well, so I ended up doing pretty well... With TAFE though, there was quite a structured teaching process, and... it was obviously more on the same model that they use at high school where there’s certain subjects that get covered off, and there’s ... reports, or projects or whatever that are quite small and specific, which I think, in some ways, is probably a – oh I mean it’s horses for courses – but in some ways, for the technical sort of ... learning that we’re trying to achieve, is better. But then, as I’ve got older and got more mature, I realise that ... the people that are going to be successful in our industry are not necessarily the experts in the technical aspects, of course, they’re the people that can ... use their technical skills and their personality – and their ambition and their determination and all these things – like they are in any business, or in any work situation – to push themselves and their own goals and desires forward, above and beyond everybody else’s... So... y’know... I suppose the training is a step to get you into a particular position, but I don’t think it’s very long before the significance of what you did, and how you did it, fades... and your own abilities and desires take over as the engine that gets you where you’re going.

Colin (HE)

Like Belinda (above), when asked what mix of formal education and on the job learning had contributed to his skill development, Colin felt that university had provided, for him, a valuable “foundation”, but also that there was no substitute for experience in the workplace. Both were essential, Colin stated:

Ah, you can’t – one supports the other. I’d be wrong if I said that the original skills [technical skills from formal education, both TAFE and university] are less important; because they’re the foundation for everything I do. They really are. I was just thinking about that yesterday. We were looking at a particular problem that we’re trying to help one of our clients solve, and ... it’s a job that one of our Project Managers is looking after, and I’ve come in to lend my expertise with it, and it’s just expertise – it’s stuff that I’ve picked up through experience – so not necessarily something I learnt at uni – and it wasn’t, I mean this particular situation was experience – but in that respect, university’s just another different experience. I mean it’s not-- there’s nothing magical about it. You just go there, people tell you things and you listen or you don’t listen. It’s the same with work. The only thing- I suppose minor difference, is, when they’re telling you something at work more often than not it’s telling you something so you go and do it ... and then [overtime, in the workforce] – they’re telling you less, and you’re doing
more, but it’s an easier way to learn, if you’ve got the right environment, because you’re actually practicing. Whereas at uni you don’t practice anything, you just try and listen and remember-[and present information for assessment]…. Colin (HE)

When asked to reflect on his own pathway – having come up through the ranks, starting as a labourer, then a TAFE course, then a degree in building and construction, and now co-owner of a lucrative construction company – Colin stated that the ‘fusion’ of work skills and formal education in his case made for a powerful combination that he saw:

... as a significant factor in my successful development... to the point where if I was ever asked to give somebody advice as to whether they should go straight to school...or, do what I did, I’d say do what I did. ‘Cause I reckon it was, it was just really... all-consuming... Colin (HE)

However, he also raised the point that such a pathway may not be for everyone because of its financial implications:

But I don’t think- I think it would be at the industry’s peril if it, in theory, ever... there was a whole generation of workers that had only come up the way I did, because it takes a long time, and y’know, it’s not for everyone, because it means you’re really not making much money; you can’t – y’know if I wanted a young – to have a family when I was young I wouldn’t have been able to do it, because I couldn’t have afforded it. So I think, y’know, it’s good to have different sorts of people and the different sorts of training...just to round it out. I mean it was a bit of luxury in a way for me to be able to... [spend four years at TAFE and two years at university]...look it’s a big commitment, and I lived at home for the first...four [years]... yeah, having those four years at home [living with my parents] certainly made it [financially] possible. Colin (HE)

When questioned further about the difference between university and TAFE, Colin commented:

I think at the end of the day, you get out of it what you’re gonna get out of it- what you put into it, I mean that’s a pretty corny old cliché, but its so true. I tend to think that... if you just look at a comparison between a TAFE course and a university course, on the same subject – which I can, cause I did them both – it’s not a great deal of value, unless you’re talking about the individual as well, because if the individual is in TAFE thinking he should be in university and thinking ‘Oh this is all a bit of a waste of time’, then he’s not gonna do very well, or she’s not gonna do very well, and miss the point...Whereas, I think if you’ve got...a... desire to... get the most out of it... then it doesn’t really matter what you’re doing, because you’ll learn. Colin (HE)

As to the “overall” benefit of formal education, whether it be TAFE or university-based, Colin, now an employer himself, offered further reflection:
I think [formal education] is a very important first step and you’re not... you’d be a very rare individual to get anywhere without having done one or the other... And ... at that point in your life when you’re not experienced, and you’re not confident, and you don’t know anyone and you’re trying to get a start, then the reality is that certain employers are going to look at ... a degree as more important. And, I mean, I’ve seen that, with people we deal with, companies we deal with, y’know, cause when you’re – not so much nowadays I s’pose – but when you are a younger person and people are looking to put people on, [companies] will either try and get you or they’ll say ‘Do you know any one?’ – I mean, I’m starting to do it myself now, when you... you know young guys who’ve come out of uni or TAFE a couple of years ago and you’re looking for a junior person to come on board, and you might say to them, well ‘Hey, do you know anybody, got any mates from uni that aren’t happy?’, or whatever. So, [education is] important in some respects, then... but...yeah, y’know it’s, like I say... I guess my point there is just to say that, although it is a first step, it is an important first step. Colin (HE)

As an employer, then, Colin sees formal education as part of an employment network, but hires on the basis of personal attributes and individual merit, rather than on a candidate’s formal education alone:

... yes I would rate the influence of individuals higher than I would rate the experience of doing a degree, or a TAFE course. That’s why I don’t-- I think that’s why I don’t really differentiate much between-- I’ll look at the individual and say what are they like? Not where did they go to university? I’d want to know that they have some formal training, but even that’s not necessarily a prerequisite. You know we’ve got a number of older employees that have got no formal training but they are absolutely unstoppable you know because they’ve got relevant experience and they’ve got the right personality. Colin (HE)

A quite unusual view about ‘what it means’ to have a university education was shared, quite amazingly, by two higher education graduates who spent time working in the field of mining. They both expressed remarkably similar attitudes as regards ‘being careful’ not to appear ‘too clever’ or authoritative in the workplace. Helen explains this in discussing some of the positive elements of her engineering degree:

The key thing that was very relevant and is still very much so today is in our course, we were taught that -we were really taught the attitude that we need to go in with, the belief that we know nothing, and that the people who were working at the coal face [literally]: they have the knowledge, they have the experience, and they have the ideas, and what we’re there to do is to capture that and pull that into the analysis. Not to go in and tell them we know it all -- which is critical, because if you are working underground and you’ve got rock over your head, every day, and it may fall on you, you’re going to be very aware of what’s going on. But if you’re an engineer who goes...
underground once or twice a week, you're not going to know, so don’t go in as a smart arse and say – you know, ‘What’s going on?’ So that was very relevant, because it teaches you the right attitude to work with people, and very relevant today, because as a person who runs projects, I’m not the subject-matter expert, I’m not even a stakeholder, I’m going in there to get the best practical solution for everyone; which means I’ve got to get everyone’s ideas and pull them together into a whole. So my skill is more facilitation, but if I went in and told everyone it should be done this way, which I recently had an experience of someone doing that, all it does is put people off and you can’t do your job. And whatever happens it’s not going to work. Helen (HE)

Charles, a participant whose interview was not included in the final 12 case studies, nevertheless concurs with Helen as regards ‘how to carry a university education’ into a mining work environment:

    When [I] went to the West [WA, in mining], that was probably another area where you think, the culture, you’re dealing with people who, having come from a similar background, who had come from a school of hard knocks, or they’re an older generation or they’re not quite, maybe they feel as though you are a bit of a smart arse, as opposed to actually intelligent. They look at that as, I suppose, a bit of a threat and that can be exhibited a bit in a bit of bullying... and you always had to be on your guard, a little bit, in that workplace. Charles (HE)

Interestingly, Colin – again with his insight as to differences between university and TAFE graduates – also conceded a tendency for university graduates to be overconfident:

    I understand and appreciate that there is a significant difference in TAFE and university, but, I don’t know that it’s... as important as the respective institutions think it is. I mean, this is a ... very big statement for me to be making.... But and I suppose I can only base it on the experience of our industry. The one difference, I reckon, that I’ve seen and I’ve seen a lot of university graduates and TAFE graduates in their early years now and I reckon the significant difference between the two would be that ... the TAFE graduates in general, once again, in general, will be a little bit less sure of their own abilities, but that’s a good thing. I think that the university graduates, and I count myself in amongst these I suppose, would be a little bit more... perhaps falsely... self-confident. Yeah, I don’t know if that’s even a fair comment, but...maybe it’s just – I don’t know.... Colin (HE)

Belinda thinks that her MBA may have increased workplace “competition”:

    It was interesting, I guess, at every place I’ve worked... [even some very large companies], I’ve been the only person that’s held an MBA, and at some places I’ve been the only person that’s held a masters degree, so...I guess not everybody has experienced that before, it’s sort of a bit different – I don’t know whether that added to the competition or not -- just an observation. Belinda (HE)
And yet she also considered this qualification crucial to her career:

*I know when I got my role at [one company] it was one of the deciding factors, and they acknowledged that: you have an MBA. I know I did some projects at [a major bank, and they] also appreciated the MBA and they were encouraging people to develop that graduate level of study, that having it, everyone recognised [there] that you had an MBA – which was really bizarre – whereas you go to somewhere like [the other company]- they recognised it when they gave you the job, but then they forgot about it... And I think [that bank] has just got a different level of awareness ... around qualifications and skills than some organisations.* Belinda (HE)

Belinda’s final word on the role of formal education, in terms of the progress of her career, however, was to emphasise the difficulty of determining causation:

*I think it’s hard though, in a way, because so much of what you learn at university you... I guess you internalise all of that, so you’re doing it subconsciously. So how do I know what I learnt at university is what I’m actually displaying now – because – it’s taken for granted that that’s what I know...so it’s a bit of a hard one.* Belinda (HE)
4.5 Benefits

The ARC Linkage project *A Ten-Year Comparative Analysis of Work, Benefit and Skill Trajectories of Parallel Cohorts of Trade and Bachelor Graduates* was, as the title suggests, interested in examining the concept of benefit in the 21st-century workforce. One of its key research objectives was: “To analyse and compare benefit profiles, beyond simply wage-based income, at each job shift and at ten years after graduation”. The study sought to investigate if the concept “benefit” could be identified by a more diverse range of descriptors than simply “income”. Figure 9 represents five of the key factors that case study participants indicated as being important to their concept of work-related benefit. Table 10 (see p.110) documents each of the 12 case study participants who mentioned these key factors. First, it is important to say that the participants, both Higher Education and TAFE graduates, ten years after graduation, did consider income as an important benefit. This age group is travelling, getting married, having children and in some cases setting up businesses. The financial demands on this age group cannot be discounted as an influential factor in occupational decision-making. It is interesting to note, however, the range of non-financial work-related benefits indicated by many participants. This includes such considerations as self-employment and lifestyle options, self-esteem, and the consolidation of skills.

*Figure 9. Benefits*
4.5.1 Self Employer

It is difficult to compare trade and higher education graduates in terms of income alone, because so many of the trade graduates are self-employed, and consequently their “net income” is structured in different ways. Simon explains the relationship between gross and net income, and between long- and short-term financial rewards, as factors informing his occupational choices:

Oh, we don’t take a lot of money home each week. Well, a few of the blokes that work for us get more a week than we do. But we’re not worried about that; there’s a lot – we’ve got quite a lot of money tied up in the business, in investments and that sort of stuff. So in terms of having money week-to-week: I don’t have a heap of money week-to-week, but I try not to worry about that too much, ’cause I know we’ve got a ten year plan, I’m sort of hoping at the end of the ten year plan that, hopefully I can be sort of set up. And I’ll never stop working, I’ll keep doing something, but hopefully I can go to something where I don’t have to worry as much and that sort of thing – hopefully relax a little bit more. Simon (T)

When asked about life satisfaction and its relationship to income, Simon’s business partner, Steven, made the following comments:

Oh yeah. Definitely [satisfied with my life] … yeah… So, with the things that I’ve got in life, we’ve got a nice house, we got a boat, we’ve got a block of land up the bush …. So yeah, I’m pretty happy with where I am at the moment. Yeah, definitely….

That’s just the way our accountant set us up. That’s [the profit-share business structure] just to top-up our wage a bit at the end of the month. But having said that too, he has also said to us, ‘If you wanna take more out, if you need it, you just help yourself, that’s fine’. So there’s that flexibility there too, to take larger sums out if we really want to. But we try not to… So, net [my income] would be… maybe mid 50s, high 50s, 60 thousand, but once again, the reason for that is also because of the way the accountant’s got – ’cause we’re a trust, he’s got it all set up to be distributed so that we don’t … we pay the minimum tax that we can. Steven (T)

For Steven, life satisfaction is spoken of in terms of assets (“the things that I’ve got in life”) even though his net income is not high, or, in Simon’s words, that they “don’t have a lot of money week-to-week”.

Colin, who is also self-employed, speaks of life satisfaction in terms of his assets, career and family: “I’ve got a very stable family, I’ve got a very well-established career, and a house, and everything like that”. Colin leaves no doubt that he is happy with the trajectory his career has followed, particularly his pathway into self-employment – which he says he “wouldn’t swap for quids” – although he does acknowledge that self-employment brings with it new responsibilities and worries:
... Now it’s a little bit more, serious in a way. Now my work is such that I don’t turn up and get a pay cheque, we gotta make our own money, and we’ve got people that we’ve gotta pay, and you know we’ve got a huge, a huge task – me and my partners – have got a huge task on our hands to keep this whole machine moving, and moving in the right direction. So, whilst the financial rewards are very, very good … it certainly has taken a different role in my life, my work, you know. Colin (HE)

Colin explained that, prior to being a business owner, his sense of achievement and work “excitement” were simpler – whereas now, that excitement is countered by risk and worry over

... things like: winning a project, because you know, you think ‘Oh fantastic, we’ve won another job so we’ve got you know, more turnover, we’ve got more work for certain individuals to do, but, we’ve also got more risk … and, what if this is a job that doesn’t go well? And what if we’ve missed something, you know, what if we’ve put a price in at X and what if it’s really worth X plus another ten percent and we’re gonna – we’re not gonna make any money on this job? And what if this client turns out to be a prick?’ … you’ve just got all of that extra responsibility that you’ve taken on. And we’ve done it knowingly and obviously we’ve done it because it’s all part and parcel of running a business ...

... I mean, you can’t, like anything, you can’t really understand something until, of this nature, until you’ve done it, and when the whole opportunity was presented to us, to get involved and … as directors of the company, and owners of the company … it was… very exciting but… you know what you – you know that you will be dealing with problems, but you don’t really appreciate… well you might know what the problems are going to be, but you don’t really appreciate how they’re going to affect you, and what you are going to have to come up with from inside yourself to- to deal with it, and to keep going… you know, and I mean it’s not – that sounds very melodramatic, and it’s not, it’s not meant to…because you still come in, at the end of the day, I mean ninety percent of the time you are doing your job, and just like the bloke who sits round the corner’s doing his job, it’s just that you’ve got your name on the door.... Colin (HE)

Interestingly, every case study participant who was self-employed expressed some measure of limit: that the responsibilities of self-employment may not be sustainable in the long term. In Colin’s words:

We’re gonna have to work very hard to keep it going. And y’know… I always wonder sometimes… am I gonna wake up one day and think, ‘Oh it’s all too hard, like y’know I’ve paid the house off now, I’ve got the kids through school ... will I go and get a job, y’know not have to worry about all this other stuff.... Colin (HE)

Simon considered business ownership as a reasonably short-term venture:
...hopefully I can go to something where I don’t have to worry as much and that sort of thing, hopefully relax a little bit more. Simon (T)

Simon, like Colin, although believing the venture into self-employment to have been “a great decision”, spoke of its risky or “scary” elements, especially in relation to growing the company beyond their capacity:

...it was a great decision to do it, I’m so glad we did it. ... [But] it’s even scary now still... I mean, we have – our problems are builders, because they’re pushing you for time, always pushing you for time, and there’s no line with builders, you can’t —...with builders it’s: ‘When we’re ready, you’re here’ ... there’s no – and that’s the hardest thing, is juggling: so how many blokes do you need and then, you know ... and we price so much work, but if you get three jobs that come in and they all starting at the same time, you’ve got no choice, you’ve somehow got to find a way of juggling all the blokes, getting them there... I mean, three months ago we could’ve put on another two or three blokes. But we thought ’No, we don’t wanna get much too bigger than this’ — ’cause it gets too heavy to handle, and we don’t wanna go too far, ... ’cause there’s so much paperwork when you go on to a job now, like sometimes we have 60-page documents we’ve got to send to builders, and all blokes they have to have: like, be in the redundancy scheme, superannuation scheme, there’s four things, plus they’ve gotta be in the union, they’ve gotta have this thing called a red tag which is a safety thing... And if you wanna get them started, it can sometimes take three weeks for all that paperwork to come through. So, it can be hard just putting on blokes left, right and centre. So yeah, that can be difficult. Simon (T)

The self-limiting size of their business, Simon explained, related to paperwork and administrative tasks – something that Sue also lamented (“I spend a lot of time on HR... pay rates and payroll and industrial relations is massive – I absolutely hate it... it’s one part of the business that I find gruelling”). Interestingly, even for Sue, whose business was experiencing massive growth, she could see a future that may be different, in terms of starting a family:

whereas me being a girl, I don’t plan to work that long [the thirty or forty years she imagines her business partner might]... so I sort of see an end, almost, to my working life as it is today... it’ll probably be a ... cut-down... I can’t think much further than twelve months in advance for that either.... Sue (HE)

Sue spoke of benefits of self-employment which were not specifically financial in nature, even though underpinned by a certain level of prosperity (as noted in the Lifestyle Section 4.3.2.11. and Lifestyle Change Section 4.5.2). Such benefits of self-employment were intangibles like work/life “balance” and “choice” among various options including sport, leisure and personal development:

Definitely choice, that’s the biggest thing for us.... Yeah, choice – yeah I can do whatever I want, whenever I want, and money doesn’t hold me back, neither does time,
because I’m like, that will still be here tomorrow. I’ll never have a tray that’s empty, and I know that [my partner] will always cover me if I choose not to come in to work, or go away, or whatever ... and I’m not physically bound by shop hours or anything like that. So obviously we both put work first in a lot of ways, but I’ve got a really good balance in my life now, and you know, I do a lot of ... I do Pilates and I play basketball and you know I’ve got a good social life, and I’ve got my charity work.... So I’ve – it’s all about balance really, and you’ve got to be able to have the ability to have choices, to, you know, get to that point. But that’s about life choice as well, or personal desires as well, because you know everyone’s different in that way... I go on holidays a lot. Yeah. Love my holidays. Sue (HE)

4.5.2 Lifestyle change

“Lifestyle change” referred to various issues that these young workers considered important to their future occupational decisions. This category of influence has been covered in the Later Career Decisions Section 4.3.2 in some detail often in conjunction with the influence of family. However, it is worth highlighting the following points in this section in relation to benefits.

Long working hours factored strongly in participants’ decisions to make changes in their working lives. Wayne outlines the demands of a very heavy workload in the following comment:

But what has changed is when I do them [tasks]. So, under the Mobility Manager, I was at the beck and call of the customer: when they rang, drop everything. Now I can – as I said, what I’ve learnt is that, I’ve always got 12 jobs on the go – I’ve always got 200 hours of work, that’s all gotta be done in one week – no matter when it is, I seem to always have it. So...it’s a matter of, I look at the time and say, ‘Okay, I’m happy to work ...pretty much 7 til 4 or 5 o’clock in the afternoon, flat, straight – even like, lunch break, I’ll quickly have a 15 minute lunch break – straight through the day, then I wanna get home, spend a couple of hours with the kids, once they’ve gone to bed, depending on how I’m feeling, I’ll quite often log on and do another two or three hours of work. So I’m sort of breaking up my day, so I’m still working the same hours but I’m breaking it up so I can spend time with the family now. Wayne (HE)

Maria summed it up as follows:

We get to a stage where we’re living to work rather than working to live....That’s not what you wanna be. No, it’s about having balance and work not owning you. Maria (HE)
Maddy is one participant who puts this sense of “lifestyle change” in terms of shifting over time. She describes herself as “work[ing] to live” in the sense that parenting has softened her outlook on career:

… I don’t, I mean, I don’t know whether it’s a bad thing or not – but, I mean, I work... and when I’m at work I enjoy it, and I want to improve as much as I can, but I work to live... you know, yeah, so...I don’t have any major aspirations to be, you know, ‘The best obstetrics sonographer in Australia’ and write a thousand articles on it, you know, or something like that.... Maddy (HE)

In Maddy’s case, as noted in previous sections, she sees her career trajectory as deviating in order to accommodate her young family. She acknowledges that “yeah, if it was just for me, if I was looking at my own career structure and I had oodles of time, I would love to do” more demanding, specialised tasks, but for the moment she is content to put her career second, in order to “look after my family’s interest”.

Belinda expresses a very similar tendency towards lifestyle change, with a view to starting a family:

We talk about that all the time: what would life look like if this was to happen, if we have a family, how could we incorporate the family into, y’know, having our own business, and how would that work, so we’re looking for a lifestyle that allows us to care for children and raise them but we’re not always having to be in the office from 8am till 8pm. We want to get away from all that, but still be able to provide, y’know, a balanced up-bringing. Belinda (HE)

Other aspects of lifestyle change which are relevant, and have arisen in various parts of this report, include elements such as: enjoyment of work (which Shane believed was critical to his future career path, away from printing); excitement and passion as regards work (which Colin spoke of, remarking how important it was that this was sustained over time, and which Helen believed to be indispensable); things that can’t be measured with money (which for Maria included health, time spent with her children and a simpler, less busy life); a significant measure of personal satisfaction to be derived from work (for Belinda, work was less about monetary reward than getting something else out of it; Sue spoke of achievements over money, and Helen highlighted the non-financial benefit of helping others).

4.5.3 Self-Esteem

When asked to indicate the key benefits derived from different jobs, and whether or not different workplaces offered different kinds of benefits, one higher education graduate responded:

… the journey through all the different jobs has been a good personal journey. I think it has helped me grow as a person, ’cause I’ve grown stronger as a person – ’cause I
knew what I wanted, when I finally saw something that I really fell in love with, I knew how to go and get it. But I – even on that path – lost my way … and losing my way actually led to new ways of thinking about myself and realising how to make my way forward in life, kind of stuff, in a career sense plus a personal sense, ‘cause it applies in, you know, personal development as well. Helen (HE)

Helen continued, listing other aspects of what, for her, constituted a satisfying working life. These included “learning” and satisfying an ongoing need for new challenges:

I’m not career-driven. I pursue things that interest me. I get bored doing the same stuff over and over again, so that often leads to seeking new projects or new roles. I’m not career-driven or ambitious, as long as I’m interested and it’s something new and I’m learning and I’m challenged. I am – no, hang on, that’s wrong – I’m not career-ambitious, but I am challenge-ambitious. I need to be challenged; so, I chase challenges, so… yeah. Helen (HE)

Similarly intangible benefits, related to personal growth and helping others, were expressed also by Maddy and Belinda. For Maddy, contact with people is central to her enjoyment of work, which sometimes also yields an additional benefit, the sense of achievement derived from having assisted in medical diagnosis:

I think it’s the patients, they kind of make it interesting for you, you know, some people … you know, have been through lots of tests and really can’t figure it out and then, if you find something that, you know, has obviously led to all of their problems, then you kind of feel – okay, that’s a bit of a sense of achievement, sort of thing, you know, I’ve used my skills to help this person out… But, look you know that’s pretty good, it’s pretty satisfying and… certainly, if you find something early, for someone, again, you feel perhaps a little bit satisfied, but obviously they’re going to start a whole emotional process there that… you know, isn’t good, but at least you’ve found it early…. Maddy (HE)

For Belinda, work satisfaction was achieved by “helping others to develop their skills”, an aspect of her working life oriented towards community, rather than financial interests:

I guess I’ve sort of gone through this period where work is not everything to me now, I’ve been through the lowest of lows, I’ve shared some great times, but at the end of the day, leaving work is one of the best things, ‘cause you go home and your whole world opens up to … other stuff. I guess one of my fundamental values, I don’t like working for the sake of making somebody else rich, I’d rather work for the greater good of something else… I would rather work for somebody else that has some benefit back to the community or doing something else, so that’s partly the reason why I can’t see myself being here [at an insurance company] forever… and at some point I will change and, yeah, take a more community-oriented role or something like that… I guess I’d like to be recognised in a way that was developing something or someone or something
new that could contribute back to the community in some way, it’s not always about the dollars. So if I was able to build a great partnership between people that somehow benefited the community, or be able to help other people do something, rather than just always making money… It’s always the focus: ‘making money, making money, make budget, you’re not on budget’. Just to be able to take the focus away from, yeah from the budget. Belinda (HE)

For higher education graduate Maria, lifestyle was mentioned as a benefit of work, but so were learning new skills and personal development — opportunities for which, she said, were curtailed by the demands of a young family:

... my key benefits is lifestyle and is learning new skills that you didn’t know you had and I suppose trial and error is how you learn it. Maria (HE)

As noted above, participants such as Shane cited “enjoyment” among the intangible benefits of work. Colin expressed a similar view:

I’ve always thought and said, that I’m lucky to be working in an area that I enjoy, because so many people say that they don’t, y’know… for so many people work is not an enjoyable part of their life, and I just think that’d be horrible…because I love it, I like it, I really do. Colin (HE)

Colin described “that real charge, real good feeling when you’ve finished something” — which he felt was part of his “passion” for his field. For Helen the thought of being stuck in the “wrong” job — a “boring” job in which one was simply “going through the motions” — would be intolerable. Helen describes this potential cost of working life — lack of enjoyment — in terms of her once having reached a point of career “crisis”:

... because I got to the stage where I really felt sick of facing another forty years of just, you know, doing what I hated, going through the motions — there’s lots of people like that — I didn’t want to be like that...I was sitting on the couch and I was really nervous and really scared that if I didn’t at least try I was gonna be stuck – hating my career for the rest of my life – and just turning into one of those people that, you know, are grumpy and not fun to work with and just so totally unhappy with everything .... Helen (HE)

Helen’s feelings of being ‘entrapped’ in a badly matched working life — one that doesn’t offer any satisfaction, enjoyment or passion — resonate with another higher education graduate’s description of a working life devoid of opportunities for skill development and personal growth:

I don’t wanna turn up and do nine to five and all the rest of it, so I wanna learn on the job... I don’t wanna waste my time, ... I wanna manage some bigger clients, and have something that I can have ownership of and, again, have something that I can be interested in again, and use my skills... so [currently] I feel, yeah, kind of – trapped. Melanie (HE).
4.5 Benefits

4.5.4 Skill Set Confidence

This consideration referred to the individual’s perception of his/her own confidence that s/he could adapt and change to new occupational demands if necessary. This gave the individual the confidence to change when needed because there was a belief in his/her own abilities to do a new job. Belinda exemplifies just his confidence, later in the ten year period, as was mentioned in regard to her ‘bouncing back’ after a second redundancy:

… I had a better network. I just had more confidence to be able to pick up the phone and call someone and say ‘Great, you’ve been recommended because— this is what I want’ and then just follow things up. Whereas the first time around I was- I would get leads and then I’d be too scared to phone someone, why do they wanna hear from me. Whereas now, it's like, I can do this, and I just did. Belinda (HE)

4.5.5 Financial

When asked about the benefits of working, Wayne is direct: enjoyment is one thing, but his motivation to work is financial:

What are the benefits... well, in short, you need to enjoy your job but you really come to work to earn a living. I mean, I’ve got a family, I’ve got kids, I’ve got a mortgage...so, you got responsibilities ....Wayne (HE)

Even so, as Wayne speaks, he mentions a number of other work-related benefits. A good job is one in which you can learn, you are given responsibility and autonomy, and can be promoted:

Look, I’ve enjoyed it [my current position] – I enjoyed it because I actually had a cost centre, so I had responsibility for [a] cost centre, I had a contract worth – at that stage it was worth 1.7 million dollars – I had five staff that reported directly to me and I ran a part of the business. So I actually ran 1.7 million dollars worth of sales, responsible for it, responsible for the margin, responsible for a cost centre, could make decisions – so I was actually quite enjoying it, making decisions. So I said ‘Okay, it’s good, it actually is a step – what I want to do.’ Wayne (HE)

For Helen too, money is still part of the equation:

I wouldn’t like to be... underpaid, I have been underpaid in the past, but ... I mean, I wouldn’t like to be in... a lot of my friends in the country, I wouldn’t be in their jobs: low pay, no-thinking, no-challenges-type jobs, ’cause they don’t suit me. It just happens that the types of jobs that I enjoy I also get paid well – which is good. Helen (HE)

But, Helen continues, “dollars” are no match for “life satisfaction” and “balance”:  

- 87 -
I don’t find dollars personally satisfying, like – I’d like to have them, it would get me to my dream shorter. But I can’t sacrifice... like, life satisfaction, I guess, because it’s more than just being in a job. Like I said, at [the mining job], had a great lifestyle, really crap job: the balance was so out of whack – I was just unhappy overall. I can’t do that again, it just doesn’t suit me. So for me it is about the balance. Get paid well now, I’ll eventually get to my dream – if it happened sooner that’d be great, but I’m working towards it and I’m gonna achieve it on my own. It may take ten, twenty years or whatever; but I will get there.... Helen (HE)

The Working Lives project was a small-scale investigation. Nevertheless, interesting questions have begun to emerge in relation to the measurement of the concept of benefit. Individuals do not only consider their working lives to be directed, or governed, solely by financial considerations. This is not to deny that financial considerations are important. However, decision-making as regards occupational change has been documented in this study as being informed by a broader range of work-related benefits than simply income or earnings.
4.6 Gender

Bearing in mind the small sample size, a number of pertinent gender issues have emerged from the data, which warrant discussion in the context of the *Working Lives* project.

Firstly, it is noteworthy that there were no female TAFE participants in Stage 3. In fact, there were very low numbers of female TAFE participants throughout the entire study: five (of 54) female TAFE participants took part in the Stage 1 questionnaire, of whom only two (of 29) took part in the Stage 2 telephone interviews. Further research investigating the participation (or apparent lack thereof) of women in TAFE-based occupations may shed light on larger questions of skill shortages in the workforce.

As such, this study raises questions pertaining to the assumption that young women are still not choosing TAFE as a career path, despite the fact that females are highly represented in the Higher Education sector. Further research investigating what TAFE occupations females choose and why is important? In addition, why do females not see TAFE occupations as a viable choice for future careers? Documenting and analysing this apparent situation may add further light on why there is a skilled shortage in the work.

In terms of the Stage 3 data – the extended interviews – various gender-based differences affecting career trajectory have emerged, as noted throughout preceding sections of this report. Most notable is the impact of parenting on the career trajectories of female workers. It is worth recapping some of the main points relating to gender, parenting and career that were touched upon in previous sections of this report:

1. Once a parent, there was a tendency to find oneself in – or to feel the need for – a low-demand job, in terms of time and in terms of “self”. Often these were also considered low-interest and low-satisfaction jobs. For example, Maria believed it was a “fallacy” that women could “have both”: a satisfying job and family time. Similar views were expressed by Maria and Melanie.
2. Once a parent, there was a tendency to become “stuck” in a field, without the time or resources to retrain in order to effect a sideways shift. This was noted by Maria – “and I suppose that’s why I don’t enjoy radiography anymore because I’m stuck … Stuck! And I don’t have the time to put into continuing education to move forward” – and especially by Melanie. (It was also mentioned by Shane).
3. Once a parent, one could expect a life of “juggling”: often concurrent part-time jobs (e.g. Maddy who worked 2 days for one practice and 2 for another, in order to achieve the part-time hours she needed) or a series of part-time jobs, sometimes concurrent, sometimes not (e.g. Maria). This routine made for complex and hectic lives.
4. In the transition to part-time work and/or during a period of maternity leave, case study participants observed a loss of personal income, and with it a perceived loss of power, and of “self”. Maria spoke candidly of this, as did Melanie.
5. Job change is often assumed, especially of female parents. Maria, in particular, expressed a sense that the changes to her career on becoming a parent – as opposed to change being imposed upon, or being expected of, her partner – were “just assumed”. She said that the decision for her to step out of her primary career for parenting “just evolved”: “I don’t think we ever made a decision, I think it just evolved… it was always going to – I don’t know how it actually arose”.

This last point, in particular, brings home the “unstated” nature of gender-based influences on career trajectories, as regards parenting. For all of the women case study participants who had children – Maddy, Maria and Melanie; three of the six women had children – it was impossible for them to discuss their careers without addressing the impact of parenting. Five of the six male participants were also parents, and yet none of them referred to any period of part-time work, and most spoke very little of the impact, career-wise, of becoming a parent. The one exception, perhaps, was Troy, who articulated a “family-first” approach as regards income and financial security, largely in response to becoming a father. Otherwise, the contrast between the female and male parents of the group is marked, in terms of perceived impacts of parenting on career trajectories.

In general, it seems that the responsibility – or burden – of putting parenting ahead of one’s personal career falls to the female parent. As a corollary, the domain of part-time work remains a predominantly female domain. The struggle described by Maria and Maddy to find positions and hours that would accommodate their familial obligations seems to indicate that recent policies and rhetoric concerning “family-friendly” workplaces are still not achieving enough, at least at a grassroots level. While it could be argued that these two examples (Maddy and Maria) were both from the same field (radiography), such an argument is countered by the experience of Melanie, who even more forcefully voiced claims of “unjust” workplace treatment in response to parental status – and Melanie’s field was far removed from the health sciences: project management (finance). When asked about her return from maternity leave, and her re-orientation to work, Melanie was highly critical:

*Look they don’t support [you] at all– I think they’re almost annoyed with part-time workers at [my workplace], I think they like to see themselves as – you know – employer of the year for females, but they certainly don’t have any, y’know, real loyalty I think to female – to people returning from maternity leave. And they don’t see a benefit of someone working three days; they can’t get their heads around someone working three days. Melanie (HE)*

Melanie continued, making further, more general, comments:

*Well I genuinely don’t think that a lot of employers, or any that I’ve come across, can accommodate part-time workers, or women that have other interests without it impacting… their role. I don’t know any employer that doesn’t allow it to impact, like, in some capacity, whether it’s subconscious or whether it’s right out there… So that’s – I guess that’s impacted my feelings on employers in that regard. I also think that… that the progression – like, and I know I sound really, y’know, caught up in the fact that I’m*
female, which isn’t necessarily the case — but I have worked in very male dominated areas — so, I — y’know, and I have quite a healthy role model in my mother, so I do have kind of, a good — and I do understand employers’ positions but, I guess ...at this stage of the game when I’m in my early thirties and I’ve had— oh, mid thirties, oh no! — and I’ve had children and I do see that there isn’t much of a role for me career-wise, to progress my career at this point in time, so I guess that’s affected me – because I think employers don’t make use of the people that they’ve got, I don’t think — I think there’s a skill shortage and I don’t think they make use of the people that – using part-time workers, using women, using — y’know the intelligence is still there, heh, y’know all the rest of it, the ability to empathise with clients and – all the rest of it, is not seen as skills really, I don’t think — in my experience. I think in other areas that, probably, are more balanced, or are more female oriented and stuff, perhaps they are better at it — perhaps. I don’t know. Melanie (HE)

This sense of the workplace being subject to systemic gender imbalances was reiterated by Melanie throughout her interview:

I always saw myself progressing through the ranks in that normal sense and achieving different things and not stopping, y’know, sort of thing ... now that I’ve had children, and I’m often feeling... confronted or angry by the fact that now things stop for a certain amount of time and that men don’t have that same kind of...[limitation]... And you know, like, that’s probably coming to terms with being female – and I’d – you know, much rather have children than a career, but I wouldn’t ever have one or the other, so I think that, y’know, I need both in my life. So I guess ... my – the idea of career has changed in that I just can’t, y’know, like right now I just can’t do what is needed- ‘cause it doesn’t sit with me, I wouldn’t leave the children, I wouldn’t work full-time, I wouldn’t, y’know,... so my idea’s definitely – I think I had a fairly idealistic idea of, y’know, how you can get yourself to a certain level and then be able to at least maintain it – whereas that hasn’t necessarily happened. So I think my idea of what career ... what can stop a career, or what can -y’know...has changed. I didn’t think that it would – Melanie (HE)

It interesting to note that Melanie had once believed that her career would be self-sustaining – “you can get yourself to a certain level and then be able to at least maintain it” — and yet, as a result of her experience, she now maintains that maternity leave, and/or a period of part-time work “can stop a career”; that a career needs continual development (“if I’m not developing, then I’ll still be behind the game, like you have to continually develop, you have to continually grow and stuff, otherwise you’ll always be behind the game”). The belief she formerly held sounds remarkably similar to that of Belinda, who expressed a belief that with her skill set she would be able to readily access maternity leave, and then resume her career. This belief Melanie has come to see as see as “fairly idealistic”.

Melanie openly and passionately describes a sense of frustration: “I just can’t do what is needed” – and a sense of being torn between career progression and parenting. She
describes feelings of being “confronted or angry” about the way in which her career has stalled, a process of “coming to terms with being female”. Like Maria, she speaks of “having lost something” and yet conveys a sense of being somewhat mystified as to how that happened:

*I’m still coming to terms, I guess, with how it all happens… it’s like, all of a sudden, you have two children and you’re less valuable as far as an employer, an employee. So I don’t feel- I feel really pissed off about it… for the lack of … you know, better [words], hehe... But y’know, I do, I feel it’s really unjust – I’m a relatively intelligent person, hehhe, on some level- and yet, you know, I can’t see any way to really progress career-wise, so I do – I can’t see another way round it, like you can only bang your head against things for so long and stuff, so, yeah, I don’t know. I do, I constantly feel annoyed about it....*  

Melanie (HE)

When interviewed, she had only been back at work for three weeks since taking her second period of maternity leave. Having lost all her clients – to a staff member of which she had previously been manager – Melanie’s annoyance has brought her to the brink of resignation; she paints a very bleak portrait of a person alienated by the workplace, unsure of how to fight what she perceives as injustice: “I can’t see another way round it, like you can only bang your head against things for so long and stuff, so, yeah, I don’t know.”

Maria and Maddy both expressed an unwillingness to “fight” for family-friendly working conditions. As noted above (Industry Policies Section 4.3.3.5.1), both women described a reluctance to “make a fuss” by attempting to achieve conditions that would allow them to remain at their current workplace while parenting. This reluctance arguably reveals something about women and their perceived role in the workplace.

To recap: both participants seemed unwilling (in Maddy’s words) to “cause trouble” – that is, unwilling to “force” change by taking formal action. In Maria’s words, she “could have threatened legal action” (in order to achieve a part-time role) but was “not willing to go down that path”. Needing to work only one day a week, she lost the ability to work in her specialised field, and was forced to move sideways, into a field that interested her so little that she eventually resigned – something she later regretted. She stated:

*I don’t know if I could’ve pushed for it and maybe – you know, if you threatened legal action or something you probably would get your way, but depends if you want to go down that path, or feel comfortable or not, and I’ve never been one to threaten and that so... and I wasn’t really interested– I was a bit naïve and didn’t really realise how much I probably needed to have that day a week. Maria (HE)*

In Maddy’s case, she “didn’t push too hard” for a job-share position, she resigned instead, having decided she was “not going to cause any trouble”. In Maddy’s case, an aversion to “hav[ing] to keep fighting and arguing… to keep, you know, hassling or trying for” promotions and conditions are a feature of her interview. Such an aversion is mentioned several times, for example:
4.6 Gender

I’m not a person who likes to just, you know, keep nagging, keep hassling people [about a pay rise]- let’s get on with the work and let’s do it, you know. So that’s really good as well, having a career structure like that where you know [you don’t have to do that], if you work towards something, you do actually get rewarded. Maddy (HE)

And again, when asked about what level her new job was, she said:

Yeah, I didn’t bother hassling and arguing and everything like that. I just said, ‘Look, this is the Grade Three level, with the private practice, I just want the same take-home pay, you know’… And there was a little bit of umm-ing and ahh-ing, but I think, you know, what I was asking for was not unreasonable. I don’t know if I could’ve got more, but I’m happy at that level – and that’s that really. Maddy (HE)

Although the size of this sample is too small to allow for generalisations, both of these women do seem uncomfortable in making demands for better and fairer terms and conditions of employment. Both women reveal a certain level of “resignation” to a workplace that is less than accommodating to their needs.

In relation to item (4) on the above list – loss of power, income and even “self” as a result of reduced workforce participation – Maria very candidly described what it can mean to postpone one’s career for the sake of partners and children. In her interview, she explained that although she stands by her decision, its consequences have been considerable:

...On the whole, I can be there for my kids and that’s really, really the most important thing on our agenda at the moment… [But… when I stepped out of radiography] I felt like I lost a bit of me – felt it was the only thing that was mine, outside of my family, so I didn’t like that. And then I realised, that far out, I’d worked for this degree and now I’ve just said ‘See ya’ without giving it much thought– it felt like I hadn’t given it much thought, but it had been brewing for a while; but yeah it was really hard to turn your back on it and say it doesn’t mean anything, but it does. Maria (HE)

Underlying Maria’s words there is a grappling with the meaning that culture attaches to “work”, “qualifications” and “self”. She described her career as “a bit of me… the only thing that was mine”, and her qualification as something she’d “worked for” but then “turned her back on”. Maria went on to explain some of the other “losses” she had suffered, both minor rewards (such as promotion, appreciation, recognition), and of course, remuneration:

I think sometimes [now as a parent and part- time supporter of the business] I feel underappreciated; whereas when I was doing radiography you got paid for your job … And I know I contribute, but I don’t actually …I don’t bring any money into the clinic and that type of thing. So it took me a while, even when I wasn’t working, to realise that – once I gave up radiography between – like when I was on maternity leave it was very hard to kind of accept that you weren’t getting any remuneration for anything you did. So, yeah, sometimes I think well long term, yeah I’d love to go out and have another job where I got paid and I could get promotions and I like the whole idea of promotion,
getting rewarded for what you do if you put the work in. And I suppose in the current role I am in, there is no room for promotion that’s it … that’s life. Maria (HE)

Considering the necessarily “fluid” state of her work future (given a current pregnancy and the possibility of further children) Maddy adopts a rather positive perspective on this fluidity:

... Look, I think there’s certainly benefits and drawbacks. I think if... if I had a set path, where I knew I was going to get to the top of the department and that’s what I was aiming for, and I was going to get to it regardless, I think that’s fine, but that’s not my goal. So I’m happy with the give and take. If something doesn’t work out, that’s okay, something else will open up... But I know there are things always opening up and... moving, so... and for me that’s good, because I don’t know what’s going to happen, whether we’re going to have two children or five children, or what’s gonna happen, so... that’s fine by me. Maddy (HE)

Interestingly, two of the female participants who were yet to start a family, both implied that “as a female” they assume their working life will be cut short. That is, Helen and Sue both assume a shorter career span for themselves by virtue of their gender. (In Helen’s case she and her partner are actively planning changes to their working lives to accommodate having children. In Sue’s case, she is “yet to meet the right partner” but has not ruled out having children; on the basis of which she compares herself with her male business partner, who, she assumes “will spend the next forty years” in their business, unlike herself). It seems that planning to have a family at some point cannot help but influence career attitudes; both Helen and Sue express a certain level of “detachment” attendant upon (what might be) a curtailed working life due to starting a family.

### 4.6.1 Special Case Study: Melanie

One participant’s individual trajectory merits some attention, particularly because her career pathway has been dominated by some extraordinary events and decisions, many of which were underpinned by gender-related factors. Melanie’s career path over the ten year period of the project can be seen in Figure 22, with detail as to her telephone interview in Table 22 (pp. 137-8).

Many of the gender related factors – injustices even – that pertain to Melanie’s later working life, centring on maternity leave, have been discussed in the previous section. Prior to her more recent problems – of grappling with being a part-time worker in (what she calls) a “male-dominated” field (finance), and a workplace that operated as a “boys’ club” (also finance) – Melanie encountered another heavily male-orientated working environment: that of her first job as a graduate. She explained:

... There were probably four women in 160-odd- in my division alone...so, you know, a lot of these guys are fairly socially incompetent and having a 23 year old or whatever
come through - it was... quite uncomfortable, you’d have people stopping and staring at you you’d have kind of a really- and I’m quite able [to cope with it], as I said, but it was still quite confronting having – like, you’d walk into the cafeteria and it would go dead quiet and everyone would be like turned around in their seat – and its not because I’m particularly attractive at all –Haha... but its not at all to do with that, it was just as a result of their being a lot of old men that had just been in the industry for a long time and very few females in there and stuff, so – we all stood out. So it was quite difficult, like the lab for instance had – it was all guys – and the lab had y’know flyers to girlie-bars and all that sort of thing, inter-dispersed with the manuals and stuff, so it was quite a sexist kind of environment – Melanie (HE)

When asked about whether such an environment impacted on her, Melanie said:

It impacted on... my ability to ask questions without – you know – without, I guess, judgment, or my ability to provide my results, like if I did a project and I had results and you know – and I thought that I’d done well, there wasn’t any expectation that I’d do anything, get anything, you know, get anywhere, whereas if I’d been a male I believe I would’ve been listened to a lot more. So I do think it effected my – not so much progression – but my personal progression and my ability to keep going forward with the job and being interested in it and that sort of stuff, because it was kind of like I was just a side project and they didn’t really think that I’d do anything fantastic in the science domain and stuff – which isn’t necessarily true... Melanie (HE)

Melanie’s words convey a sense that her gender almost undermined her work: that she “was just a side project”, something of a novelty, not to be taken seriously. Melanie stayed for three years in this position – suggesting something of the discomfort expressed by Maddy and Maria, reluctant to “make a fuss” about conditions that were less than amenable to their interests. Melanie expressed her reluctance even to resign from a job that was quite emotionally destructive, explaining this reluctance in terms of lacking the confidence to leave:

I was really worn down by the day-to-day kind of stuff that was happening, just lots of things, y’know like I had a particularly volatile guy that worked there and he would – because I worked in fibre-optics, he would break fibre optic splices, like fibre optic joins and would completely ruin my results of my project, so I had – like he’d put a cup down on top of things and stuff like that, so – I just got- I just had no confidence – and I had sort of stress leave as such, in that I went on leave without pay and... came back home for a few months and then I went back there, and then I was also terrified I wouldn’t get another job, like I just thought – you know, what can I do? I don’t wanna move back to my parents’ place and all the rest of it and physics is very hard to get a job in – so there was a lot of factors that just sort of ruined the confidence I guess, of leaving, and then I’d finally had enough ...Melanie (HE)
4.6 Gender

Melanie’s case highlights the ongoing need for cultural and workplace change, especially in relation to gender inequalities.
5.0 In Summary

This small-scale exploratory study involved three stages of data collection and analysis of 179 trade and higher education graduates from RMIT between 1994 and 1996. The study has revealed a number of interesting comparisons between the two cohorts of RMIT graduates. By using a Life Course methodology, the research team has documented the various influences on the career decision-making of these young men and women during the ten year retrospective survey period.

The study documents the strong influence of families in the first occupational choice post-Year 12, and then the strong influence of family considerations – referring to the expectations of partners and the needs of children – in the post-qualification period of career-building and decision-making.

A workplace issue raised by many of the participants in this study pertains to working hours – comprising the effects of shift work, inflexible working hours and long hours. A number of participants were clearly influenced in their career choices by this situation, as they considered long working hours detrimental to their personal life and wellbeing.

The impact of long working hours on career decision-making is related to another point requiring further investigation. This pertains to a variety of contractual arrangements put in place to meet the needs of both employers and employees. Issues relating to permanent part-time work, and part-time contracts that maintain employee rights and working conditions were raised by a number of participants in this study. Female participants, in particular, felt the major impact of career interruptions and the effect it has on career trajectories. In a time of skill shortage, improvements in part-time employment arrangements is an area that could yield considerable benefits for employee and employer alike.

This study also highlights the constant educational needs – including re-education – of a workforce changing and adapting to the impact of computerisation. The current skill shortage reflects this incommensurability of old skills no longer required and new skills not yet acquired in the various processes of employment change. There is a change required in the culture or mind set, of both employers and employees, concerning the re-education process.

Another issue raised by participants in this study is that of post-qualification and further education. Participants’ varied perceptions of the value of further formal academic studies, as compared to on the job training and short courses, provide valuable information for education providers of the future.

The study also raises the question of how to adequately measure “benefits” of work in the twenty-first century. No longer is a simple monetary indicator adequate to a person’s concept of occupational benefit. A new, more complex, measure of work-related benefit is required in order to properly investigate career and job changes with a view to understanding skill shortage in Australia.
Reference List


Table 4. Effects of influences by career stage

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Table 5. Influences on Career Decisions for Higher Education and TAFE Graduates by Case

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Table 8 documents the workplace influences on career choices relating to the following descriptors: company loyalty, opportunities for promotion, availability of work mentors, working hours, family leave, industry policies, job shortages, redundancy, and changing technology.
Table 9. Effects of influences by gender

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Figure 10. Effects of influences by gender
### Table 10. Benefits by case

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## Appendices

### Individual Case Studies

Figure 11. Wayne  
Table 11: Summary of Wayne’s Stage Two Phone Interview

Figure 12. Maddy  
Table 12: Summary of Maddy’s Stage Two Phone Interview

Figure 13. Troy  
Table 13: Summary of Troy’s Stage Two Phone Interview

Figure 14. Sue  
Table 14: Summary of Sue’s Stage Two Phone Interview

Figure 15. Steve  
Table 15: Summary of Steve’s Stage Two Phone Interview

Figure 16. Simon  
Table 16: Summary of Simon’s Stage Two Phone Interview

Figure 17. Colin  
Table 17: Summary of Colin’s Stage Two Phone Interview

Figure 18. Helen  
Table 18: Summary of Helen’s Stage Two Phone Interview

Figure 19. Belinda  
Table 19: Summary of Belinda’s Stage Two Phone Interview

Figure 20. Shane  
Table 20: Summary of Shane’s Stage Two Phone Interview

Figure 21. Maria  
Table 21: Summary of Maria’s Stage Two Phone Interview

Figure 22. Melanie  
Table 22: Summary of Melanie’s Stage Two Phone Interview
Figure 11: Wayne (Degree Graduate / Married / Stable within Field)
Table 11: Summary of Wayne’s Stage Two Phone Interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name: Wayne</th>
<th>Qualification: BAS (Applied Physics)</th>
<th>Year completed: 1995</th>
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1. **Bio:** Wayne attended an urban Catholic secondary college in Melbourne. Wayne was not quite sure initially what he wanted to do career wise. He received a scholarship to go to RMIT which influenced his decision, as did the fact that Phillip/RMIT University was close by and he could live at home while studying. He is married with four children.

2. **First job:** After graduation, although applying for a dozen or so jobs while in his final year at RMIT, a major telecommunications company was the first to offer him a job which he took, and has been with them ever since.

3. **Subsequent jobs:**
   Has moved through the ranks, from Technical graduate to Portfolio Manager:
   - Graduate technician
   - Experience technician
   - TR Team (Trouble Report)
   - Help Desk – Frontline
   - Technical Coordinator
   - Intelligence Manager
   - Intelligence Design Team
   - Y2K Asia Pacific
   - Global Support Asia Pacific
   - 2001 ‘Tech Wreck’ (down sizing of company from 120,000 to 43,000 employees)
   - Major project management (ongoing)

**Significant events** in his working career:
- initial job (great job opportunity),
- ‘Tech Wreck’ (down sizing; a difficult job),
- ‘Major project management’ (unbelievably demanding on time, 6 days a week and 18 hours a day)

Positive comments about the job opportunities and support for career development with this long-term employer.

4. **Current job:** Portfolio Manager for an international telecommunications company

**Skills**
He believes the most important skills in his job are human communication:
- ‘You can be a great technician, but if you cannot communicate to the client/customer you are not effective’
- ‘You need to be fully rounded employee. You cannot just be an expert in one dimension’.

Wayne has always continued to undertake on the job training, lifelong learning experiences, and certified programmes outside the company, such as the Mt Eliza Business School. He has undertaken many management training programs (he looked up his work plan on his computer while we were talking and listed 10+ such training packages that he had undertaken). Such training has been self motivated and encouraged by his employer.

5. **Impact of significant life events:**
6. On Reflection

Future:
He aspires to take on a global role in the head office located in Europe. The skills he will need to achieve this goal will involve people networking at the middle management level.
Figure 12: Maddy (Degree Graduate/Married/Stable within Field)
**Table 12: Summary of Maddy’s Stage Two Phone Interview**

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<td>Qualification: Bachelor of Applied Science in Medical Radiations</td>
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<td>Year completed: 1995</td>
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<td><strong>1 Bio:</strong> Maddy was born overseas as were both her parents. Father worked as maintenance worker and mother did sewing piece work. Attended a state high school in country Victoria, completing Year 12 in 1990. Was unsure what she wanted to do – was attracted to sciences, engineering, medical field. Parents wanted her to go to university. She didn’t have the marks to do medicine and didn’t want to be a nurse so looked for something in between. Began a course at Swinburne in Medical Biophysics and Instrumentation in 1991 and finished 1st year but this course had involved a lot more physics than she had anticipated so she looked around and decided on radiography. This had been one of the options she considered in Year 12 because she knew it had good employment prospects which were important to her. Maddy was granted no credit for her Swinburne studies which she found disappointing.</td>
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<td><strong>2 First job:</strong> Was intern at a major city hospital starting in Jan 1996 which was part of degree requirements. This was main reason for taking this job. The job was actually a rotating internship which also included other major hospitals. Maddy found the work and this training model very satisfying as it provided exposure in a number of public hospitals and a broad range of experiences, working and assisting people from different backgrounds. Maddy found her assumptions about the work verified via the experience, although some traumas could be confronting. She was offered employment at all 3 sites but said no to all because she didn’t want to work with children and one hospital was too far away; she had to wait for a position to become available at her hospital of choice.</td>
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<td><strong>3 Subsequent jobs:</strong></td>
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<td>Maddy’s first two jobs after graduation were at a major Melbourne hospital in 1997. She took this job initially because she thought it would be a good platform to start and was able to get an immediate start.</td>
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<td>In 1999 Maddy took on an extra job, at an outer urban hospital, working in the same field, on her days off to help pay for her house and wedding dress.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She started training in ultrasound in 1998 and continued this over a number of years, only finishing in 2005 (Graduate Diploma in Medical Sonography). Maddy saw this extra qualification as important in providing a specialty and opening up opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maddy took a year’s leave in 2000 and went overseas to travel with husband (who works in the same field), working in the UK for a few months at UK hospitals in 2001 doing the same sort of work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Returned to the same major Melbourne hospital in 2002 after travels and continued training in ultrasound, working partly in this area and in other areas of radiography.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003 Maddy took maternity leave and part-time work at this same hospital (see below)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004 had to go back full-time because ultrasound can only be done full-time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005 got better hours and income after completing her qualification (no more shift work)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006 was able to work in a job-share arrangement, now working 3 days a week which really suits – in ultrasound specialty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main reasons for job changes have been going into a specialty – sonography and ultrasound, leading to promotions and/or more pay for better hours; having a child which changed work patterns.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4 Current job: Sonographer
Main skills identified are problem solving, adaptability, being flexible and diplomatic.
Being able to relate to and having knowledge of patients’ history is important
Also requires technical skills which include understanding pathologies, a good understanding of
the equipment and the science behind it.
Gained technical pathology skills through Graduate Diploma but rest of the skills all learned on
the job.

5 Impact of significant life events:
1st child born in 2003 – had 6 months maternity leave and then worked 2 days a week for the
remaining 6 months, then had to go back full-time because ultrasound requires full-time work
and she needed the money to save for house. Did not want to use childcare but had to – didn’t
like the idea of strangers looking after her child.

6 On Reflection
Past: Main skills important to the progress of her career have been: the technical skills and
education as sonographer. Other key skills include: not getting involved in workplace pettiness
and being able to respond appropriately to patients, behaving/communicating effectively in
difficult situations (e.g. not allowed to give results) and understanding of patients’ psychology.
Only time she felt held back/skills not used was after completing qualification and not getting a
position straight away and having to work nightshift but this did not last long
Future:
Would like to specialise in vascular ultrasound and work part-time maybe in smaller private
environment
Will need to develop skills in this area and to adapt to particular needs of vascular surgeon. May
need more formal training and mentoring on the job.
Figure 13: Troy (Trade Graduate /Married/Sideways Changer)
Table 13: Summary of Troy’s Stage Two Phone Interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name: Troy</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qualification: Trade graduate - Printing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year completed: 1995</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. **Bio:** Troy went to a suburban independent grammar school and completed year 12 in 1991. While his parents wanted him to go to university and do accounting, he wanted to work. He did not know exactly what he wanted to do, but did not want to study accountancy. There is a sense of a strong difference of view with his parents. Both his parents were born overseas. However, Troy perceives himself as Australian. Father, a ship’s captain, mother a nurse. He lived at home for the year following Year 12, working as a labourer in landscaping. In 1993 a friend of his father offered him an apprenticeship in his printing business. As this was the only offer going, he took up the apprentice position and completed in 1995.

2. **First job:** In the year that he completed, Troy was promoted to Supervisor and given responsibility for contacting apprentices and supervising their work, as well as having day to day production tasks. He stayed with the same employer in the same position for seven years after completion.

3. **Subsequent jobs:** The trigger to move from printing (his trade) came when he moved in with his partner and travel to work became an issue (2002). This gave him the excuse to leave and look for different type of work.
   - In 2003 he was offered a job as an assistant store manager in a small retail chain closer to home but found this boring.
   - In the 2004 he moved into the construction industry labouring as a scaffolder.
   - In 2005 he left this job (because he felt it had no future) and got a casual job with a large supermarket chain in their distribution warehouse, doing picking and packing jobs to fill supermarket orders. Within the year he gained a permanent position with them and in 2006 was promoted to a leading hand.

4. **Current job:** Leading Hand, large supermarket chain
   He is positive about continuing to work at a major supermarket chain and appreciated the internal job promotions that are now open to him. He sees the current job as one that is providing learning opportunities – it is very busy and allows him to develop and demonstrate leadership skills. His leadership and management skills, particularly his team leadership abilities (with reference to also coaching a cricket team), are identified as assisting his career movements so far, but he identifies that he would like more communication skills which he sees as being learnt on the job, both formally through employer provided training and self learning through hands-on experiences at work.
   In his first job Troy was working a 50 hour week but in his present job he is working 38 hours per week, even though he has recently been experiencing 10 hour days. Time with family is important to him.

5. **Impact of significant life events:** Family formation has clearly influenced Mark’s later career moves. Initial partnering provided the trigger to move out of printing, and the later birth of his first child and the take up of home duties by his wife have developed a strong commitment to succeed with his present employer. His ambition to be running a retail distribution centre in five years indicates this.

6. **On Reflection:** Troy says that his skills were not being used in printing, and that the job was “too repetitive, it was an easy job and I got too comfy.” He also felt that, in retrospect, he was held back and that there was “no room to move” in printing.
   Troy presents a case of someone who moved out of his trade area into an unrelated field, and on reflection is glad that he moved out as the trade job had become boring and did not present a challenge. Also an example of family influences on job history.
Figure 14: Sue (Degree Graduate / Divorced / Upward Mobile)
Table 14: Summary of Sue’s Stage Two Phone Interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name: Sue</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qualification: Bachelor of Applied Science (Hospitality)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year completed: 1996</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. **Bio:** Completed year 12 at government (selective-entry) girls secondary school in 1990. Her father was the MD of a family business in which her mother was also employed. Sue had worked in food-related part-time jobs while at school (a bakery and a fast food outlet). She applied for university courses in hospitality at RMIT and a travel/tourism course elsewhere. Sue was pleased to be accepted into the RMIT course in 1991, which was via interview – she regarded this as a vote of confidence in her capacities. Sue started bar work in the second year of her course, and was then given the opportunity by her employer to spend time in the office, to learn the administrative side of the business. Sue stayed with this same hotel owner, and over time, increased her working hours, often to 30-40 hr working week, so that it took longer time to complete her degree – finished this in 1996.

2. **First job:** While completing degree, Sue looked around for other positions – in hotels, event management etc – because she found hospitality very demanding (‘on your feet all the time’). She was offered a position with a Melbourne hotel, but her then employer convinced her to stay on. He owned one inner urban hotel and a nearby restaurant, and he had recently bought another hotel that had been closed; he intended to re-open it, and asked her to take over its management – she was attracted by opportunity for advancement. And so Sue became the manager of a busy inner urban hotel. This proved to be ‘a fantastic learning curve’ – the job turned out to be ‘bigger than expected’ – new business partners came in, and there were extensive renovations. Over the next couple of years Sue took on wide range of responsibilities: managing the public and lounge bar, the restaurant, functions, events, front door staff etc – and so built up knowledge of licensing laws, payroll, HR etc. Sue sees this experience as providing the basis of her current position.

Sue remained in this job for more than 3 years, left in 2000 when the hotel was sold – its weekly turnover had increased enormously in that time and she had the option of staying on, but decided to go into her own business. She had an eye on buying a little cafe. With a friend and fellow employee from the hotel, Sue bought a café in outer urban Melbourne.

3. **Subsequent jobs:**
   **Subsequent expansion of business**
   Following the success of her first cafe, Sue opened a second – an opportunity became available nearby, when butcher’s shop came up for sale – she purchased this in 2002, renovated it during 2003 – and opened an ‘upmarket restaurant’.

   In 2005, through personal network, Sue was offered the opportunity to take over a restaurant in the area that she had known well from her hotel management days– this became her third restaurant.

As business expanded, with 3 venues, the 2 partners recognised the need for new management systems, so restructured operations: created head office, hired independent staff (an operations manager, and 2 full-time and 2 part-time administrative staff).

In 2006, ‘opening the fourth was easy’.

**Key influences**

Her divorce: after she had been with partner from the age of 19, she separated from husband in 2002 – the reduced personal stress enabled her to relax, focus on business success, more determined, put more energy into work, also made her more mature and a better manager.

Her first ‘real job’ on front desk at a major city 5 star hotel: during 3rd year of hospitality
Appendices: Individual Case Studies

degree, as 20 year old, had to obtain industry placement. Hotel staff usually to start in reservations, and then move to front desk, but Sue answered advertisement for front desk job. After a grueling 3 hr interview, she was accepted – she and parents very proud. Didn’t love the job, but felt she benefited by being exposed to 'great level of professionalism’ (i.e., strict rules, regulations, expectations of staff, in comparison with previous experience in small business).

4. Current job: Skills used, in position of company director (her role more operational)-
   - Staff management – both communicating, relating with staff, and ‘HR stuff’ (i.e. following rules and regulations)
   - Financial analysis – has done some courses (excel, management)
   - Interior design and decoration – no formal training in this, but just loves it, can indulge her hobby, personal flair.

5. Impact of significant life events: see above - Key influences

6. On Reflection Past:
   People management – ‘to manage staff... keep the peace... get the most out of your staff’.
   Learned a great deal throughout the 8 years in own business - e.g. in 6 months prior to opening first cafe, enormous range of tasks – dealing with design, builders, contracts, beginning relationship with bank, making decisions, spending own money.
   Felt she wasn’t learning much when delivering catering, after opening first cafe – but countered this with the job satisfaction that came from the fact that it was her own business.
   Future: Continuation of status quo – maybe work fewer days; feels she already has the necessary skills

7. Anything else?
   Very entrepreneurial approach – in addition to 4 cafes/restaurants, while in first hotel management job, also bought a coffee cart, and with approval from the relevant authorities, operated this at an inner urban railway station each morning for several months, prior to going into first cafe.
Figure 15: Steven (Trade Graduate/ Married Upward Mobile Within Trade)
Table 15: Summary of Steven’s Stage Two Phone Interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name: Steven</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qualification: Trade graduate - Plumbing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year completed: 1995</td>
</tr>
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</table>

1. **Bio:** After completing Year 12 at a government high school Steven studied drafting for three years at a TAFE Institute. On completion of this qualification he found that there was not much work around for draftsmen. A family friend with a roofing business offered both him and his brother an apprenticeship in plumbing. They both accepted the offer.

2. **First job:** During the first year after the completion of his apprenticeship Steven left the company of the family friend and, with another friend, established his own sub-contracting roofing company. By this time he had married and moved out of the family home. For the next five years of working life he continued working as a roofing sub-contractor, gathering considerable skills and experience in estimating and project management. In the first year as a sub contractor he purchased his first home and in the fifth year upgraded to a larger home.

3. **Subsequent jobs:**
   His trigger to move from sub contracting came when his business partner decided to go to another company. Steven and his brother then decided to set up business for themselves and move out of sub contracting into prime contracting and construction of commercial roofs.

4. **Current job: Business owner, Roofing company**
   Over the next four years the company that they established as a partnership, grew from the two brothers and one employee, to one that engaged eight employees with a growing reputation and contract base. In addition to drawing a net monthly income of $4,300 the company has an annual profit share program. Both brothers have a strong reinvestment practice of putting funds back into the company. Steven estimates that he works 60 hours per week and considers that that is required to maintain the business.
   He enjoys “the independence of being your own boss and making contacts within the industry”.

5. **Impact of significant life events:**

6. **On Reflection:** Skills and learning:
   Steven feels his trade skills are a starting point, but interpersonal and business skills are now more important. In his own words “people want to deal with you and that is where the business counts.” While strongly believing in learning by doing and speaking to other experienced people in the industry, Steven has also undertaken a small business management course at a TAFE institute.
   **Future:**
   He is developing a network concept for expanding the business by aligning his commercial roofing company with successful building and construction companies. Skill development of employees is also part of his company vision, so he actively directs and supports them in acquiring additional tickets in rigging, crane operations and elevated working platforms.
Figure 16: Simon (Trade Graduate / Married / Upward Mobile within Trade)
### Table 16: Summary of Simon’s Stage Two Phone Interview

| Name: Simon  
| Qualification: Plumbing  
| Year completed: 1995  
| **1 Bio:** Simon completed Year 12 at a suburban government secondary school and had ambitions in either the areas of chef or sports management. He applied to do a course in sports management but did not have the requisite end of school score to gain a place. In the three months after leaving school and not gaining a place in his preferred field a family friend who ran a roofing business offered him an apprenticeship. He accepted the apprenticeship because he did not have a job and at that time (1992) there was a recession, so he accepted what was on offer.  
| **2 First job:** Two and half years into the apprenticeship the family friend’s company “went broke” and Simon had to find another employer. An apprentice friend working for another company got his employer to take Simon on. After completing his apprenticeship and working for that company for six months after completion Simon went to the UK to play cricket for a minor county side for six months (year 1).  
| **3 Subsequent jobs:** On returning to Australia (year 2) he joined his brother as a subcontractor to a prime contractor, being paid mainly on a square metre basis for roof installations. For the next seven years he and his brother did sub contracting work. It paid well and work was plentiful, but they began to question why they were working as sub contractors and having their conditions and rates determined for them, without any of the benefits of fully working for themselves. His description of that time: “the company was just floating. It was a dull period and we thought we are better than this. A lazy pattern was setting in of just turning up and work was there. We needed to challenge ourselves a bit.”  
| **4 Current job: Business owner, Roofing company**  
The brothers have just put on a new apprentice and employ nine people overall.  
**Skills:** Simon identified the skill shifts from working as a sub contractor to running your own partnership company as shifting from routine technical work (using your trade skills) to one of managing people and money and business planning. As a prime contractor it is also important to maintain and develop builder networks, as roofing jobs come through the major building companies.  
| **5 Impact of significant life events:**  
The questioning that led to the creation of their own business was partly triggered by Simon’s changing family scene. Six years after completion of his course, Simon moved away from home, married and established his own household. In his words “financially these three things affect your available money.” In the 8th year he and his brother established their own commercial roofing company. Simon described the circumstances to this: “you answer to nobody, you have a go and don’t die wondering, sick of the old boss and a belief that we could succeed.”  
| **6 On Reflection**  
**Future and Learning:** Simon is comfortable in this present job but both he and his brother are looking to expand or do something different in the longer term. He sees that he will be developing the company for the next five to six years and will require additional business skills to do this. Beyond this he would like to be doing something different in ten years time. While he has a strong belief in backing
his own judgement and learning business skills through experience and networks, he does see some need to attend some courses in areas such as IT. So far he sees himself “learning every day” and gets over big hurdles by having a go. He does not see himself working for someone else. He is critical of the present arrangements for formal courses of study and does not believe that they make themselves attractive to working business people like himself with a strong “learn by doing” streak.

**7 Anything else?**

In the last two years of working life Simon has had the added stresses of a new child and a wife diagnosed with brain cancer. Caring responsibilities have taken a lot of work hours and distracted him from the business. He is currently working 45 to 50 hours per week and earning a net declared income of $4,000 per month.
Figure 17: Colin (HE Graduate/ Married/ Upward Mobile within Trade)
Table 17: Summary of Colin’s Stage Two Phone Interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name: Colin</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qualification: Bachelor of Applied Science (Construction Management)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year completed: 1996</td>
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</table>

1 Bio:
Colin completed Year 12 at an inner urban government secondary school in 1989, after switching from an independent school after Year 11. Colin was born in Australia to Australian born parents. His father was a solicitor and mother ran a catering business. Colin took a long and interesting route into the RMIT degree. After VCE he started a Monash Arts degree (as at this time he was only looking at Monash or Melbourne Universities). He lasted one semester and began working in a building and garden supplies business as a labourer. He settled in and tried to get a carpentry apprenticeship but wasn’t offered one. He then enrolled in an Advanced Certificate in Building Inspection at RMIT which takes 3 years. Half way through he also enrolled in an Associate Diploma of Building Design and Construction. He finished both qualifications.
In the last year of the Diploma he started working with a building company, which turned into a cadetship. He worked for them in the day and completed the diploma by night over two years. It was the company that suggested he do the RMIT degree because one of the directors knew some of the RMIT staff. He says the company would have had to retrench him and getting him into the degree “was a convenient and productive way of offloading him”.
He started the degree in 1994 and continued to do some casual work for them sporadically as a building coordinator. He also worked full-time with another company at Christmas and they offered him a full-time job on graduation, but he didn’t accept it because he felt they offered him too low a salary for his experience.

2 First job after finishing degree:
Colin commenced as a project manager for a private design and construction company in November 1997, whilst finalising his study. This job involved programming building projects, tendering subprojects, design meetings and financial payments to contractors. He took the job because they offered a good salary. The job was what he expected because he had experience of the industry. He says this job brought: expected financial benefits, greater exposure to different elements in the building process, and autonomy. It was a smaller company which gave “more opportunities personally”. He stayed for 6 years until 2003; and left because he was offered a higher position in the start up of a new company, as an offshoot of his former employer with another couple of employees.

3 Subsequent jobs:
Colin’s second job was in 2003 (above) and his current job was to form a new company with a couple of other senior employees as a separate entity from previous employer. Colin was invited to become a shareholder/director in a “complicated arrangement”.

4 Current job:
See above. This job involves strategic planning for the company, supervising 3 project managers, and undertaking some projects himself. Main skills in this position are:
- having “a clear head to get to the heart of an issue” because there are so many problems that can arise; and being able to make decisions. He sees these skills as natural abilities. Says he was singled out as a leader even in school. He has also learned from key people who he has worked for and seen how they have managed him or others.
- diplomacy – at different levels – says these are skills he has developed through experience but also believes his home influence was a factor– thinks these skills largely developed before work – just developed further through employment.
Appendices: Individual Case Studies

5 Impact of significant life events:

Says “almost everything I do I have trained in, but it all requires experience, assistance and coaching on the job. The practical is very important – university only provides the basic ideas.”

6 On Reflection

Past: Colin says the skills that have been most important in progressing his career are:
- communication skills – ability to communicate and relate to people on all levels is very important in the construction industry
- tenacity and courage – you have to take opportunities and go for it.

The job he felt he was learning a great deal in was the cadetship job whilst he was finishing his diploma – this was “the first proper job I’d been given” – gained lots of experience and very good mentoring to becoming productive. Colin says that this job really extended the skills and knowledge he was gaining in study.

Never been a time he feels his skills were unused.

He felt his career was held back when he made the decision to leave the cadetship company to go to other company at Christmas.

Future:

Colin sees himself as doing similar to now in 5 years time with similar company structure and people. He thinks he will need new skill development: such as negotiating with clients to bring in more work, a role which is predominantly done by their current Managing Director. He believes he will gain these skills through mentoring from their Managing Director and by just “starting to do it – its not rocket science”.

7 Anything else?

Colin says he has stayed with the same company all the way from graduation because it is a good company, with a good salary and they have recognised and appreciated his efforts. They identified the progression for him, in setting up the separate company and becoming a shareholder and director. He loves the work he does – when he first left school he never would have thought he’d end up in the building industry. He says the Arts Degree was a waste of time – he couldn’t see how he would find gainful employment from it. Now that he is a prospective employer he can see that he wasn’t focused at that point in time. It was a job he took as a filler that started his career in construction. Colin sees his working life as very stable and soon after starting with the company he settled into a relationship with his now wife; he has one child, with a second on the way.

Says the TAFE courses he did equal in many ways [equal to degree] but not for everyone. The model of TAFE/university worked very well for him. He doesn’t think there is enough exposure in high schools to other career options.
Figure 18: Helen (Degree Graduate/Un-Married/Stable within Field)
Table 18: Summary of Helen’s Stage Two Phone Interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name: Helen</th>
<th>Qualification: Bachelor of Engineering - Geological</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year completed: 1995</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Bio:  
Helen completed Year 12 at a regional Technical School (government) in 1990. She is Australian born to Australian born parents. Both parents are farmers. Helen wasn’t sure what she wanted to do: she knew she didn’t want to be farmer or to work in an office and had always been good at maths and sciences. There was an expectation of going to university because all her sisters went, but her parents didn’t care what. She went to JAC website and couldn’t see anything that really interested her. Helen chose geology because “you can go anywhere with it” and it gives a range of options. The biggest influence on her career choice was her middle sister who was a process engineer, and Helen saw the kind of work she did on work experience. Helen found coming from the country to the city was hard – very different. She lived in a share house for 3 years with 2 of her sisters whilst studying. She did not have part-time employment.

2 First job:  
Helen commenced as a graduate geological engineer with a major mining corporation soon after graduating in Jan 1996. Her job involved geological mapping. This was more a geologist role: analysing ground stability and monitoring mine dewatering. The job was permanent full-time. She took the job through graduate recruitment. Helen wanted to live in remote areas and to work for this particular mining company because she had a sister there and they came across as a good employer. She targeted the company. The job wasn’t what she expected because her first 2 years were supposed to be a graduate rotation but she didn’t get to do most of the rotations because her boss was a geologist and he wanted her to have this focus. The job did provide the benefits she thought it would in terms of: pay, lifestyle, and experience – “it made me take control of my career”. Helen stayed 21 months in this job. She left because of dissatisfaction at not being allowed to move around within the company. She says this job wasn’t engineering at all, but her boss couldn’t see this – he thought there was too much work in his section and didn’t support the rotation. Helen knew by this stage that she didn’t want to be a mining engineer, so she began studying by distance education, first in finance and then in change management, whilst working in this job and the next.

3 Subsequent jobs:  
2nd job - Sept 1997 as an underground mining engineer with another mining company in Queensland. She sourced the job via a friend from her previous job. Even though she had decided on a career change this job was what she expected mining engineering to be, unlike her first job. She was retrenched after working just over 3 years (company went under and was bought out). The retrenchment brought forward her plans to move back to Melbourne and start a new career – she took the redundancy and two months off for a holiday then relocated to Melbourne.  
3rd job – March 2001 new career as a business improvement consultant with a Consultancy firm. The same friend put her onto this job (because she had worked for them) so Helen ‘cold-called’ them and got the job. She stayed 18 months and left because of very long hours/weekend work and travel - no work/life balance.  
4th job - Sept 2002 went to a major soft drink manufacturer as business improvement manager straight from previous job. She sourced the job through networking. She stayed 2 ½ years but had to leave “because there was a clash of cultures – the role they had advertised was very different from the actual job. They didn’t believe in business improvement in their operations.”

4 Current job:
5th job – Operational improvement manager for a major mining/chemical company, from Jan 2005. She sees the main skills of her current job as:
  - facilitation skills with stakeholders/knowing how to engage
  - logical thinking
  - change management knowledge
  - process mapping
  - business improvement skills like TQM
  - project management skills
  - listening to people
Most of the skills she said came from experience, natural ability and common sense. She says she got these skills through the university degree and commented that communication is a very important skill in mining because you need to work with people based on their knowledge and their ideas and bring them on board – not dictate to them.

5 Impact of significant life events: nil

6 On Reflection

Past: Helen says skills that have been most important in progressing her career are:
  - Knowing what you want and not relying on other people – actively doing things to create a path. “if I hadn’t done it I would have stayed in the same occupation”
  - expressing where you want to go and what you love doing
  - looking at the skills you’ve got so you don’t get pigeon holed into a specific role so you can move into different areas i.e. “if you say you come from mining you get pigeon holed”

The job where she felt she was learning the most was the 3rd job at the consultancy firm; because it was the first time “I could use business skills and apply to business problems”. Two jobs where she felt skills were not used. Firstly, in my role as new graduate: I had a view of what a geological engineer would be doing and this was different from her boss (refer previous) and secondly at the soft drink manufacturing job, because “I was forcing them into business improvement”. This latter role was also where she felt her career was held back because “they had hired me to do a job but they wouldn’t let me do the role.” i.e., they tried to make her do other things and she found it very frustrating. She then began to question if they were supportive of business improvement, because for them efficiency didn’t seem to be a priority – unlike the mining industry with its boom/bust cycles.

Future:
Helen would like a work role similar to now – she may move into business strategy and new directions for business improvement. The skills she would need involve an expansion of her current ones – into systems thinking. She imagines she would most likely gain these through mix of further study and work. On a personal front, Helen would like her own house and play more sport.

7 Anything else?

Impact of her degree – “I don’t think it gave me many of the skills for the jobs I did but it did teach me the ability to think for myself and to grow up”.

It was whilst in her first role (as a graduate) that she became interested in change management as a possible career. At the time the company set up a continuous improvement program which set targets to reduce costs and she felt the whole approach was very good – this sparked her interest in this kind of work, so she started studying to get skills to set her along this path. She reflects that she has left jobs because she realised there was a mismatch between her values and the company’s values. She can’t stay with a company if things aren’t right but also says it takes time to work through and make up her mind. When in her fourth job, she went to a career consultant and she felt this really helped her understand what the problem was regarding the clash of values and how to target companies that were a better fit with her values.
Figure 19: Belinda (Degree Graduate / Married / Sideways Changer)
Table 19: Summary of Belinda’s Stage Two Phone Interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name: Belinda</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qualification: Bachelor of Applied Science (Hospitality Studies)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year completed: 1995</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 **Bio:** Belinda completed Year 12 in 1991 at an independent grammar school in Melbourne. She is Australian born to Australian born parents. Her father worked a civil engineer and her mother as a marketing assistant. Her parents wanted her to go to university and get a profession – she definitely didn’t want to be a teacher or hairdresser. She had no real idea what course she wanted to do “her preferences were all over the shop” – she got into this one but didn’t really mind – she thought it sounded “glamorous” and followed in the footsteps of her sister. Belinda went to university immediately after school and lived at home whilst studying. She did a hospitality degree 1992-1995 then started a business degree at RMIT which she did for a year. She then went to study in the USA for 6 months in first half of 1997.

2 **First job:** Belinda worked in hospitality whilst studying, including at five star Melbourne hotels and in the Whitsunday islands. Her first job without study was in July 1997 at a major Melbourne hotel, working as a reservation sales agent (taking reservations) working full-time. She took this job because she had just come back from the USA and a girlfriend was working there and recommended her. The job was what she expected along with its benefits.

3 **Subsequent jobs:**
   2\(^{nd}\) job – Belinda was promoted at the major hotel, to sales manager after a year. She worked in this job for 2 years. This involved team leadership, sales reports, budgeting and financials.
   3\(^{rd}\) job – was with an Australian airline company, as a team leader in outbound telemarketing (selling the airline). She had seen an advertised job for a lower position, but was appointed to this – in charge of a team of 10 telemarketers. She was made redundant in September 2001 when the airline became insolvent. This was a challenging time, as she was still living at home and had commenced an MBA. Redundancy really knocked her – see below. Belinda was unemployed for 3 months from September – December 2001, and then went overseas with RMIT and fast-tracked her MBA.
   4\(^{th}\) **period of employment** in 2002 involved a series of temporary jobs for 2-3 months
   5\(^{th}\) job in 2002 was as a contractor/self employed for a bank, working on a 9 month project as sales trainer/facilitator which she was made aware of via a friend from her airline job. When this project finished she had a couple more temporary jobs in 2003.
   6\(^{th}\) job was as a full-time sales manager for direct marketing with a car hire company, starting in June 2003. She sourced this job through SEEK and stayed 2 and ¾ years until February 2006. She was retrenched from this position because of cutbacks.
   7\(^{th}\) job after her wedding (see below) was with a small consultancy company, doing leadership training/change/business development; but generally acting as “dog’s body”. She started this job in May 2006. She sourced this job through the recommendation of a company she had worked with as part of the bank project. Stayed here for a year. She left because of company size and values – “small company environment” – didn’t see values as similar and wanted to get back into marketing.

4 **Current job:**
   8\(^{th}\) job – is Direct Marketing Manager at a large consultancy agency – sourced this job through a friend from her 6\(^{th}\) job. She started in June 2007. This role involves selling personal accident insurance to members and public. She has no background in insurance, but the job is an avenue back into marketing. Core of the job is sales/marketing and the skills include: financial/budgetary skills, direct marketing skills, sales and presentation as well as general
management and people management. She says her sales related skills developed through a mix of education/training and on the job learning – other skills all on the job

5 Impact of significant life events:
1. Airline redundancy had a major life impact. She was one of the first to be made redundant (last employed, first to go model). She says she ‘drank herself stupid’ – and commented that all staff were heavily affected. She found support and shifted her sense of despair via the people she was doing the MBA with. They were slightly older and provided a lot of emotional and mental support – she says her parents couldn’t help her – they didn’t understand. So through the people she met through study she made it through this dark period. Belinda also met her husband around this time and he “was my saviour”. She was down to her last $20 and was very worried about her future, but she reflected on the good personal support she received.

2. Belinda’s second redundancy was 2 weeks before her wedding and she didn’t tell anyone – so she found herself bottling it up and got very stressed worrying about how to pay for everything. After her honeymoon, she came back to look for work – she was unemployed about a month.

6 On Reflection
Past: Belinda sees her people development skills as the most important in progressing her career because they have given her confidence to try new things. Doing the MBA also important because she had 2 career changes whilst doing this and study assisted with these transitions. The period when she felt she was learning a great deal was at her 5th job, as a self employed contractor because she got to put many of her skills into practice, and she had to keep modifying and adjusting things, which gave her a buzz.

She also felt that she learned a lot at her hire car company job (6th job) because she gained her direct marketing skills there and the company was innovative. The job where she felt her skills used ineffectively was 7th job (as a dog’s body) because she had to try and manage everything and never felt she could get into an area in depth.

The period where she felt her career was held back the most was at her 2nd job, at a major hotel, because she couldn’t see any clear career progression. She held a similar view of the hire car company.

Future: Belinda aims to start up her own business with her husband in hospitality and have a family. This is about lifestyle change. She thinks between the two of them they have the skills – will need to do legal stuff like food handling/alcohol service.
Figure 20: Shane (Trade Graduate /Married/Stable within Trade)
**Table 20: Summary of Shane’s Stage Two Phone Interview**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name: Shane</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qualification: Lithographic printing - trade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year completed: 1998</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 **Bio:** Australian born to Australian born parents. Father was a cleaner (he lived with his father). He completed year 12 at an urban secondary college (government) in 1994. He had originally wanted to do something like PE/human movement but didn’t get the marks; says he didn’t study very hard in Year 12 because he was more interested in football commitments. He did the apprenticeship with some reservations – last choice because family was into printing and he had read the course outline. He knew there was good money in this type of work and that if he got into the right company it would be good – fortunately got an apprenticeship with a major newspaper after doing a 6 month course at RMIT, in printing technology administration and process, so he didn’t start the apprenticeship until about 6 months after leaving school. He then moved out of home with his partner.

2 **First job:** Shane was offered a job at the newspaper on completing his apprenticeship, which involved producing the newspaper, ensuring quality control and making adjustments. He accepted the job as knew the employer and knew they offered good money and felt fortunate to get the position. The job was what he expected (although it has changed a lot now because of new technology) and he said it provided the benefits that he thought it would, including: salary, superannuation from very young age, and the opportunity to progress – he was made a leading hand at age 23. Shane stayed in this job for 12 years but relinquished the leading hand role because of external commitments with sporting/cricket club.

3 **Subsequent jobs:** He is still with the same employer, but has moved sideways into a new area in the plate room because he was bored – still under the same job title – not a promotion “everyone is equal in printing”.

4 **Current job:** This is his current job. He has never considered moving from this newspaper because money is very good and hours suit him – he works 4 days a week for $75,000 per annum without overtime. The main skills needed are computer based, as all printing work is now done through computers; he has acquired these through lots of on the job training and self-tuition – his current work is very different from his original apprenticeship.

5 **Impact of significant life events:** He has been very involved in his cricket club and has given his time to this, rather than seek promotion. Shane says he’s actually ‘worked backwards’ having been a leading hand at 23 and now just on the floor, but this has been his choice – he says he finds it very rewarding and likes to see people develop so does not mind – just doesn’t have the time to put more into work.

6 **On Reflection**

   **Past:** Shane sees the most important skills to progressing his career as communications skills within a team environment and learning how to get on with management and how to cope with deadlines/working under pressure. The position/time he felt he was learning a great deal was when the newspaper moved premises, with a major upgrade, when everything was new and all electronic – all new processes and no one knew how to do them, so everyone was learning together. Sometimes feels his skills not used because the environment he works in is based around everyone being the same and sharing, so it doesn’t have a hierarchy. He doesn’t feel he’s been held back – it has been his decision not to move forwards.

   **Future:** He would like a change of career after so long in printing in his area of interest – something like sport and recreation administration or facilities management. He would take a redundancy if it was offered in a few years as he will then have achieved 20 years service. He would need to do a course to gain the skills for a new profession – he says his school grades weren’t too bad and feels he would enjoy learning in an area of interest to him.
Figure 21: Maria (Degree Graduate / Married / Stable within Field)
### Table 21: Summary of Maria’s Stage Two Phone Interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name: Maria</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qualification: Bachelor of Applied Science (Medical Radiations)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year completed: 1996</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**1 Bio:**
Maria is Australian born, with an Australian born father and an English mother. Her father was an instrument technician and her mother an integration aid (ceased working when Maria was in Year 11). She completed Year 12 at an urban secondary college in 1993. Her parents just wanted her to do something that had a future – medical radiations was her first choice – as he knew she wanted to do something medical, but wouldn’t get the marks for medicine, and didn’t want to be a nurse, so this just suited. She had looked at general science but decided she wanted to do something that led to a specific job. She lived at home whilst studying.

**2 First job:**
Maria finished her degree in 1996 and did an intern year in 1997, commencing full-time, permanent work in Jan 1998 at a major Melbourne hospital as a Grade 1 Radiographer. Her job involved a mix of medial radiations work, rotating through different areas, and felt as though it was at “the bottom of the pecking order.” She sourced the job because she had done a clinical placement as part of her earlier work experience.

*1st job* - was what she expected and she found it to be a very good grounding for the rest of her career – she saw it as a very good experience, although the hours were very long. Maria left this job in January 1999 because of the hours and the distance to travel and because of the politics – “no matter how hard you worked you didn’t get anywhere”. She also found she was becoming sick a lot because of the shift/on-call work.

**3 Subsequent jobs:**
In 1999 she moved to a suburban private hospital, with similar duties but higher career prospects. She moved into CT work which is more specialised and by the end of 2001 was promoted to CT Supervisor, which also involved training and running whole department (Grade 3 position).

She was working full-time in this job and also part-time for her husband doing his book keeping. In July 2003, this hospital changed ownership, and the environment became very political. She was pregnant but didn’t mention her pregnancy in case it threatened her job. This was a very stressful period. She had her first child in December 2003 and took 12 months maternity leave, but started working back there 1 day a week again in September 2004 as “she needed the adult company.” She was unable to continue in her role in CT, as this could not be done part-time, so she had to move into the field of angiography and drop back to Grade 2 position. She was very disappointed, but understood that CT was a job that was difficult to do part-time. She picked up a second day from December 2004 and also was in an “on-call” role at another private hospital. She was happy with this arrangement until the end of 2005 and was also still doing the bookkeeping for her husband. She went on maternity leave again in early 2006 for her second baby but continued doing the bookkeeping.

In April 2007 she went back to the private hospital 1 day a week in angiography – she needed to do this to keep her license current. She was then also doing 2 days a week for her husband’s business – this involves the practice management/administration of his podiatry practice.

**4 Current job:**
This is divided into the two areas she works in: 1-radiography and 2-book keeping/practice manager of husband’s podiatry practice

1- **radiography skills** include: attention to detail, following instructions, initiative, enthusiasm, the technical knowledge base, taking responsibility for self including self management, training
skills, learning new equipment.
These skills were learned on the job and through ongoing professional development; she has not
done any further formal education
2 – book keeping skills include time-management because the job is open ended, book
keeping/accounts skills, administration, marketing, reception and training receptionists. Her
accountant taught her the book keeping skills – the rest were self taught.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5 Impact of significant life events:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The main reasons for Maria’s job changes have been promotion, pregnancy and her husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>starting up his own business as podiatrist. See above</td>
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</table>

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>6 On Reflection</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Past: Maria believes the main skills for progressing her career have been people skills, because “the</td>
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<tr>
<td>more you get out of people the better and the more productive you become”. She also feels her</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>initial skills were important as they gave her a base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria feels her 1st job was where she was learning a great deal, because it provided her with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>range of experiences and knowledge. Her 2nd job was also very important because “it gave me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a lot of opportunity” and pushed her into responsibility very quickly, in situations where she had</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to prove herself.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maria sees the current period as a time when her skills are not being used effectively and where</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>she is being held back, because of working part-time, having to forego her supervisory C/T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>position and being restricted by what she can effectively do because of family and book keeping</td>
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<tr>
<td>commitments</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Future:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maria sees herself as working more time in her husband’s business and part-time in radiography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“to keep a foot in the door”. She does not want to work full-time. She sees that she will need to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>keep her radiography skills up to date - this will be learned on the job, whilst her skills for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>practice management include those related to business management and marketing. This may</td>
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<tr>
<td>require a formal course in Business/Administration or Accounting</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Figure 22: Melanie (Degree Graduate / Married – Related Pathways Shift)
Table 22: Summary of Melanie’s Stage Two Phone Interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name: Melanie</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qualification: Bachelor of Applied Science- Applied physics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year completed: 1996</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Bio:
Melanie Attended a catholic secondary school in urban Melbourne, completing Year 12 in 1992. She was born in Australia to an Australian father and a Dutch mother. Her father worked as an accountant and her mother as a part-time nurse. Her parents had no influence on her decisions regarding university, nor did her friends. Applied physics was not her first choice, which was medical radiations, but she didn’t really mind. She tried to transfer into radiology after 1st year, but could not get any recognition for her 1st year subjects and there were only 2 places for transferring students. On completion of the degree in 1996 she took a gap year travelling before working (in 1997).

2 First job: 1998 – Melanie returned from travel and got a job with a defence force agency, as an applied physicist in optical physics in electronic warfare. She was contacted for this job because she had applied for a different position a year earlier and was on their books. She was contacted and flown to Adelaide for an interview and on deciding to take the job moved to Adelaide with her partner. She saw this as good opportunity and right time to move. She had been applying for jobs in Melbourne without success, and the job sounded very interesting with lots of good ‘pie in the sky’ type projects and use of her science degree. Unfortunately the job did not turn out the way she thought it would, as she had very low accountability and there was a lot of downtime and issues in terms of hierarchies; but she did think it brought considerable benefits in terms of being able to use her degree and gain experience. She was unconcerned about salary. Melanie stayed in the position for about 3 and a half years, resigning in 2001 because she was one of only 4 women in the division and it was “an uncomfortable workplace”. Issues included sexual harassment, hierarchies, no real accountability and political issues.

3 Subsequent jobs:
Melanie came back to Melbourne and did not work for about 4 weeks, then saw a job on SEEK and was interviewed and got a position working for a US company starting up in Australia. This 2nd job started in 2001 was as a project manager /fibre optical physicist in long haul telecommunications. Melanie was trained for four months in the US and then worked for periods in both Australia and the US. She found the project ‘really good’. She was retrenched in 2003 when the Australian arm of this company was closed down. She did not work in her profession for about 6 months after retrenchment – these months were spent as a mix of unemployment and some call -centre work. She went to an outplacement agency who helped her refine her skills.

3rd job was with a major accountancy/finance firm, as a project manager in Science Research and Development. This job wasn’t what she wanted to do, and not what it was advertised to be – it was really a technical advisor not a project manager, but she stayed in it for 3 years because “she knew how hard it was to get a project manager job and she thought if she stayed with this company other project management jobs would come up but they never did”. She took a pay cut in this 3rd job and left because the jobs never developed and there was “a dog-eat-dog mentality” there.

4th job was as a telecommunications project manager with a large private company, in 2005. Melanie only stayed here for 3 months as this was “the most horrific period of my working life”. … Deleted information here as it may identify participant….

She found out she was pregnant and knew that she couldn’t stay – she absolutely hated the job. Although she was never directly affected, her immediate boss was fired and this really upset her.
### Current Job: Research and Development Manager with another major finance firm, starting in 2006 when pregnant – at first on a 6 month contract and the given leave without pay to have her baby. She had to take sick leave as she had a problem pregnancy (and was in premature labour for 3 months) but held onto the baby. She returned after 6 months but in a part-time position. The key skills of this role she sees as: interpersonal skills/dealing with clients, time-management and analytical thinking. She gained these skills through her project management experience not the course.

### Impact of significant life events:
Regarding her 2nd job – and retrenchment – Melanie described lots of rumours about the close down before it happened, and she already knew a lot of unemployed people in fibre optics – (the IT boom/bust) and knew if she stayed in this area she would probably end up retrenched again, so looked for a safer job, in a slightly different field. The birth of Melanie’s first child changed her working life – no longer the same opportunities; does not see herself has having good career prospects, because of being a mother.

… quotation material removed for identity reasons…

### On Reflection

**Past:** Most important skills to progressing her career have been project management skills including interpersonal skills, leading a team, analytical and technical skills. The job she felt she was learning a great deal was her second job…. because they gave her the managerial as well as technical skills and developed her project management skills. She feels her skills were not used in both her fourth and current jobs. She feels her career was held back at both finance firms, because she has not been able to use her project management skills or work autonomously.

**Future:** She is unsure because she is about to have her second child. She would like to get back into project management, and move up the ranks into a senior position but her children are more important right now. She’s not sure what skills she will need but in the future, if in same field will need to maintain current skills on the job.