
Rethinking the purpose & design of pathways

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Enhancing Engagement, Access & Opportunities

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Rethinking Skills in Vocational Education and Training:
From Competencies to Capabilities



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Background

- Vocations: the link between post-compulsory education and the labour market
 - <http://www.ncver.edu.au/workinprogress/projects/10454.html>
 - How to improve pathways within & between education & work
 - 3 streams, 3 universities
 - Lot of reports from project published & more coming



Argument

- Educational pathways are shaped by the relationship between qualifications & structure of jobs
- Nature & structure of pathways will differ between industries
- Policy implications – a uniform approach to policy isn't helpful



Australia has 2 sectors of tertiary education



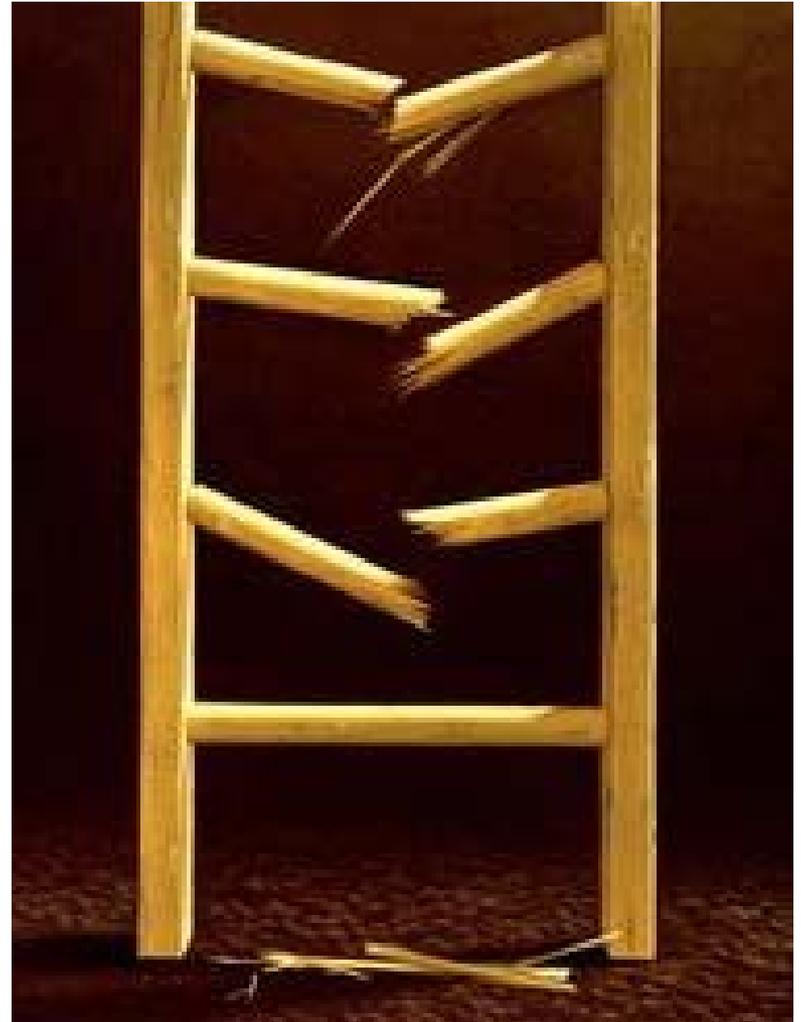
All qualifications serve 3 purposes

1. As a labour market qualification (entry or upgrade)
2. As a transition qualification to higher level qualifications
3. To widen access to tertiary education

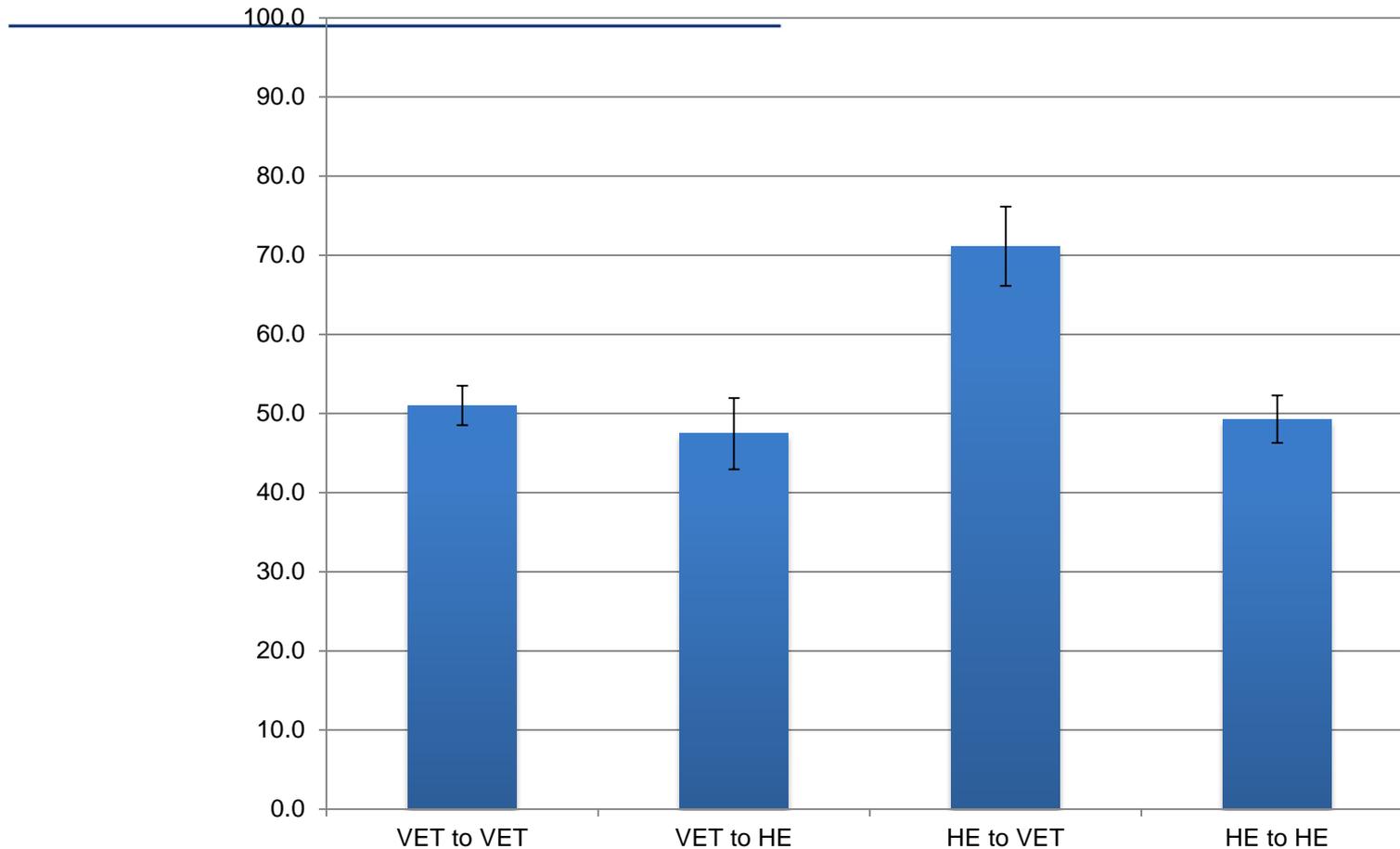


Thinking about pathways differently

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- Links between education & work not strong
 - Skills mismatches
 - Pathways shaped by many factors, including structure of occupations

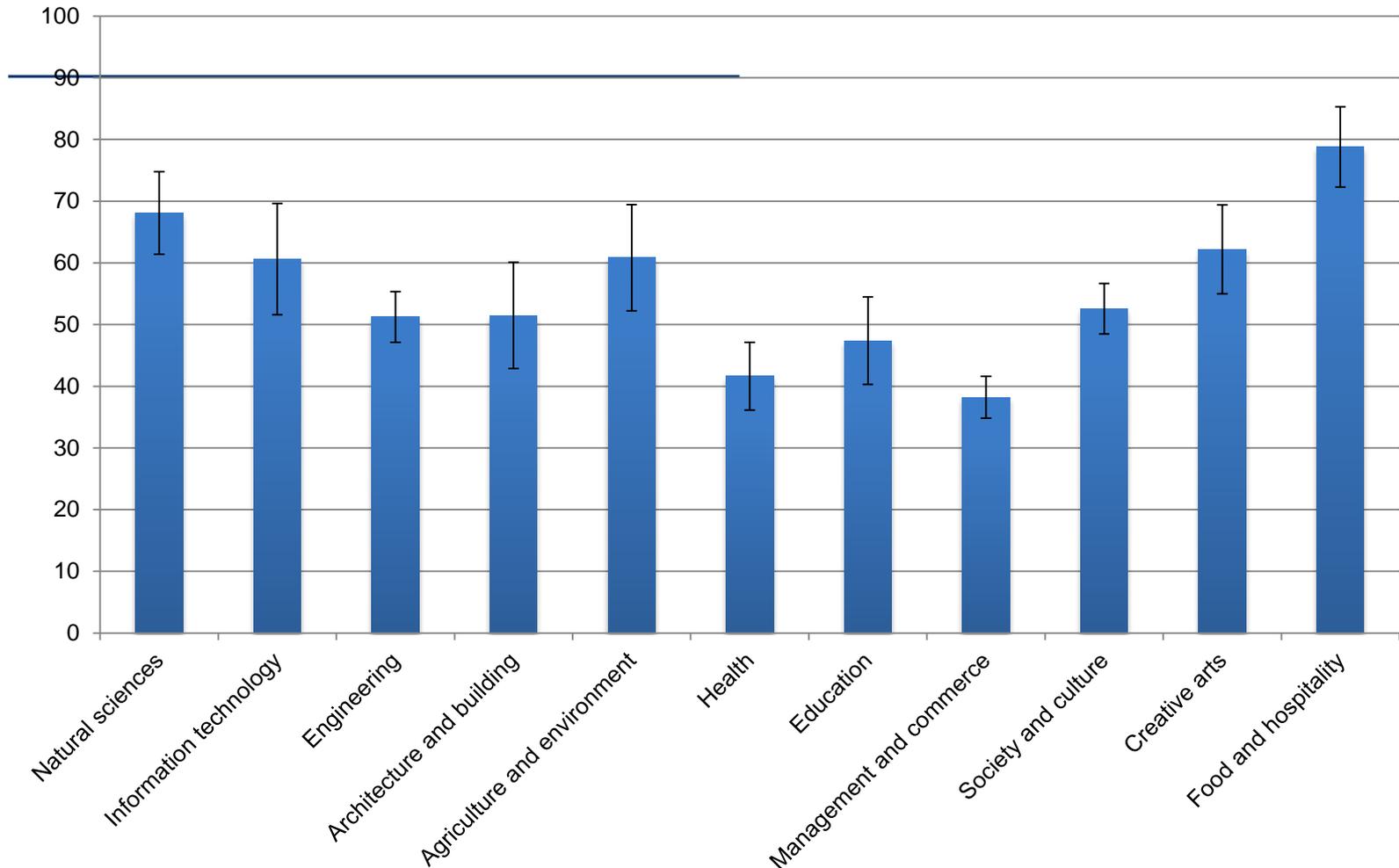


Students change their field of education



Source: Nick Fredman

Changes within fields of education

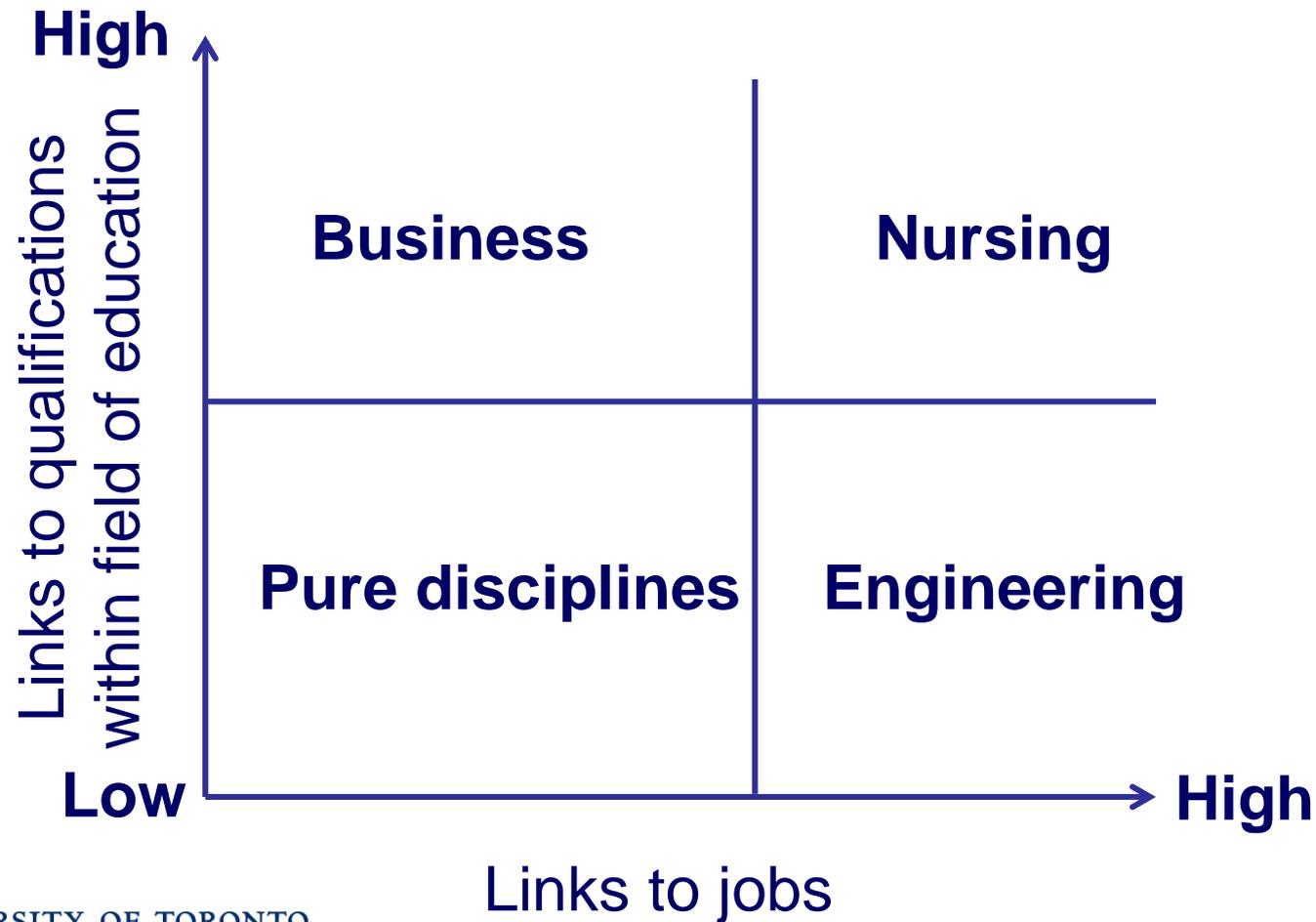


Pathways differ in relationship between qualifications & jobs

1. Strong links to jobs & strong pathways between qualifications in same FoE
2. Strong links to jobs & weak pathways between qualifications in same FoE
3. Weak links to jobs & strong pathways between qualifications in same FoE
4. Weak links to jobs & weak links between qualifications in same FoE



Four types of pathways



Signalling or screening device?

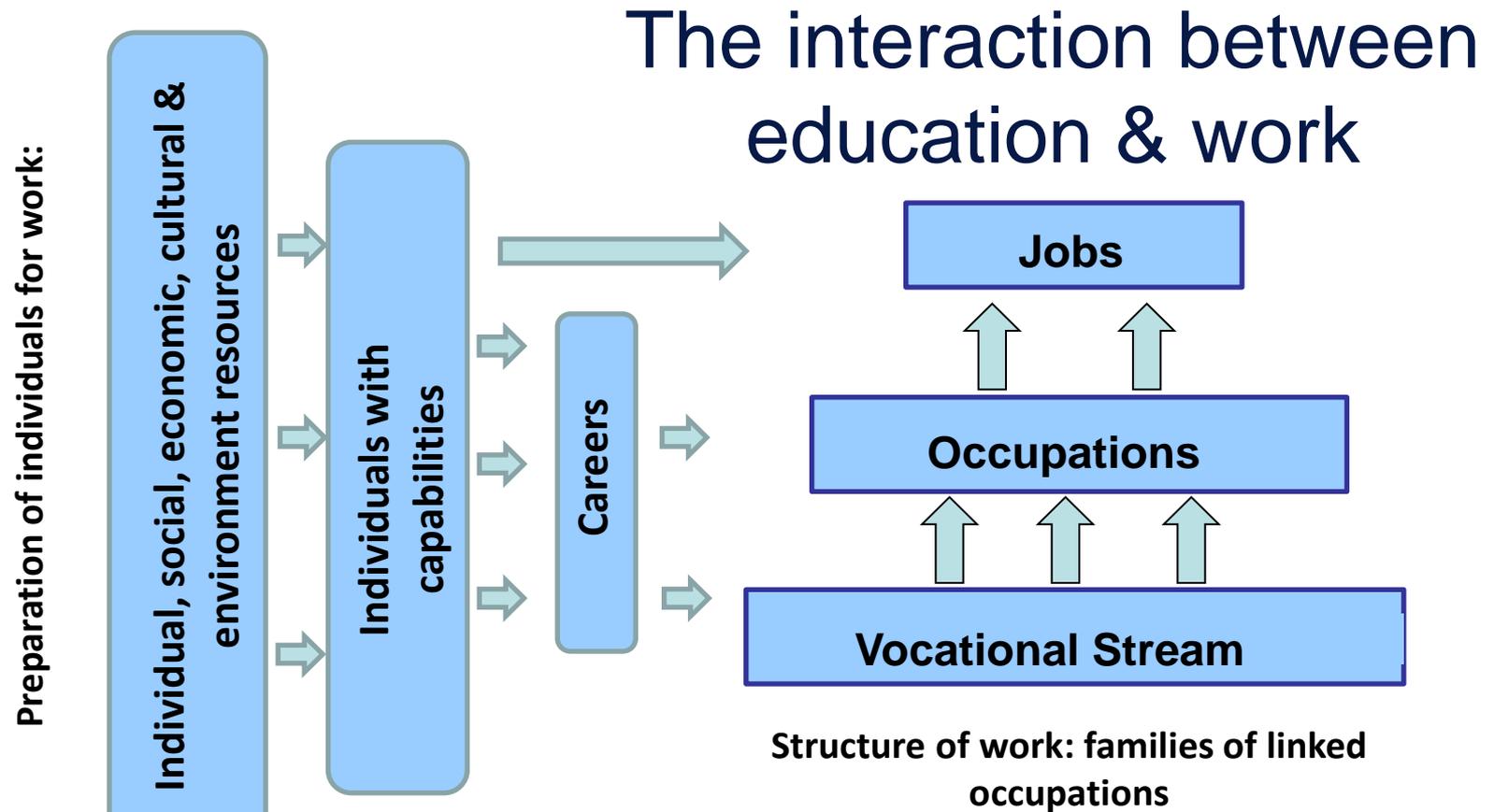
- Signalling device
 - Occupational labour markets -
 - Entry & progression specified by the profession/ occupation
 - Qualifications specify what people can know & do (broadly)
 - Content & skills clearly mapped
- Screening device
 - Internal labour markets
 - Entry fairly open, internal progression through ranks
 - Qualifications indicator of capability & attributes (broadly)
 - Content & skill less tightly specified

All pathways should be short & fat

- “If the bulk of the students transferring choose to do so through a small subset of conduits, then the allocation of resources and attention should be informed by this compelling fact. To spend time on the potential needs of virtual students in empty conduits is to neglect the manifest needs of real students striving to navigate the mainstream of transfer.
- Priorities need to be set and and observed if transfer is to function well.”
- Laurente and Pailthorpe (2002: 4), California Postsecondary Education Commission



Our conceptual framework: The capabilities approach



Revisiting 3 purposes of qualifications

- Qualifications serve 3 purposes but do so in different ways; design should reflect this
 1. Provide access to the labour market, but either as a signaling or screening device
 2. Transition to higher level qualifications – how tightly defined does curriculum need to be?
 3. Widen access to PSE – middle level qualifications the link to higher level studies & better labour market outcomes

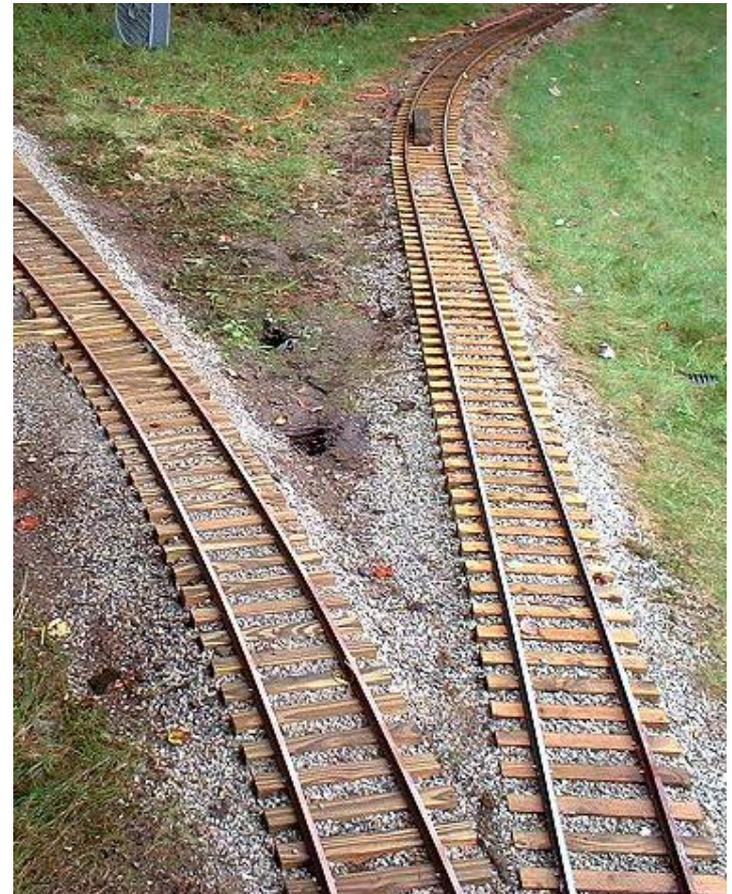
Strong links to jobs & strong educational pathways

- In general, these pathways work well
- Need to be supported by occupational & licensing bodies
- Educational bodies work with accrediting bodies
- Not problem free



Strong links to jobs & weak educational pathways

- Pathways will remain weak while occupational pathways are weak
- Vocational streams offer potential
- Work with occupational & professional bodies
- Broader idea of pathways



Weak links to work & strong educational pathways

- Prepare for broad vocational stream & emphasise educational transition
- In Australia, business FoE doesn't support low SES students



Weak links to jobs & weak educational pathways

- Until VET moves away from competencies & exclusive vocational focus, pathways will be weak
- In universities, pathways need to be diverse, in vocational fields – often tacit
- Not ‘vocationalise’ qualification, but offer explicit advice



Conclusion

- Policy needs to be differentiated
- Recognise qualifications serve diverse purposes
- Emphasis will vary depending on whether qualifications used as screening or signalling device
- Capabilities approach – conceptual basis for qualifications that links work & education

