# Webinar with NCSEHE Research Fellow Maria Raciti

## *Career construction, future work and the perceived risks of going to university for young people from low SES backgrounds*

16 August 2019

SUE TRINIDAD: Welcome to this webinar, Career construction, future work and perceived risks or going to university for young people from low SES backgrounds. It will be presented by Associate Professor Maria Raciti from the University of the Sunshine Coast. I am Sue Trinidad, the director of the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education.

Some quick housekeeping points. To activate the closed captions, notice that there is a CC button on the tool bar that's either located at the bottom are the top of your screen. To increase the number of lines appearing in the caption box, click on the small arrow on the top right hand side of the caption box and if you do have any technical difficulties, please email admin@adcet.edu.au.

This presentation will run for around 40 minutes and then we will have time for questions after, about 10 to 15 minutes. Throughout the presentation please feel free to enter your questions into the chat pod. You have the option to share your questions and comments with the entire audience by selecting all panellists and attendees. And your questions and comments will be read out at the end of the webinar.

So I wanted to start with some background to Maria's research. So during 2018 and 2019, the National Centre supported Maria to conduct a research fellowship project examining the relationships between perceived risk and university participation for low socioeconomic status students. Today Maria's going to provide us with an overview and her key findings and include the university participation decision making model comparing the influence of perceived risk on students from low SES backgrounds with those from other SES backgrounds and identifying specific areas for widening participation interventions.

Maria uses marketing tools and techniques for the greater good, being in the active pursuit of equity, social justice and betterment and her main research areas are social marketing and widening participation in higher education. So we've been very pleased to have Maria as an Adjunct Fellow this year and also she's been a part of the 2019 departmental task force with the Australian Government Department of Education and Maria is the Principal Fellow of the Higher Education Academy in the UK and was also the 2018 Research Fellow with us here at the National Centre and is co-leader of two Indigenous research groups at the USC, University of Sunshine Coast.

Now I'm going to hand you over to Maria. Thank you, Maria.

MARIA RACITI: Thank you for that introduction, Sue. Welcome, everybody. I really appreciate you joining me this afternoon. So I'm going to give you an overview today of my Fellowship project. The two key findings that came out of it, one were the number of perceived risks identified as well as the model so I'm hoping you will get a lot out of it and there's a lot of information you can start to think about how we can operationalise it to make a difference.

As you can see from the title, the focus was around really what's happening in the 21st century. We know these days that we live in uncertain times, we know more and more that students, particularly those from low SES backgrounds were not considering going to university, were not going to university, it's a very complex, emotional and quite a protracted decision process.

So what we're starting to see these days is not only making occupational decisions is more complex than it has been in the past but there's a great deal of uncertainty about future work. What work will there be in five or ten years' time? Will my preferred occupation still be there? And so in particular with low SES families, often with people being the first in their family to go to university, what they're looking for is a clear line of sight between doing a degree and entry into a preferred occupation.

Now, what we're seeing is in the 21st century that clear line of site is becoming more muddy and hard to establish because of changes.

What the reports are starting to tell us is jobs in the future are more likely to need a university education and so looking at this from an equity point of view, what this suggests is that we really do need to accelerate efforts in widening participation, in order to avert the deepening of social in equalities. Some international research is becoming quite concerned in this space that we're going to see a greater gap, if you like, between those who are well off and those who are not.

So what we're seeing at the moment is that there's a great deal more career speculation, perhaps when you watch TV or in the news recently there's been discussions about new jobs emerging or new occupations and what future work might look like. We've heard a lot about the gig economy and some jobs will be made redundant. What we're start to go see is it's starting to fuel uncertainty about whether to go or not to go to university and a big concern there is will this degree actually help me get a job? Will this actually lead to the outcome that is I'm after?

So we know making career decisions, it's always been complex but it's becoming more and more complex because of this uncertainty, because of this interplay where future work. We don't have a crystal ball so we're not really sure what's going to happen. So for a student from a low SES background, this suddenly adds weight to the decision.

So more occupations exist now than have in the past. There's hundreds and indeed one report said that there's over 1,000 occupations that exist today in Australia. So what the marketing literature tells us is that when we're faced with too many choices we actually don't make a decision at all. We become confused and we experience what's called decision paralysis. So this perhaps is something that we're starting to see while on one hand we have all these possibilities and all these options for young people, the fact is that paradoxically, having so many options is actually making it more difficult to make a choice.

So with future work, and sometimes it's referred to as industry 4.0, or similar sort of digital Darwinism and things like that, be but what it's really telling us is that work is changing around us and it's actually a lot of the predictions are suggesting that the labour market and work will look very different by 2025 and indeed by 2030. So for those students who are currently in school, this is something that's very real to their decision making.

So what some of the literature is talking to us about is the rise of the gig economy. So instead of having a full time job, going from short term contract to short term contract, much like freelancing, we're hearing a lot about job automation and how some careers we have at the moment may be taken over by artificial intelligence or people working with robots and the like. And we're hearing more and more about career mini cycles. So for our current students in secondary school, they might be planning or may experience, maybe not planning but experience seven or eight different careers, not just jobs but careers, in their lifetime.

So what we're seeing here, this comes from the work of Savickas is what he calls the erosion of the grand script. In the past there was a sense of predictability. You went to school, you picked a career, you went to university and you got a job in that preferred occupation. What he's saying is this grand script is starting to be eroded and it's reducing our sense of security and so as a part of that, people are starting to, I guess, question or be unsure if going to university will actually give them access to the occupation they want and in fact, if that occupation will exist in its current form or in a slightly different form when they finish their degree.

So this is the instability or the uncertainty.

So what we're starting to see here is that it's becoming harder for young people to plan ahead and young people and their families and communities around them as well because the experiences of their parents and cousins or uncles and aunties is quite different to what the current generation are experiencing.

So becoming harder and harder to plan ahead, to actually say what they want to do, lots of choices, perhaps too many choices, and also multiple pathways of what should I do? Should I go or should I not go?

So as a result of this, we're seeing young people who also have underdeveloped decision making skills being faced with a complex decision and a multitude of opportunities and having to work through the sea of information.

So for some of them, going to university is, in fact, a giant leap of faith going forward.

So what we know is that the risk is amplified for people from low SES backgrounds. What we know from the literature is that young people from low SES backgrounds have fewer sources from which we can gather information about careers and understand different types of careers or even just have exposure to all the options that are out there. So that's really the impetus of this project was about understanding this really sort of contemporary context, where things are going in the next five to ten years and also understanding this, I guess, from the lens of a young person at the moment, someone who is perhaps making the decision do I go to university or not.

So for a young person, this really represents a dilemma and we've seen that in countless research popping up. Young people today, very much see this idea, if I go on to the OP path and senior high school, what opportunities are ahead or should I stay with the non OP pathway when I go into high school and what opportunities lay ahead with that.

The reason they see it as a dilemma is because of the streaming process. Most students in year 10 around the country at the moment in term 3, are making their choices about what subjects to do in senior high school and they will determine whether or not they're on the ATAR pathway or non ATAR pathway. The reason it's a dilemma is because they're mutually exclusive. Do I choose one are the other? If I choose one it means I'm excluded from the other.

We know there are opportunities for people to jump between the streams in senior high school but we also know that very, very few people take up that opportunity.

So the reason it's a decision dilemma as well is that often it faces people and their families at a much younger age. We tend to think about the decision to go to university as something that happens in Year 11 and 12 when in fact the decisions start to be made in junior high school and middle high school.

So what's happening with the decision to go or not to go to university is that it is actually a complex decision. You've got young people with underdeveloped decision making skills being faced with a dilemma and unsure about what to do. They have fewer sources of information and therefore they're not their ability to make an informed decision is sort of constrained as a result of that.

What we know is when we're faced with complex decisions, you might think about this for yourself, we respond to it in different ways. So the literature often talks about this notion of risk.

What they often say is we have different levels of tolerance for risk. Some of us are risk seekers. We see a challenge and we don't need all the information and will pursue it. Others are risk neutral where we make a balanced decision based upon the risk versus the reward, the possible gains that we might get out of it and other people are risk averse, where they're more hesitant about the decision going forward. So when faced with career uncertainty, uncertain job prospects you can see that risk starts to play a factor in the decision of whether to go or not to go to university.

In this particular area, I came across an alternative point of view that I hadn't seen. A lot of the literature talks about the choice to go to university or not to go to university as pretty much dependent on two big factors being aspiration and people's academic ability. But I came across this reference and it was, I thought, really presented an alternative point of view in that people from low SES backgrounds, that this decision is actually a rational pragmatic strategy of risk avoidance rather than a lack of aspiration and talent and that really corroborates with a lot of recent research which is increasingly showing us that it's not necessarily about aspiration, but in fact there's high aspiration but there are other barrier that is are preventing it going forward.

So building these things together gave the focus for this particular project.

So I did a bit of a deep dive into risk. There's a lot of work on risk from a lot of different discipline areas where I've got a few there. Vocational psychology talks about risk, consumer behaviour, services, marketing, behavioural economics, and the decision making literature which is really quite a dense body of literature.

What they're all saying is a relatively same thing that we know that all human endeavours carry some level of risk. We know that people generally fall into one of three categories with how they handle risk, risk averse, risk neutral or risk seekers. We know what concerns them, the specific types of risk can take lots of different forms.

I was interested in how risk comes into the decision making process of current secondary school students and their parents in making the decision to go to university or not in the light of future work and in the light of the way we construct careers today is very different to how it has been in the past.

So with this project, as I move through it, the methodology included three studies. I really wanted to stand on the shoulders of giants and learn from what was already out there so, of course, there was a comprehensive lit review that sat behind it as well.

So with the first study, this was a systematic content analysis of grey literature. This included Australian newspapers and other published online reports as well as other reports. In the year that I was doing this was actually quite a lot of reports that came through. A grand total of about 990 items were pulled and then from those 396 form the final set of grey literature that we looked at.

So with the grey literature, in particular, I was looking at relevance or reference to different types of concerns or risks that people from low SES backgrounds and their parents and families were pointing to that were actually starting to complicate the decision to go to university. I was interested in the grey literature as well because I was after that contemporary sort of finger on the pulse, what are people talking about now? What's grabbing the attention of the Australian public, of Australian families?

The second study that followed this was a thematic analysis of a large NPP project that was recently completed and there was a large volume of qualitative data that came from that. That data was really rich. It included data and interviews with secondary school students, with school staff, including principals and other staff leaders such as careers advisers. It also included interviews and information from university outreach project managers and university students as well.

So with multiple stakeholders and the recency of that data, I basically went through it again to see for mention of different types of risks that were occurring and how the idea of future work was playing into this.

The third stirred was where I collected primary data. So this was a national quantitative survey of students and parents. In particular it was looking at students aged 15 years and over 15 years to about 18 years who are in years 10, 11 and 12. So in that real decision making part of the process I was able to get a national sample with all States and Territories represented, about equal gender ratios as well, and with this particular study, because I was focused upon understanding what exactly was the difference between low SES students' decision making and other SES students' decision making, the sample included these two groups.

So with students, I had 561 school students in total in terms of the useable sample and of those, about 275 were from low SES backgrounds and about 286 were from other SES backgrounds. So I thought it was really important in developing a model that was actually going to test the points of parity and the points of difference between socioeconomic status.

With the parents, this was also a really rich part of the study was to actually understand the perceptions of parents who had school students who were currently in Year 10, 11 and 12, so 15 plus. 15 years plus. So this was really interesting because it threw up some interesting findings as well. So with the parents of secondary school students it was about the same. I had a bigger sample of 616, again, a national sample, again, about equal in terms of representation across the country and in terms of gender and a number of other characteristics included in it with high SES and low SES.

There were two research objectives. The first one was to understand what exactly are the specific risks concerning for young people from low SES backgrounds and the second part was to build a model, develop a model and also to test that model to see the differences between low SES and other SES.

So this is the first key findings which links to that first research objective. And what this idea was, was these were the 10 common types of risk that popped up through the three studies. So the first two had mention of them and then the third one confirms what they looked like in terms of how they were perceived by both school students as well as their parents.

So the first type of risk there is what's called functional and future work risk. So this the thinking that, as and I say it I will use the sentiment of the young person in this, what's the likelihood that this university degree will actually do what it promises? Will it give me access to my preferred occupation and will it give me those skills that I need for success in that occupation?

So this is an often one of the more common discussions: is going to university worth it? Will I get to where I want to go? And as I mentioned right at the beginning, it's because of this need for a clear line of sight between undertaken a degree and getting into a preferred occupation. So very pragmatic, very sensible but obviously becoming more clouded with future work.

The second one along was about financial and resource risk, another common barrier that's discussed in the literature. So it wasn't just about the monetary cost but it was that general affordability and having access to resources that would enhance success at university. That might be equipment or technology or textbooks or even just the internet that are needed to help students do well.

Psychological types of risk also emerge. These are personal fears that students had, and their parents saw their children had, about the risks of going to university. Often this was just a fear that they might not be smart enough, that they might not be able to understand the concepts that they can't keep up. So this type of risk was quite deep seated and people still talked about it but it wasn't as commonly talked about as the first two.

Social risk we also hear a fair bit about in the WP literature which is that concern about fitting in and belonging, finding a friend, making a friend at university and that can have a big impact, particularly if they're the first in their family to go to university and even if they're going to a university where they may not know other people as well. So that sense of fitting in was a very big part of the concerns that young people had.

Now remember, young people in the sample that this came from, so we're talking about 15 year olds, we're talking about young people, so for them, social risk is a big deal.

And the next risk along was physical and wellbeing risk. So this was about that sense of personal safety, not just on campus but also travelling to and from campus. In other projects and other research had heard, for example, concerns about catching the train, about classes being scheduled late at night or early in the morning and that the person, particularly being young, they're going to university straight after school, concerns about their personal safety.

But also this was about the impact of the stress of study on their wellbeing and the impact that that can have. We know from QILT data, for example, that stress and wellbeing is one of the biggest reasons for drop out from university.

The next risk along was time loss. Now this was a really interesting one because it was this sense of is this the best use of my time? What I found fascinating with this was stories about people concerned that they won't get a full time job at the end of their degree and so whether there was something else that they could do to build their skill set and their knowledge set in the interim, that would actually have got them to the place they wanted to be as well.

So this is where that grand script sort of idea came in.

Competency actually popped up a bit and it sort of is a bit linked to gap years, people making the decision to defer or take a gap year. And a part of the competency risk was that that concern was losing momentum. So if they took a gap year or two, that they would lose the motivation, the momentum and even the skills, study skills to go on and do well at university. So this was a bit of a concern. Some people were exhausted, they wanted to take a gap year or had to take a gap year for other reasons. So taking a gap year, in and of itself posed a number of perhaps unintended consequences in terms of their competency, they felt.

Social class identity. Probably one of my most fascinating ones because this was new. Very little has been written about this in the literature and it did pop up again. It's often not talked about because it tends to be quite painful and, well, psychosocially painful. When people talked about risks, they talked about the socially sort of acceptable things to talk about functional and financial but what social class identity risk was is this idea that in order to go to university to uplift their socioeconomic status, to get a job in a preferred occupation, a profession, that by doing so they'd have to give up their current sort of identity as a low socioeconomic person.

There was just that view that people who go to university are “snobby”, that they've got tickets on themselves, that if they go to university that they wouldn't be accepted back by their peer group or their families as a result of changing. So there was this real tension between pursuing a profession and a higher socioeconomic status and feeling a connection to their family as well.

The next one was economic cost. We know students have lots of opportunities in terms of what they have after school. What was really interesting here was a finding that I hadn't come across before which is a view by some young people that if they wanted to go into a degree they thought they could get work experience or a job, entry level job at the end of school while they were young, 17, 18, and they'd only get paid junior rates but that would make them more employable and more attractive to an employer. They thought that this was a way to get their toe in the water to see if the occupation or the industry they were interested in was really for them. They felt that perhaps if they went to university and then graduated with a degree in three or four years' time they'd have to be paid adult rates of work and that would make them less attractive.

I thought this was again pragmatic, when you look at it, quite a logical way forward but it probably wasn't something I'd seen in the literature before. And overall risk, that general sense of is going to uni risky? This may have reflected a bit of their risk preference.

So the main model that came out of this, used structural equation modelling as a process and the data and a lot of that is detailed in the report but I'd like to present to you the model in its simplified version. In the model it included a number of personal attributes and characteristics. Just to read out a few of them, it included a lot of demographics in this space, so gender, age, and one that I had added in which I hadn't seen a lot before but it kept popping up was about if they had an older sibling who was no longer at school. I popped that in there under demographics to see what happened. It included their location, if they were in an urban, regional or remote environment, if they were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage, what language they spoke at home, if they were a person of disability.

A couple of other factors that came up through the vocational psychology literature, one was about this notion of work volition, which is the belief they have the choice to choose which occupation they want to go into and that they can choose it. About that personal freedom, that sense they could make a decision for themselves.

Another big area that I added in here was what's called adaptability as a characteristic. So, again, the vocational literature talks about adaptability as the key competency that's needed in 21st century decision making in order to navigate not just going to university but to navigate multiple careers, perhaps the gig economy and being flexible to move between different occupations with transferable skills.

I included the personas that were developed in the social marketing widening participation project as well.

So while I've got it quite simply there, there was actually quite a few variables that sat underneath that because I wanted to see the impact that they had.

Now with the decision making model here, I based this off the work of Savickas. A lot of his work talks about career construction in the 21st century and identifies that one of the first steps is what's called the crystallisation of occupational self. This might be something that occurs at the late primary school or perhaps in early high school.

With crystallisation, this is where we start to see ourselves as doing something in an occupation as a worker in a place or being self-employed in a particular place. Where we fit into the world, where our passions lie, where our talents lie and how we can bring those together.

So in the new work that's done in this space, they often say that even when we choose to change a career later in life, we always go back to this first step and we reimagine ourselves and who we are and what we could be. So this is that sort of, I think, that wonderful sort of dreaming time.

The next step along is what they call the exploration of occupation. So this can be formal exploration, looking up occupations, visiting and talking with different workplaces, but it also can just be a heightened awareness. A young person who might be in Year 7 or 8, might just pay attention to certain people in certain occupations. So say they want to be a teacher, they might start to watch their teacher and wonder what a day in their life is like, or what it must be to work in that occupation.

Now you will notice in the type there it says the primary appraisal and the secondary appraisal. This comes from the psychology literature which tells us how we make decisions. When we have a complex decision, like going to university, we go through it in bite sized chunks. We can't just make the decision. Often the first decision we make is this exploration of opportunities and this matching what I like and what I'm good at with what I can do or what's the name of that occupation even that I want to do.

Obviously this exploration for people from low SES backgrounds, you know, there's often that phrase “You can't be what you can't see” and sometimes there's constraints around not knowing the full spectrum of occupations that are out there.

The secondary appraisal is that decision, do I go or do I not go? So I'm going to walk through that now. So these were the findings that came up. First of all, that there are three different types of risk tolerance behaviour that was occurring. There are a lot of risk averse students and what happened was the risk averse students would often be focussing on those 10 perceived risks will the job get me into the occupation I want? Is this the best use of my time? And that tension between social classes. So those types of risks would be factored into their decision and often as a result of that, what might happen is that they would postpone their decision, just meaning they took longer to make the decision because they had to process through all those different types of risks and the myths that might be surrounding those risks and hearing from friends and family and others around them.

Postponing the decision might involve two elements. One is just procrastination and pretending they don't have to make a decision, burying their head in the sand, or the other option is buck passing which is trying to get other people to make the decision or help make the decision for them.

For the risk neutral student, and their family and their parents as well, I must say, this model actually worked for both the parents and the students. I made sure it was compatible across the two. For the risk neutral student, they tended to focus first of all on this idea of whether the university qualification was desirable or essential in order to get access into that occupation. So obviously for some things in order to practice psychology, to be a teacher, to be an accountant you have to go to university to get that degree to gain entry into that occupation. At universities there's also a number of degree that is are desirable, that will enhance opportunities to get a job in that space.

But this was their first focus, was the risk neutral person really had that pragmatic, “Do I have to … do I want to go?” Often what would happen here in this second part was shortcutting the decision. That's because young people in this space, there's so much information, in fact too much information to process. So shortcutting just made sense in terms of trying to cut through the clutter and get the information needed.

So sometimes what they would use and sometimes what was mentioned through the survey and the other studies, was this notion of it's the natural next step for me. Going to uni was just something that I was always going to do. So that was one of the ways they would shortcut the decision was it's been made already.

Another one was role models. This is where our great student ambassadors, for example, going out to schools and doing outreach come in, presenting seeing role models in their community, student ambassadors being amazing role models in terms of showing people this is what I did and you can do it too, so role models was another way of shortcutting the decision.

A third way of shortcutting the decision for the risk neutral student was what's called un-conflicted change. This is basically the path of least resistance. This is the student that says my mum wants me to or my mum doesn't want me to. My community expects me to and the like.

So what happens here is that there's that sense of expectation, sorry, of other people around them that they use to shortcut the decision process. So, if you like, it's that sense of well, I have to go to university, it's essential for me to get a degree, to get into the preferred occupation I'm after and also people around me are supportive and they want me to go and they think it's a good idea that I go. So this shortcuts the process.

I'll talk about satisficing in a second. I'll put it third one up being the risk seeker. As you can see, the risk seeker, being a risk seeker, bypasses the whole decision making process and goes straight to the end. These are people who will go barrelling straight towards the gate, yep, I don't need to know it — I'm just going. It might be a distinctive or emotional decision or it might be the thrill of the chase, this is a risky way to go so I'm going to have a go.

This last box on the end, “satisficing”. That might be a phrase known to some people. It's a composite of satisfaction and sacrificing. This is where we weigh up the options. We want to get the near enough best option for us. So I will give you an example

A person may want to go to university, say they're risk neutral, they have to go, they know that it's essential for them to get a qualification to work in the area they want to. They've had positive feedback and expectations that they go, but because of costs and other things, what they might do is make decisions where they find the next best or the closest fit. So they may have a preferred university but instead they may choose a campus or a university that's closer to home in order to help any financial costs or social risk costs they might have.

Another thing that may happen here is they may not get the ATAR or entry into their preferred degree so they take the closest to or the near enough to degree. So perhaps they want to get into psychology but they don't quite make the ATAR so they will go into a similar occupation or something like social work where they know that it's highly related to that material.

So that is what satisficing is, it's that decision making at the end of how close can I get to this, what's the nearest way.

There's three different types of risk tolerance that exist there for low SES students as well as other SES students. Just interpreting the risk averse, the general view is that university is perceived as, generally speaking, threatening, that can do more harm than good so they want to know more and unpack all the options and myth busting is really important here. This is where university outreach is really key.

The other is the risk neutral where university is perceived as a challenge. They know it won't be easy but they also know it will be worth it so have a more balanced view of what lays ahead for them. And the risk seeker is called benign positive, where it's a very optimistic view that only good will come from this, what could possibly go wrong?

As you can see with all of them, they're all a little bit different but this is the nature of the low SES students that are coming through to university. I thought it was quite an interesting way to look at the way they approach risk.

Three key conclusions and recommendations that emerged from this was, first of all, those 10 types of risks, that secondary school students from low SES backgrounds perceive. And this will influence their decision whether they go or not.

Now there's something that we can all do in this space, including upstream. By upstream I mean government at State and national levels. And by midstream, in the second one, mostly schools and universities as well as community groups and employers even can have an influence in this space.

So we know that going to university poses a number of risks. So for upstream stakeholders, they might be able to embed resources into existing websites, for example, like the QILT website by adding even a tab that talks about resources for parents, even. These are the common concerns that people have or for students, these are the common concerns that students have about going to university, about not making friends, about how well they will get along and it might give them some very practical tips about how they can learn or find out about that.

If they're not sure about the content, you know, encouraging, for example, to go onto a university website and looking at the course outline that's there for the introductory course, just to give them a sense of what might be covered and what content's in there.

Importantly for parents, this is a good way for the parents to also understand what lays ahead because parents, particularly those, well, the students who are First-in-Family, and really don't know what lays ahead. They want to help very much and they want to do the best by their child. So it might help them a lot as well to have dedicated resources for them.

For schools, universities and other midstream stakeholders, it's really about that co-design process to help myth bust with students.

Walking them through it and really focusing on the notion of making an informed decision. So, that's really a key part of it here because you've got young people with underdeveloped decision-making abilities faced with a dilemma, uncertain about what the future may hold and so it can be quite a scary place. It's about making that informed decision.

The next one along, the second conclusion, was that low SES secondary school students respond to the dilemma of going to university or not in a different way. So this is those three different types of the risk averse, the risk neutral and the risk seeker. So for upstream stakeholders this might be about acknowledging the different types and embedding, for example, chatbots or the quizzes, like in joboutlook.gov.au, for example, about risk profile to help people understand themselves a little bit here, to recognise, for example, if they're a risk averse person that there's other ways that they can process through making this informed decision.

I think just that bit of self-awareness, also for the parents as well, one of the big findings that came out was that parents very much underestimate all of the risks and concerns that their child has. So they're aware that they're worried, but they're not aware of the spectrum and breadth and depths of those concerns. As I mentioned, some of those concerns like social identity risk are ones that people don't really talk about or perhaps don't even know it's a thing or perhaps haven't even sort of consciously connected with that. They might talk about others but not necessarily the full spectrum of them.

So for midstream stakeholders, schools and universities, this would be around looking at widening participation initiatives, for the risk averse, risk neutral and risk seeking. For example, with the risk seeking student, it may be around slowing them down a little bit and saying "Hey, we know you're really keen." Sometimes risk seekers jump steps. "Let's go back a bit and make sure we've got all the ducks in a row." So that might be the approach with the risk seeking student.

For the risk averse student, very much along that myth busting approach and in some ways drawing out for the students that all human endeavours involve some level of risk and this is no different and they're obviously in front of one of the bigger decisions, if not the first big decision that young people will be making in their lives.

The last one, the perspectives of parents of low SES students are different. I felt that I had proven the obvious, that parents weren't really aware of what was going through the minds of their school student. And perhaps part of this is that the young person themselves can't articulate well what they're feeling and what they're going through as well. But what we can do here is very much that parent dedicated resources to help parents help their child. So it's helping the helper.

I think a really important one because a lot of the big websites often will have a “for students” tab and resources but not necessarily a “for parents” tab and resources available on their website or digital resources.

This also means at the midstream level for schools and universities that the material they create or develop for parents in terms of WP needs to be substantially different to that which is delivered to students. There may be that sense of reusing the student material for parents and framing it slightly different but there for the parent, making them more aware of the full spectrum of concerns that their child may have and then ways that they can start those conversations, or perhaps even having parent/child sort of co-design workshops, if you like, to help the parents work with the child through those things and, I guess, have a greater understanding of where each is at and what lays ahead.

So this brings it to an end, the general summary of the project. In the report itself the model is explained in a lot more detail. There's quite a few variables that are included there but I hope today that gave you a nice overview of the two big findings, ten different types of risk and you can have a look at the model. Thank you.

SUE TRINIDAD: Thank you very much, Maria. And yes, you will find Maria's a full report and a summary report on our website and that's the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education or NCSEHE. We will provide all that information to you.

There will also be the recording as well as the presentation put up to the website.

I'm now going to hand you over to Darlene who will take us through the question and answer section. Darlene.

DARLENE McLENNAN: Afternoon, everybody, or morning wherever you are today. I'm Darlene McLennan, manager of ADCET. We've had a number of questions coming through. If you have any questions for Maria, put them there. One question that came through is what are some of your thoughts regarding the role of community and industry and what they play in feeding and nurturing educational aspiration?

MARIA RACITI: I think absolutely fundamental to this, particularly in rural, regional and remote areas. An untapped resource and resource where I think industry and a lot of community groups want to get involved in but perhaps don't know how and perhaps that's up to winding participation, university providers and schools to actually reach out to them as a resource and bring them in. I think that there's a lot of good will out there and a lot of interest. It's just a matter of, I guess, finding a pathway to encourage that.

So, for example, young people in that middle or junior high school, to understand the range of occupations right there in their home town. So, particularly in regional and remote areas, and very remote areas, sort of getting a sense of well, what is it, because often the saying is can't be what you can't see but perhaps they're just not aware of the spectrum of, you know, types of employment that exists right there where they live.

DARLENE McLENNAN: Excellent. There's a question around work experience. So how important do you think work experience is in schools and show the model students start to explore occupations. You gave the example of a student looking at teachers closely if they think about that for their job in the future, so careers lower socioeconomic students may be limited, therefore opening up opportunities for students to experience different authentic roles would be important to inform risk. It could be that work experience is lost in schools at the moment. What's your thoughts on work experience?

MARIA RACITI: Absolutely valuable as it is in universities. There's obviously impetus around employability but very much so for long people. It's perhaps providing those opportunities. There's limitations around what schools can do but maybe there can be formal or informal ways that work experience can be provided. But I think absolutely essential in the 21st century to get some sort of stronger sense.

As I said at the beginning, for some students it's very much a leap of faith that I want to be an architect but I don't really know what they do but it sort of looks OK and I think it would fit with me. So very much work experience would help to cement that decision making and I think, I guess, alleviate any doubt or most doubt, perhaps, going forward.

A key part of this, too, might also be when universities are doing their outreach, to consider a broader range of degrees that they talk about. Sometimes they talk about the big degrees, you know, nursing and business and engineering or perhaps they will pick degrees that seem very relevant to that particular location. But I think it's also important, too, to show the breadth of opportunity that exists out there. So it might be fashion and design, for example, which some universities teach, which a young person may not know so much about.

But look, I don't think we can underestimate the power and the importance of work experience. So what we know, too, is obviously people from low SES backgrounds have fewer of these the social capital. So fewer friends and family to draw onto provide, to ask your friend can you give my child some work experience or opportunity. So schools are really key here in terms of making the connections and helping make the links. And I think work experience earlier in junior high school would be particularly helpful to let students explore the opportunities or possibilities that are around them.

DARLENE McLENNAN: Did you, in your Fellowship, have a look at the way schools discussed uni pathways?

MARIA RACITI: I didn't specifically focus on it but the Qualitative Study 2, that particular that was a national priority, large study and that there was a lot of discussion around how the interface between schools and universities and how well, or areas that does it really well and ways that it can improve as well. But I think more cross-sector discussion can only help in this space and I think schools want to talk more with universities, universities want to talk more with schools and I think that, you know, we've already got that but I think we need to evolve it a little bit further. And particularly in regional, rural and remote areas, making sure that these connections are being made so that a young person knows that they have a choice — that they can go to university if they want to.

DARLENE McLENNAN: Someone's just asked for you to just expand a little bit more on the parent perspective of your Fellowship. Is there any other things you wanted to focus on or talk about?

MARIA RACITI: The interesting part was when I ran the model with parents and I compared it with low SES parents. There was not a single path that was the same. Parents really do think differently.

One of the biggest things I found with students, for example, is they will do that first step, crystallisation of the occupational self, so crystallising who they want to be but they will move more slowly to exploring the occupation than a student from another or middle or higher SES background. So what we noticed was the parents didn't notice that. So the parents weren't aware of it and that's perhaps the discussion in the household, bigger things happening in the household than that.

So perhaps a part of it here may be alerting parents with children in senior high school that kids are starting to think about this now and maybe it's time to prompt some conversation around it as well. When I ran it, it was quite amazing how the paths that were very significant for students were not at all for parents. The biggest point of difference was that the parents didn't understand the breadth and depth, how worried or how concerned their risk averse child was. They may have known the child was risk averse, personality wise, but they didn't quite realise all the possible things that were going through their minds that was concerning them. As a result of that, weren't able to help at the point when they needed to.

The other thing that popped up for parents, amongst the different types of risk, was personal safety with transport to and from uni. A lot of the times we think the biggest issue is logistics getting accommodation if they're relocating, for example, but particularly in inner and outer regional, if young people were catching a train or a bus and classes were scheduled in the evening, which many are increasingly now, in the evening or at odd times, the concern about the young person, particularly trains, catching a train, there and home, for some that concern was so great that they there was a sense of trying to discourage their child from going to uni because of the fear for their safety.

DARLENE McLENNAN: So talking about risk, then, the risk to finance, like the cost of degrees, was that a risk for parents or students or both? Was there a difference in that?

MARIA RACITI: Yeah, for both of them and I think a part of that, sort of in reflection and looking at the other literature is because often at that young age, they're presented with the costs. This is how much it will cost you to go to uni but they're not shown the other side of the equation in terms of the benefits you will gain. The graduate gain people will get. People are going in thinking this is going to cost me a lot of money. When you're 15, $100 is a lot of money. When you're talking about $30,000 plus textbook and relocation. We've got to put ourselves in the shoes of these young people and go what lays ahead for them.

It was a concern for both of them and in both cases it was trying to unpack exactly what the costs would be. Lots of myths out there either spread by students amongst students or perhaps incorrect information being given or a lot of the times with the younger ones it was just that they'd heard that it was expensive. They hadn't actually unpacked it or explored it to say this is what HECS is and this is what it looks like so I know when you talk to people on the other side of the equation they're saying it's the best loan you can get and these types of things but to a young person from low SES, they're seeing a cost but they're not seeing the benefit so they're not seeing the gain that they will get over their lifetime.

But even in terms of the satisfaction of working in an occupation that they're passionate about, that lines up. So it's not always just about the money.

DARLENE McLENNAN: There's quite a number of questions and we're not going to get to them all in the next few minutes. So are you happy, Maria, to answer the questions and the National Centre will make those available?

MARIA RACITI: Sure, no problems.

DARLENE McLENNAN: One question to finish on before I hand over to Sue is what about career advice in school? I mean, you know, often an ebb and flow of when that should start within schools. Is there anything in your Fellowship suggestions around where career education should start within schools?

MARIA RACITI: Probably the earlier the better and that it's appropriate for the age and stage. So for Years 5 and 6, if you like, the senior end of primary school, it might be very simple because if they're at that stage of crystallising, it might be just helping them to sort of, you know, because really it's that dreaming phase. It's what could I be? Or I could be this or that. It's probably important at that stage to make sure that the horizon is broad in terms of have you heard of different types of jobs, there's these ones and those ones as well.

Generally at that senior primary school is a really good place to start it but very much the career advice should be age and stage appropriate and programmatic, not just ad hoc. For example, resources can be an issue in schools as well in that students, I guess, are walked from Year 7, 8, 9, 10 up to that sort of decision that they're given opportunities to explore who they are and what they want to become. So they've moved from crystallisation to exploration and really it's about helping them make the decision.

Once they get into Year 10 it's more about the decision process itself and then outreach that might occur or career advice that might occur in years 11 and 12 is more about affirmation. Because people start to doubt themselves when they get into Year 11 and 12, did I make the right choice? So marketing, it's what we call post purchase dissidence. They're wanting that affirmation that you've done the right thing, you're on the right path, you've got this. And that might be the focus too.

So there's obviously an information part but there's also like a bit of a psychological pattern as people move through those stages. And really, in Year 12 in those senior years, outreach might be focused more around the more concrete things of this is what a bursary is. We use those terms bursary and scholarships but people might not know what they are or might think they're only for people who achieved academically but there might be other ones available for them.

DARLENE McLENNAN: We've run out of time. The questions have been fantastic and there's some really good ones. The webinar has been recorded and the presentation webinar will be made available through the National Centre. I'll hand over to you, Sue, to finish up.

SUE TRINIDAD: I would really like to acknowledge Jane and Darlene from ADCET for all their work behind the scenes and fielding the questions here to make this webinar a great success and thank you, Maria, for a wonderful presentation. We've been very lucky to be able to support your Research Fellowship which has allowed us to know a lot more about the relationship between the perceived risks and university participation of low SES students.

As I said previously, all of this is available on our website. So if you go to the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education, type that in, our website will come up and we will have the recording and presentation up there as soon as possible.

Thank you, Maria, and thank you, everyone, for your participation. Have a good weekend.