

# FUTURE PROOFING AUSTRALIA'S YOUNG PEOPLE



*Career Pathways for the workforce for the future*

Discussion Paper  
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**SPARROWLY  
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## **Disclaimer**

Sparrowly Group is a national management consultancy that works across industries including education, training, community development and community services, tourism and agriculture in a strategic consulting and mentoring capacity.

We do not claim to be experts in the field of education, but rather, hope that this discussion paper may help in raising awareness and opportunities that create meaningful and accessible career pathways for young people. This piece is to be used as a guide only, with recommendations and additional readings provided. As this is a discussion paper, the intent is to ensure it is kept dynamic and current. It is therefore updated regularly with additional examples and research including additional interviews undertaken throughout the year.

## **Acknowledgements**

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## **Methodology**

The purpose of this discussion paper was to understand how the education system together with parents and carers, the government, and industry can provide better guidance to young people on their early career journey. The focus of this discussion paper is Australia only. Both primary and secondary research included, but wasn't limited to social listening, survey, industry interviews, attendance at conferences, and online learning (webinars and discussion forums).

# ABSTRACT

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On average, we have between five and seven careers, and 19 jobs in our lifetime. With our technology and working environments moving at unprecedented speed, we need to revisit the career advisory system and rethink the way we prepare young people for the new world of work.

Our ageing career advice faces growing challenges in the modern landscape. It relies heavily on our educators who are time poor, under supported, and often lack career experience outside the education sector. Students are given a heavy responsibility to proactively seek advice and work experience, with the guidance on offer often falling short of what is needed, while being provided too late and yet, concluding too soon. Parents' expectations can be unrealistic, while their influence is shown to be the greatest in the career planning process.

At its core, our current system is based on the concept of a single and specific career path. This idea is quickly fading with the emergence of artificial intelligence, digitalisation, big data, machine learning and automation but especially since the global COVID-19 pandemic. In a world of exponential change, we cannot apply yesterday's thinking to today's employment landscape.

As our future workforce is staring at an uncertain future in the face of a global crisis, to adequately prepare young people is our job as citizens and it requires new levels of collaboration between students, parents, schools and industry. We need to work together to advocate for new ways of supporting the education-to-workforce transition. This might include contemporary concepts of industry-led engagement, on-demand and future-focused learning, lifelong learning, career development (as opposed to career planning), human-centric skills, the role of the "elders of our society", skills passports, learning journals, and the formation of self.

This white paper starts a meaningful and constructive discussion that is pegged to grow. It considers some of the current challenges alongside the growing opportunity to rebuild meaningful and impactful systems whereby we, as a society, can more effectively support young people and create a better workforce for the future.

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# INTRODUCTION

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In a world of exponential change, we cannot apply yesterday's traditional school-to-workforce pathway to today's employment landscape.

## Why?

Society and industry are ever evolving and undeniably, the workforce environment will further evolve in ways we cannot yet foresee with the widespread adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) and technology.

Perhaps the biggest disruption to date for this generation has been the COVID-19 pandemic. This has pegged in history the starting point for fundamental change. Global disruption on a scale never seen before has upended the way we work and travel.

With the impacts of COVID-19, and the emergence of Industry 4.0 and the Gig Economy, how can we support school leavers in transitioning to the workforce, and how can we bridge the gap between the workforce and education environments to create a better workforce for the future?

The nature of work has fundamentally shifted towards temporary, contractual and project-specific roles. This shift is fast-making predictability, and in many instances, job security, a thing of the past.

However, it is not just technical skills but also human-centric skills that will drive our workforce forward. A cohesive combination of these skills is fundamental for both employer and employee.

Australia is not the only country struggling with the career pathway conundrum. Ahead of the National Careers England Summit in London, FE News published an article stating "Less than the cost of a cup of coffee is being spent on providing career advice to young people in our schools and colleges". A report published at the National Careers England Summit in London supported this claim which revealed that schools in England are unable to provide young people with the careers advice and guidance they need despite 84% of them "strongly agreeing" or at least "agreeing" that careers provision in their schools is now a high priority.

It is clear that career pathway support for young people is complex and there is no one-size-fits-all model. NCVET (2015) reported that there are varying levels of disadvantage to navigate (i.e. barriers to equal participation, success in education, and entry into labour markets). Such things as socio-economic landscape, geographical isolation, indigenous status, disability, mental health and linguistic and cultural diversity all impact an individual's career path. Supporting our young people is not just the responsibility of schools and parents, but rather a broader and more integrated requirement from all 'elder' influences.

The process of initiating such support needs to begin at a much younger age.

Quite often, the finger is pointed at the school to take the responsibility of career pathway support. However, if we are to create a better workforce, this has to be a collaborative effort between students, parents, schools and industry to advocate for direct and indirect career pathway programs. It is only as a collective voice that we can truly support young people and promote a more integrated career pathway approach with educators, schools and governments.

There is no silver bullet. Currently, many great programs exist across Australia to support young people in their career choice but access to them can be sporadic or limited.

The inspiration behind this paper is to start a more meaningful and constructive conversation with those that can influence career pathway support for young people. It is also to help young people become more aware of what is available to them and encourage them to ask for help.

This paper explores the development of career paths, identifies the advisory and support channels available, and provides discussion points on their evolution. Furthermore, it outlines the changes needed in workforce and education environments to effectively support young people in transitioning to the workforce and the next stage of their lives.



# THE TRIANGLE OF INFLUENCE AND DECISION MAKING

Young people and their internal and external influences (parents, caregivers, educators, support workers, part-time job managers, employers, etc.) all need to be taken into account when discussing career pathways. This paper considers this triangle of influence in a young person's decision making.

## The school

### *The gateway to adult independence*

Anecdotal evidence suggests young people feel a sense of overwhelm and anxiety when it comes to career planning. For some, this can be intense and disabling. Considering a career path is one of the biggest decisions a young person faces and it is perceived as an open-ended problem in which they feel unlimited options to grapple with.

#### ***“Which one is ‘correct’ or ‘right’ for me?”***

This decision coincides with changes in development and adolescent life, adding to the overwhelm.

During a young person's childhood, people of influence (parents, caregivers, teachers, peers, coaches) share advice and direction. For many young people, the career path decision is the first time they may have considered themselves. It is a big decision as the gateway to their adult independence and a life of self-made decisions to come.

#### ***“My future rests on this”***

For many young people, this is the first time they have thought about their future, their career and the steps ahead in the transition to their adulthood.

### *The disengagement engine*

Unfortunately, in some instances, by the time the career conversation starts, young people are becoming, or are already, disengaged.

Disengagement is multifaceted. However, for the purpose of this paper, we refer to “disengagement” as being a disengagement with school.

‘*The Children and Young People at Risk of Disengagement Report*’, released by the Commissioner for Children and Young People Western Australia, states that 20% of students have some level of disengagement with school. The report identifies levels of disengagement (with the content, classroom, school and education as a whole) and types of disengagement (behavioural, cognitive and emotional). The report states:



*“ABS data shows that of the 25% who do not complete Year 12, the most common reason for not doing so was because they either got or wanted a job or apprenticeship (35%). A further 25% said it was because they did not like school, and 9% said it was because they did not do well at school.”*

For children and young people, their home and family circumstance is a key driver of disengagement beyond the educational setting. The ability of parents and caregivers to support young people emotionally, physically, socially and economically affects the ability of the young person to engage at school. Research consistently shows that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to experience markers of disengagement. This is important to recognise when considering career path support which needs to be for all young people, whatever their home circumstances may be. Offering the right career path support has the power to positively and significantly impact social issues in Australia today, including social disengagement, unemployment and multigenerational unemployment.

A notable centre of excellence in this area is Bundaberg Regional Youth Hub and its Link and Launch program. Their research shows that industry-led engagement with young people is the most effective way to engage and support their decisions to pursue a life of employment or further education.

## *The role of the career advisor*

Generally, the current broad-brush career pathway process includes:

- A one-to-one meeting for around 30 minutes with a career pathways advisor (or similar).
- A one-off career expo with booths from universities, TAFE and other providers.
- One or two additional lecture-style events for students to attend within the school grounds.
- Work experience.

## *The one to one meeting*

In the current career path process, the student is given the responsibility to seek advice or guidance from a career advisor (or a similar school advisor or representative). This is usually offered to the student during Year 10. The initial encounter includes a short one-to-one meeting, and at times, personality or aptitude tests, a discussion on the test results (and suggested careers), and a brief conversation about their career interests.

After this (brief or oftentimes non-existent) interaction, a young person’s senior school subjects for Year 11 and 12 are committed and the remit of career pathway guidance is concluded. This formalises the final two years of high school study and sets the path for ATAR (or similar) results and thus, what further education is available to the young person.

It is important to highlight the role that all educators have in sharing with their students potential pathways and opportunities. In lieu of the resources for adequate career advisors, it begs the questions, how can career pathways become a part of everyday discussion with students - both informally and informally? And how can department heads keep abreast of what opportunities exist in industry to add to the conversation with students in a more meaningful way?

## *The in-school expo*

The one-off career expo is a great way to introduce options to young people within the school environment. Anecdotal evidence suggests that these expos are heavily dominated by universities, with TAFE and VET options being secondary and often not as well represented as the universities. There needs to be a better balance, with greater representation from industry and other sectors. Additionally, inviting ex-students to expo days could add value by providing a form of peer-to-peer advice from those who have recently made the transition to the workplace and can talk about their personal experience in a meaningful way.

## *Lecture style events*

The effectiveness of the lecture-style events is extremely hard to measure. While this is an important and potentially helpful activity, the impact on young people tends to be short lived (as often this may be the first interaction and the context not understood). It is imperative to ensure that speakers are well researched and vetted, making certain that their content and ideas will translate in the school environment in addition to being part of a broader career pathways support program. This can be achieved by attending other events where the speaker is present and by surveying the student body (not a select few) to understand where their interests currently lie and what sort of jobs they are thinking about for their future. The purpose of these events should be inspirational and help the students see that their skills and interests can be relevant across a broad range of careers. Booking a mix of speakers is important, balancing attainable and real-world experiences with the aspirational ‘world is your oyster’ sentiment. We cannot overlook the impact that a local business person could have in sharing what it is like to run a business and be a part of a team, or an ex-student might have in speaking about their own transition whether it be straight into the workforce, TAFE or university experience.



## *The work experience disconnect*

Mandatory work experience is an extremely controversial element of the career pathway decision-making process, with varying factors for success. With COVID-19 fundamentally changing the way we live and work, naturally it has also impacted the way in which students undertake work experience. This applies across school, tafe and university placements.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic key issues included:

- Students working with family or family friends as a box checking exercise to meet the requirement.
- The suitability and nature of the work experience.
- The needs for greater accountability from the host to ensure the student gets something meaningful from their experience.
- Schools not bothering with work experience due to a bad experience with previous year cohorts.
- Lack of face to face mentorship

Since COVID-19, the list of challenges has grown to include:

- Businesses ability to provide meaningful real world work experiences in a remote working setting.
- The businesses ability to navigate the technical challenges of remote work experience for both the business and the students they host.
- How effective is the work experience if the students don't get the full 'on job' experience.
- The lack of face to face mentorship is further exacerbated by the online environment.

To make this more effective, the employer could be given a worksheet or interview document to complete in partnership with the student during their induction, guiding both host and student to structure the week for success. Likewise, guidance with supporting tools given to the employer from the school on how to host a student, how to get the best out of them and how to provide value for the student and the employer.

While there are some examples of schools that have taken a different approach to career path guidance (explored later in this paper), generally, the process discussed above has been repeated for decades. The reality behind this is that teachers and schools are under-resourced and the development of an integrated and responsive program is difficult to implement without cross-faculty engagement. Therefore, it sits low on the long list of priorities that our educators are entrusted with.

What is evident is the overwhelming need to get students closer to industry while at school and tertiary learning institutions. One example of this is the initiative of the NSW Government RIEP Program which aims to take advantage of local knowledge, skills and networks and boost student interactions with their local industries and business community.

Another fact to explore is that, in many cases, teachers take on the role of career advisor in a secondary capacity alongside their main teaching role. While there are qualifications available, it is not mandatory and often not undertaken due to cost and time. Careers advisors who do not undertake the additional study are given little-to-no training or support in developing advice and programming provided to young people. This, combined with their often limited industry exposure outside the teaching profession, increases the likelihood of student confusion and disconnection in the career planning process (especially

in student populations that are already demonstrating the markers of disengagement). It is difficult to take on the role of a career and workforce advisor when your own experience, as a teacher, is a journey from school to university and back to school. The rate of technological change and the challenges industry faces to evolve at great speed are almost impossible to keep abreast of when you are not involved in this discourse on a daily basis.

In order to undertake the above mentioned career advisory qualifications, you must first be a qualified teacher. These courses have a significant cost, and when added to the cost of completing a teaching degree, price can be a significant deterrent. We have to question the validity of qualifications like this. Additionally, with any course, regardless of cost, completion does not guarantee an ability to do a good job. All roles and jobs require constant guidance, experience, learning and development in which to grow and improve.

With all this considered, today's career advisor often lacks industry workforce experience, provides advisory support in a secondary capacity around their main teaching role, is presented with a financial barrier to entry and lacks support and ongoing mentorship to grow in this role themselves. These challenges increase for those without a teaching qualification.

That said, a growing number of schools are beginning to hire non-teachers into career advisory positions. One school in Victoria has committed to only employing teachers that have 'life experience'. This means they might have traveled, been published, worked outside of the school environment, and can provide interesting and varied perspectives to students.

With the emergence of microcredentials and massive open online courses (MOOCs), it is time to review and reform the career advisory qualifications and cost structures to reduce barriers to entry, particularly for those outside of the education profession. Our education system needs to reflect the thinking that true collaboration and problem solving comes from having a diverse team that can offer different perspectives. Operating in homogenous silos limits our potential.

## *The impossible task*

We have a habit of thrusting the communication of societal changes upon our schools and teachers, tasking them to deliver information, guidance and structure to our youngest generations.

We expect too much from our educators. We give them high expectations and unrealistic workloads. The teachers that we engaged in the creation of this paper all commented that the ATAR is easier to fail than ever before due to the increasingly tough curriculum.

Education experts and employment consultants say the careers advice at secondary schools is failing school students which leads to high university dropout rates and low representation of regional and rural students at university. This problem partly stems from the fact that high schools are being ranked solely on ATAR or equivalent and have little vested interest in whether they are preparing students for successful and fulfilling careers.

Furthermore, giving one teacher in a school the sole responsibility of career advice for hundreds of students each year is adding another impossible task to their list. We cannot expect our teachers and schools to deliver the evolution this process needs on top of their pressing industry and career pressures.

## Parents and caregivers

### *The underestimated role*

Inherently, most parents want what is best for their child. In the context of career paths, there can be a disconnect between what parents think is best, what the child wants and what is well-suited and reasonable.

The role of the parent or caregiver is dramatically underestimated when it comes to career planning for young people as their expectations are an important driver in a young person's decision.

Parents can set unrealistic expectations for their children and react adversely to the choices a young person is considering. For example, some parents do not consider hospitality to be a career choice with future options that they define to be successful. However, the succession plan of a front-of-house role can lead to positions of leadership, such as the general management of a hotel.

Research shows that parents and caregivers have the most influential role when it comes to assisting and providing guidance to their children. This is why devoting time to help the student through phases like self discovery, researching and consultation in partnership with the school (careers advisor, teachers, coaches etc.) and drawing from the support of friends and family across industries is an essential step to helping the child choose a pathway.

### *The research project*

There is a need to let young people compare career paths objectively like a research project. By considering their drivers (likes, dislikes, skills) alongside their potential (to learn) and their interests (attraction to certain roles and industries), young people can begin researching jobs and careers effectively. Parents can be actively involved in supporting young people through this process, undertaking research with their child and providing objective guidance.

### *Objective guidance*

In an interview discussing his latest book, *'The Art of Growing Up'*, John Marsden remarked that the nature of today's parenting is harmful when compared with that of past generations. In turn, the nature of parenting in generations past was harmful in a different way, and so on. He noted that human beings have an intrinsic, ancient and primeval belief that our children are our property. He notes that the process of beliefs, attitudes and opinions being passed from parents to children is what keeps a culture strong through generations. This led to his comment that "many parents are weakened emotionally due to the parenting they received. This is the paradox to parents being able to provide objective advice."

Katherine Martinelli writes it is important, as a parent, to have time to be thoughtful, time to consider and time to sit back. Parents can often be too quick to jump in and try to solve their children's challenges instead of giving them space and time to consider their own solution and options. While there is little research into exactly what is said between parents and children, there is extensive research in parents' expectations and how unmatched this is with young people's ideas and expectations.

## *Expectations and the new world*

If the goal of parents is to raise kind, independent people who can live a prosperous life of their own, why do we not grant them more freedom to learn, explore and discover for themselves? It may be because we do not want them to make the same mistakes that we did. If so, we overlook that it is our mistakes and adventures that bring us to pivotal moments and opportunities to relearn and flourish with resilience, curiosity and fulfillment.

In light of the rapid changes taking place in the nature of work and the future of jobs, there are careers now and careers to come that did not exist before. An Oxford University study concluded that 45% of all jobs will disappear in the next ten years. More than ever, it is critical that parents help young people navigate this changing landscape with more freedom.

In her article *'The Paradox of Pushing Kids to Succeed'*, Lynn Margolies PhD writes, "Ironically, parents' hypervigilance about teens' grades and future success backfires psychologically and academically. When parents are overly invested in performance, kids are less likely to develop their own, more sustainable, motivation."

More attention needs to be paid to the role that schools play in the lives of our young people. Whilst important, the academic performance is only one facet of the overall schooling and education system and 'succeeding' shouldn't be measured purely in academic terms. The aim of the system should be to help young people grow and develop into educated, well-rounded and balanced young adults who have a range of life skills to begin their own life's path.

We need to give our children greater freedom to think, process and solve problems. These first-hand experiences and learnings shape them. Granting them freedom also means letting them define what a successful life looks like, the role their career path might play, and how they can seek that success, supported by parents and other influencers.

A great resource developed by the Queensland Government is the 'Spark Their Future' website. This resource has been developed specifically to give parents tools and resources to help their child transition to life after school.

Another fabulous resource for parents, students and schools is the Study Work Grow website. It provides weekly updates on the latest careers info, university courses and further study options including:

- News about jobs and industries
- New University courses
- Open Days, Info Sessions, and Deadlines
- VET, Apprenticeships, and Traineeships
- Scholarships and Work Experience

## *Redefining success*

Is a successful day having a meal together as a family? Or for a young person to have got through a school day and completed all their critical tasks for tomorrow?

Redefining success as a parent may help in reframing the career path. Teaching young people that a successful life is filled with love and joy and meaningful work that gives back in a range of ways aside from purely financial return could be key to redefining the career path of tomorrow.

The notion or idea of being self-supporting or self sufficient comes into play here. Should we be teaching young people that the goal of all career pathways is to become self-supporting and sufficient? This removes the house, car and picket fence definition of success and brings it back to a more simple concept.

“Self support” is defined in the Oxford Learner’s Dictionary as “having enough money to be able to operate without financial help from other people”. Arguably, it is a universal goal to have enough to pay our bills and live the lives we want. As parents, we want what is best for our children, but at the same time, we need to be careful not to project unattainable pressures and societal success and status symbols on the next generation.

In the book, *‘The Millionaire Next Door’*, Thomas Stanley and William Danko studied the buying habits of the wealthy. They interviewed wealthy people living in large homes and affluent suburbs with expensive cars and found an interesting paradox. The most wealthy (by society’s definition) were the poorest and drowning in debt. The genuinely wealthy lived in modest homes in modest postcodes with modest jobs and displayed behaviours that were money smart.

Instead of focusing solely on academic results, there needs to be a focus on practical life lessons such as financial education (budgeting, tax, compound interest, superannuation) and human-centric skills (listening, being emotionally connected and authentic).





## *Untraditional paths*

In her 2015 article Karen Frampton suggests most careers do not have a defined path with the succession plan being highly dependent on the person, their attitude, their choices, their experience and where that leads them.

One parent we spoke to happened to be a teacher and pastoral care coordinator assisting with developing career paths in a regional school. She stated, “Kids need to be given permission not to go to university. I use my girls as examples when I speak to some students. One of my daughters earns more than I do and hasn’t been to university and another who has a double degree is working in a major department store who has never utilised that degree. Both have received in-house training and some incredible professional development opportunities. They are both thriving”.

Another parent highlighted the fact that their child did not do well in school, but has always had a good attitude which has played an important role in his career. He now works for himself and runs three successful companies.

Another parent said of their child, “She was always so smart and destined to be an organiser due to her people skills. Now she’s managing a remote team of 30 developers building software products. I would have never imagined that as a job opportunity for her and she loves it.”



## The student

### *Life's first big decision*

The young person is often the last factor we consider after the influences of school, parents and caregivers, yet their views on what the future holds for them are the most significant in this puzzle.

In the context of their lives to date, they have existed in a world where adults (parents, caregivers, teachers, coaches, managers etc.) have told them what to do, how to do it and when to do it. They have made extremely limited autonomous decisions and it is unlikely that they have had to think about long-term decisions before, with their parents and caregivers making these on their behalf (sometimes without their input).

We recognise there are schools that approach this differently and provide exposure to a range of different initiatives and opportunities. However, when referring to the broad-brush career advisory approach referenced earlier in this paper, it is often the case that students select their senior subjects in Year 10, roughly aged 15. When doing so, for the most part, their 'working' exposure has largely been in schooling and home environments (unless they have a part-time job). Within the school and the home, they have a prescribed syllabus and routine with teachers and parents guiding them.

Suddenly, towards the end of Year 10, young people are given a life-changing set of decisions to make with little preparation or support in conducting any research. Naturally, young people speak to their parents for advice and often are told, "you can be anything you want to be" or "you can do anything you like". While these words are dream statements for past generations, they can be overwhelming and mind-boggling for young people that have limited experience in real work environments and exposure to possibilities, while dealing with the emotional aspects of being a teenager.

With the nature of work changing rapidly since the COVID-19 pandemic (jobs and employment landscapes are shifting faster than we can comprehend), we cannot expect our young people to make such defining life decisions in such a short time, without the right support, and with the threat of disengagement.

It is important for young people to consider as many options as possible and the benefits of each, with a specific focus on displayed strengths and preferences.

## *Owning the decision*

Students need to also be proactive and take ownership of their pathway and engage in the career planning process to forge their 'own' path.

There is a lot to contend with as a teenager; developmental changes (explored later in the paper) part time work, sports/ extracurricular activities, school commitments, family and home obligations and more. It can be hard to fully understand the importance of where career pathway planning comes into the mix of everyday teenage life. Modern day life whilst flooded with benefits, has also seen young people spoon fed and a decline in the level of independence around enquiry and decision making. This results in students being reactive rather than proactive in some instances and focusing on learning and developing their hard skills (through the education system) and giving little thought to self development in other areas that are essential for working life such as building their soft skills set.

An important tool students can use to start thinking about their career pathway planning is, first, exploring the notion of standing for something as individuals otherwise known in adult circles as personal brand. This can start from as early as year 7 when they first start high school. Having a clear personal brand will help ensure as an individual that they stand out from the crowd, leads to opportunities and inspires trust in the people around them. By thinking about their individual interests, values and ethics this enables them to start to create a picture of themselves and how they can fit into the world, as well as give a sense of direction for further discovery and development. Gaining a better understanding of themselves as a person will lay the foundation for important conversations later and give greater clarity in framing questions as they progress along the career planning process. These sorts of conversations should be incorporated and encouraged into everyday schooling and home life.

## *A tired education system*

*'The Children and Young People at Risk of Disengagement Report'* (2015) shares that 25% of those aged 15 feel that school has not prepared them for life beyond it, 10% believe school has been a waste of time, and 22% feel they do not belong at school.

When interviewing young people, we found these sentiments to be true. When asking young people if they had ever considered dropping out of school and why, comments included:

"Yes, it is terribly boring and I lack interest in the current school system. I have stayed because it is the most common path."

"Yes, we spend a majority of the time in school doing something we have no interest in."

"Yes. Grade 12 can be very difficult as so much pressure is put on you to do the best, achieve high marks and complete everything in the time you have while you already have other commitments, such as a job, music, sports, and others. I haven't dropped out because you cannot get a job normally in Australia without completing high school. Also my parents would not be happy."

## *The benefit of work experience and internships*

Despite the challenges reported earlier in this paper, one area that has seen success in helping young people navigate the career planning process is compulsory work experience and internships across all levels of the education system (school, Tafe, university and other tertiary institutions). These activities provide real workplace exposure and allows young people to gain insight and experience in jobs, industries and team environments.

It often provides the first, and sometimes only, experience from which a young person can evaluate career paths more effectively. Yet, the guidance given is limited and in many cases the student undertakes a placement that has nothing to do with their interests because they do not know where to find these opportunities and opt for the easy route of attending work experience for example via family or connections of family friends.

In one particular instance that we recorded, the school was so unsupportive of a student seeking work experience that the student was punished and given detention for not having secured a placement in time, while given no opportunity to seek guidance or assistance. In another school, because the previous year's cohort behaved 'badly' during work experience, the school didn't run the program for the following year's cohort and they, as a result, received no work experience opportunity in their high school career.

In 2019, by chance, a Year 10 student came to Sparrowly Group on a work experience placement. This student was not only a high achiever academically, but was also very creative. We spent significant time mentoring this student to understand her interests, skills and communication levels to develop a work plan for her and determine how we could support her next placement. She thrived, but interestingly said to us, while her schoolmates were all at the local hospital on their placements, "I had no idea jobs like this existed and it was just luck that I ended up here. My friends can't believe what I have had the opportunity to do and the exposure I have had." She has kept in contact with the team. In fact, two years later, reached out to the team with an update of all the opportunities she has had because of her work experience and the networks she was introduced to.

A key factor in determining a successful work placement, as previously mentioned, is the quality and commitment of the host. This makes a massive difference and is key to the student experience. Some young people have been poorly treated and this is not the fault of the school but rather the host not understanding the role they play in facilitating this introduction to the work environment and being accountable for that experience. It is the responsibility of the host company to decline a work experience student if they cannot provide meaningful learning outcomes, resources and time.



While work experience is one of the best ways in which to provide insight to young people, this often occurs once or twice in their school career then usually once at Tafe or University. Consistent and regular work experience placements across a range of areas, organised in collaboration with industry, would expose young people to greater opportunities and give them broader tools with which to consider their future choices. Some of this exposure can come from part-time work, which is a great way to expose students to the pressures of life and balancing work commitments, study and social interactions. However, it would be beneficial if there were more opportunities for students to participate in work placements for other learning outcomes within their school and Tafe/ University careers.

In a recent article dated December 2019, a student named Maya Muller highlights the importance of work experience. "Through my school's work experience program, I have been able to write this article and experience a journalistic environment that I'm very interested in and have thoroughly enjoyed." She goes on to say, "If students were required to complete a week of work every two terms, it would make them accustomed to not only looking for work but also doing it. Students also need to learn about different areas of work so we can discover jobs that may suit us. This would prepare us for future careers and teach us how to go about getting those jobs." It is this level of student consultation that educators should include in course and syllabus design.

As mentioned earlier in the paper the lack of face-to-face mentoring is also a factor in determining the success of the work experience placement. As this is completely new and in many ways foreign for the student, mentoring is essential during the experience to give them a safe space to ask questions, gain context as to why things are done and explanation of systems or processes. Internships need to be more than technical experience these days as many young people lack general employable skills. By providing a mentor this gives greater value to the experience as the student gains important insight into how businesses function and most importantly, the human beings behind the work. The host can also look at internships/experience in a non traditional light. An example of this may be a short project or series of short projects so that the host can provide the student with constructive feedback. This would further build on the learning and ensure the student gains meaningful and relevant experience.

# WHAT THE SCIENCE SAYS

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## Developing the control panel

*Understanding the teen brain* n.d, Health Encyclopedia states that we, as a society, put too much importance and emphasis on chronological age. Psychologists agree and the science is there to back this up. At the age of 20, everything in the brain is already fully wired, matured and connected except the frontal lobe or frontal cortex. The frontal cortex is the last part of the brain to mature and this does not occur until approximately 25 years of age.

According to the above report “The frontal lobe is the part of the brain that controls important cognitive skills in humans, such as emotional expression, problem solving, memory, language, judgment, and sexual behaviors. It is, in essence, the ‘control panel’ of our personality and our ability to communicate.” This part of the brain is most sculpted by environment and experience rather than by genes.

The brain continues to change processes and structures beyond this, throughout our lives. The *‘Journal of Adolescent Health’* states that, “when we refer to ‘maturity’ we do not intend to suggest the end of development, but rather use this as shorthand for the achievement of adult-like capacities and privileges.”

## Determining adulthood

Healthline article (2015) states “In using chronological age and neuroscience to determine adulthood, research shows that the age of 18 is not an accurate marker of adult capabilities.” Asking young people to make such life changing decisions before this age, when they have not been given the freedom to choose in this way before, is problematic. Additionally, our current system and process rushes young people to make a decision that they are ill-prepared to make.

Without brain maturity (a fully-formed and connected frontal lobe), young people are unable to assess this life decision clearly and objectively and so they identify all facets of the possible outcomes, becoming unstuck.

# CAREER ADVICE AND SUPPORT

## The cracks

Whilst schools undertake career guidance in varying capacities, more needs to be done in assisting them to minimise the number of young people that are falling through the cracks.

Typically, in the school-based career advisory program, a student attends a 30-minute support meeting which closes with a review of the Department of Education's Bullseye Posters which outline jobs and corresponding subjects.

The National Centre for Vocational Education and Research (NCVER) produced a report titled, *'From STEM to Leaf - Where are Australia's Science, Mathematics, Engineering and Technology (STEM) Students Heading?'*. This report stated, "Having access to careers advisors while at school can help students transition from school to work or further study. However, a study of the 2003 LSAY cohort found that the usefulness of information received through careers advisors was highly variable. In particular, students who were studying at least two STEM (science, technology, engineering, maths) subjects while at school stated that careers advisors were more influential in directing them away from STEM careers and post-school study options."

While in a key face-to-face position to offer advice, teachers can also display bias particularly through the lens of their subject field of expertise. Teachers that have the responsibility of career advice are teachers first, trained in a specific discipline. There is no mandatory course or competency required to attain this dual role. These are not faults of the career advisor but rather a failing of the system.

## The elders of our society

Furthermore, a large number of career advisors have no external industry experience outside the education environment, with their paths being a transition from school to university and back to school again. Therein lies a major problem, as mentioned earlier. If the people advising our young people have no industry experience or greater life experience, are they qualified to support young people in this capacity?

During the aforementioned interview with John Marsden, he discussed his Candlebark School and the ethos they work to. When hiring teachers at Candlebark, Marsden makes a point to only hire teachers with life experience and that he calls "the elders of our society", defined as those who have traveled, been published, or worked outside of the school environment. "People who value human complexity, wisdom and understand that things cannot always be resolved and who can contribute more to thoughtful processes." He was not interested in hiring teachers that transitioned from school to university and back to school.

What if the career advisor was not a teacher at all? What if they were a business person? Someone who has worked in industry and has real business experience. Perhaps there is a need for some sort of mentoring program from businesses to schools to help the students in selecting their subjects to transition to further education and/or the workplace in a more meaningful way.



Positively, some schools in Australia have introduced a dedicated career support unit (with at least one full-time (equivalent) member of staff). In some cases, this involves a non-teacher with a background in human resources or social work. Whilst this is a step forward, the resourcing is limited in its ability to service, in some instances, up to 1,200 students. One school based in Queensland has three full-time staff in their Careers and Future Planning Department, none of which are teachers.

## Transactional consultation

Another problem with the advice process is that students are not seeking the depth of information they need to make meaningful decisions. One career advisor we spoke to said most of the work she does is foundational and not specifically career-related. Her time is spent introducing students to UAC, the application system and explaining what an ATAR is. Another career pathways advisor said the process is becoming, or has become, very transactional in terms of sharing the steps to apply to universities and TAFEs.

Another Sydney-based career advisor at a private school said, “I’m new to this role, having never done it before. My principal said, ‘just design what you want; you do you’”. This statement is indicative of education providers having to meet so many other requirements and suggests the career advisor role simply ticks a box for compliance purposes.

## University, Tafe and Life After School

The inconsistency in preparing students post studies beyond the course materials is increasingly evident to employers. The general lack of job readiness and industry exposure provided by many secondary schools and more so universities and Tafe means that young people are graduating with no real job readiness. This often is due to the fact that those teaching, have little to none industry experience outside their chosen field of education.

It is only when an individual lecturer or educator can see the value of improving job readiness skills that they engage and create course material for it or bring in industry subject matter experts for training or presentations.

During our research there were many examples of the lack of adequate advice and preparation students are receiving in preparing them for the working environment. For example, when a student asked 'how to work out what a suitable salary range is for their qualifications', the feedback they received was "work out how much it costs you to live". Whilst this makes sense to a certain degree, however, each person's perception of what it costs to live is dramatically varied. Advice such as this is setting students up for failure thinking that they can't take a graduate position as the salary isn't enough for what they think they need to live.

This type of advice sets unacceptable perceptions that because the student is now 'qualified' that they are 'entitled' to an unrealistic salary. Although they have studied and gained a tertiary qualification, the lack of job readiness provided leads to the student unable to understand that they are, in fact, inexperienced in the real work environment.

We regularly receive comments from our interns and junior staff that Tafe and university didn't prepare them adequately for the work environment or teach them the skills and insights they gain from their time working with us. Whilst we take an active role to help young people gain the job readiness skills which often leads them to securing employment, many businesses don't have the time to do so.

One of our recent interns commented "My Graphic Design course at TAFE didn't prepare me for working at all beyond learning the technical basics. It didn't teach me how graphic design works in the real world - for example, interaction with a client, developing, reading and understanding a design brief, time management, office etiquette. These things matter. I am lucky that through family I have been able to secure several internships but it's still not enough. It's a competitive market, and understanding how recruitment works, and practically applying this would have given me a head start."

Another intern commented on the difficulty she felt when transitioning from university projects to the workforce. This was felt by both her and the team she was working with as the level of expected communication wasn't there between the student and the team, thus leaving everyone feeling uncertain about the status of a business critical project. These types of issues are easily managed through providing thoughtful mentorship to help young people piece together their role and expectations on them while working in that particular environment.



# THE NATURE OF INDUSTRY TODAY

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## Aptitude and experience

We have known for a long time that industry demands well-rounded candidates, at times putting focus on experience, skills and ability as much as academic results. Numbers (ATAR scores) alone are not enough in this constantly shifting world. Straight A students who focus on hard numerical results and pay little attention to other human-centric skills often do not have the right mix of skills to transition successfully to the workplace.

We are not stating that grades do not matter; they do. However, young people put themselves under an excessive amount of stress surrounding scores and results when, in reality, a more well-rounded individual, is a more employable one.

In our consultation, we spoke to one young person who achieved high grades and transitioned to his degree of choice. Upon completion, he undertook a masters degree with honours. He is now receiving feedback from prospective employers that he is overqualified for the roles he is applying for. It is not uncommon to see young people studying more before entering the workplace with the aim of acquiring extra qualifications and competency through study, missing the opportunity to gain practical skills or training on the job. In some cases, it is the university who is advising the students to do this.

This situation results in employers identifying young people as being overqualified for entry-level positions as their experience is not akin to their qualification.

We have often met with university graduates that seek mentoring because they are struggling to secure their first role despite good grades. The feedback they receive is that their resumes lack basic work experience, coupled with a lack of articulation of soft skills in their resume and in the way in which they present themselves.

## The gig economy

With jobs and the nature of work changing, many young people are abandoning the traditional 9-5 work structure in favour of autonomous, task-by-task based work in a freelance capacity, giving them greater flexibility, wider markets and more specialised opportunities.

Interestingly, AiGroup (2016) suggests industry requires more specialised roles for shorter and specific contracts thus, the organic and attuned demand on both sides has seen the birth of the gig economy. The emergence of digital talent platforms and the increasing speed of the internet are additional driving forces of the gig economy, linking workers with employers in an unprecedented way.

Arguably, this new structure has an overwhelmingly positive impact on productivity because workers are motivated by performing tasks and jobs in which they specialise and have strong skills. There are numerous benefits to industry too, with a more adaptive workforce that can respond to rapid changes, increased productivity, cost savings and ease of access to highly specialised talent. For small and medium businesses, this is of particular interest as traditionally they would struggle to hire and keep high-performing talent. This on-demand workforce means great efficiency and better allocation of resources for maximum output. Data from the AiGroup report, *'The Emergence of the Gig Economy'*, revealed 4.1 million Australians (32% of the workforce) had freelanced between 2014-15.

## Dying and emerging occupations

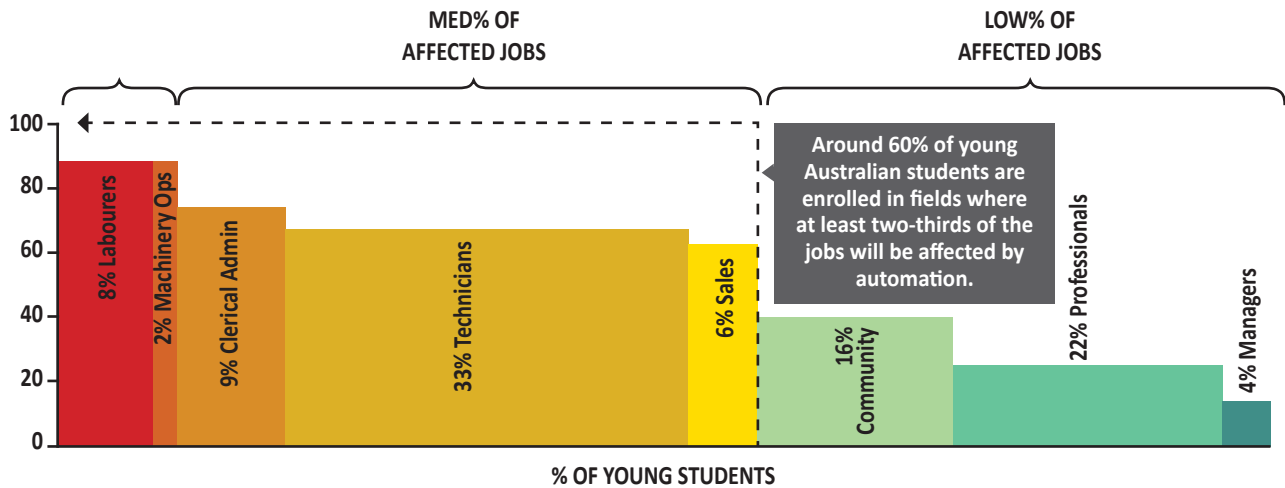
In 2017, the Foundation for Young Australians (FYA) released a report titled, *'The New Work Order - Ensuring Young Australians Have Skills and Experience for the Jobs of the Future, Not the Past'*. This report explores the changing work environment and the skills and investment young people need to be competitive in it, highlighting issues facing them.

- 70% of young people enter the workforce in jobs that will be radically affected by automation in 10-15 years.
- 60% of students are being trained in jobs that will be radically changed by automation.
- More than half of the workforce will be required to build, configure or use digital systems ('digital literacy') in the next two to three years.

The diagram below indicates the occupations that are declining and the percentage of young people employed in these areas.

**FIG 14. MORE THAN HALF OF YOUNG AUSTRALIAN STUDENTS ARE ENROLLED IN OCCUPATIONS THAT ARE DYING**

*% of jobs that will be affected by automation, width represents proportion of 15-24 yr students enrolled in VET and university courses, 2010-2014*



Source: CEDA (2015), NCVET, DET, and AlphaBeta analysis

The future will see AI ingrained within society. We will be unable to work without AI operating in a marketplace defined by disruption, complexity and change. The major disruptors of AI, digitalisation, big data and machine learning lead to automation, and a range of new jobs and opportunities will come from it.

In 60% of occupations, at least 30% of tasks will become automated. Workers of the future will spend more time on activities and tasks that machines are less capable of, these being managing people, applying expertise and communicating with others.

Above all, the human ability to be empathetic will be essential.





## Education to enhance humanity

The nature of global communication has changed with smartphones, smart technologies and 'on demand' services. This new normal has crept into the world of education with interconnected, universal and accessible programs and services available, including MOOCs.

MOOCs provide people with the opportunity to study micro courses or modules from larger degree courses, and in the process, get the same exposure to the world's best researchers, practitioners and university talent.

This has disrupted the traditional model of university education and is fast making the old model of study obsolete for many subjects (of course, we are not suggesting that medical, engineering, or highly technical and specialised courses will become obsolete but there is certainly a societal need for these occupations to be held to a higher standard). However, for qualifications that can be applied across departments, industries and locations, adopting a skills passport approach makes more sense. For example, why would someone want to pay huge fees for a full bachelor program when they may only need or apply 30% of the learning in a role? It makes more sense for them to study the parts of the course they require.

To remain relevant, universities and colleges need to transform and foster a more innovative approach and embrace the interconnection of technology. Short courses with focused materials, certificates, micro-credentials, MOOCs and other on-demand forms of learning are growing as the preferred method of education for this next generation of students. A future-focused university will promote engagement and impact, enhance humanity, and expand student access.

# EXAMPLES OF EXCELLENCE

## Regional Industry Education Program (RIEP)

As mentioned earlier, RIEP is a NSW Government initiative that aims to strengthen connections between local industry and secondary school communities while supporting students in planning their future career pathways.

### **RIEP objectives include:**

- Build partnerships between employers and local schools.
- Support employers to engage with schools and share their expectations for their future workforce.
- Help students develop the skills they need to get a job.
- Strengthen links between what is learnt at school and what is needed in the workplace.

This program will take advantage of local knowledge and networks to boost student engagement with local industry support. Specifically, 14 locally-based RIEP officers have been appointed throughout a network of regional centres to provide statewide coverage. RIEP officers will:

- Work with school staff on initiatives that engage local industries and support students to plan their career pathways.
- Work with local employers to facilitate their access to local schools in order to promote careers within their business or industry.
- Facilitate activities where employers can communicate what they need in terms of skills and experience from young people entering their industry.
- Support school staff to promote the range of jobs and career opportunities available in the region to students and their parents.
- Develop and provide resources and activities to increase the capacity of schools and industry to engage with each other.

## The medium matters as well

Link and Launch is a community-based program that runs across six state high schools in Far North Queensland. Link and Launch pilot schools are working with 123 young people. Through their hard work, 119 young people have successfully made their first transition into study or work.

A partnership between the Queensland Government and the Bundaberg Youth Hub, this program is providing the much needed support for students in Year 13 as they navigate the transition from school to the next stage of their path.

Their research shows that industry-led engagement with youth is the most effective way to engage and support young people to make decisions to pursue a life of employment or further education.

“Research suggests that illness, disengagement, lack of activity, or lack of engagement in habitual meaningful practice such as work, for more than six weeks, can have a negative impact on engagement or re-engagement,” says Bundaberg State High School’s Principal Mrs McCord.

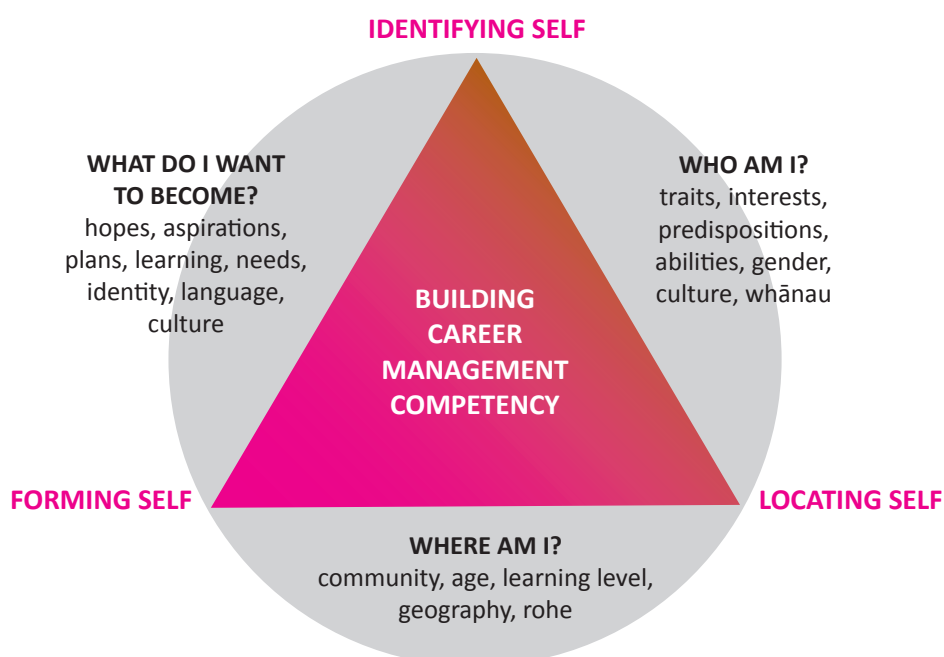
Funding will be allocated to employing someone dedicated to connecting with students while they are at school to learn about their goals and interests and identify training, employment or volunteer opportunities that might help students reach those goals. That person would also maintain connections with employers, training organisations and higher education facilities to create a bridge for school leavers and address regional skills shortages.

This idea of community support was also noted by The Liza Shalom College. “We have changed the language we use in our schools. We don’t use ‘careers’, we only use ‘pathways’ and we use ‘additional learning opportunities’ instead of ‘VET’. Even then, it is hard to cut through. We invited a third party to come and present to our students and it cost a lot of money for them to deliver two sessions to Years 9 and 10, and the students’ eyes were glazed over. We have been thinking of creating a content mini-series with a #mypathway hashtag, highlighting people within the community and their career journeys in short videos to help get the message across.”

## Additional inspiration from abroad

Careers NZ has developed and published a set of benchmarks as part of their ‘Secondary Career Development Benchmarks Report’. They have described these as, “A set of quality benchmarks for career development programs and services in Aotearoa New Zealand secondary schools.”

It is the view of Careers New Zealand (2016) that in order for students to achieve their potential and be positive contributors to the community, economy and nation as a whole, schools need to provide culturally responsive, effective career development programs and services. These programs and services should focus on developing students’ career literacy and capabilities so they are resilient, confident, connected and actively involved in lifelong learning. These benchmarks place importance on building career management competency with a focus on the formation of oneself as the underpinning success factor as illustrated below.



# THE FUTURE OF CAREER PLANNING

## **We are certain there is no one-size-fits-all approach.**

With the objective of fuelling discussion on this topic, we suggest a handful of ideas that are worth exploring and discussing here:

1. The notion that there is not one specific career path.
2. There is a need to build capability and transferable knowledge.
3. Capturing proof points along the way is vital. The devil is in the details.
4. We must explore other ways in which we can support young people.

## **There is not one specific career path**

The research by Careers New Zealand (2016) indicates that the average worker will change career (not job, but career) five to seven in their lives. Therefore, when looking at career planning, there may be a need to transition to a model of career development rather than planning, noting the many steps in defining multiple paths and possibilities (i.e. career choice, models of education, degrees of skill and expertise).

“Career development helps students link ideas about preparation, exploration, self-awareness and decision making to different situations. As they develop their capability to self-manage their life and learning, they need opportunities and support to successfully transition from school to further learning and work”.

Research suggests career development should be done on an annual basis, beyond the young person choosing a career, and reviewed into adulthood.

## **Building capability and transferable knowledge**

Being a lifelong learner has never been more important. Even in employment, there are always ways in which we can improve the day-to-day and enhance our skills, via practical and theoretical opportunities.

Today, there are many ways to achieve this, such as education, formal channels and institutions, professional development opportunities in webinars, continual learning through reading, skills training through reskilling or upskilling, a focus on right skilling and, most importantly, learning through trial, error and adoption.

It is equally as important to document skills acquired during trial and error as those acquired via other channels. Concepts such as skills passports, as opposed to traditional resumes, are gaining in popularity.

## **Capturing proof points along the way**

A recent blog post by Ashley Fell states the average tenure in a job being three years and four months, a person starting their working life aged 18 and retiring aged 75 will have 19 jobs in five separate careers and industries in their lifetime.

Within the career development framework, there is an idea that the individual captures snapshots and proof points of their learning developments in a learning journal. Continual improvement, while capturing data points, means the individual is consistently learning, noting and reflecting on ways in which they can be better. This provides important data for performance reviews, asking for a pay rise and interviewing for new positions. In capturing the data along the way, the individual is automatically creating a journal of experience.

The skills passport, coupled with a journal of experience, is a unique way to position oneself and keep ahead of the crowd. It can provide support and self confidence when most needed, while job seeking and facing situations that can breed self doubt. These methods provide a means to better understand oneself, one's outlooks and one's career opportunities.

## Other ways we can support young people

There are ways in which we all can better prepare our young people for the workforce. Some ideas include:

- **Preparing them early:** begin the conversation earlier with students and encourage parents and caregivers to be more aware of career opportunities and education pathways. A model to consider is the Victorian Government Education and Training Department for careers education which includes these steps in a young person's acquisition of skills and knowledge for lifelong career self-management: I Discover (Year 7), I Explore (Year 8), I Focus (Year 9), I Plan (Year 10), I Decide (Year 11), I Apply (Year 12).
- **Guiding their resilience:** if a student is prepared and aware of what opportunities may be available to them, they are more likely to want to take part in activities that may benefit them. For example, this might include identifying their key skills and attributes, understanding their personal qualities and encouraging them to seek a number of different opportunities.
- **Building on curiosity:** the best way to encourage, shape and build curiosity is by giving young people endless first-hand experiences. These first-hand experiences challenge and shape the individual, cultivate inner strength, provide better social awareness, and build resilience. This is important to encourage young people to question and think through things themselves. Exercising one's moral compass in this way helps an individual better understand themselves and their view of the world in which they live.
- **Acknowledging the changing workforce:** instead of focusing on specific university degrees or generic roles and job titles, talking to students about the skills needed for different jobs is essential in ensuring they foster transferable and human-centric skills in a world to be dominated by AI and technology.



# SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE

## Human qualities for the future of work

Extensive research exists into the high demand for soft skills with the focus on human-centric tasks being the centre of new business. While we understand there needs to be a broad curriculum to cover all potential subjects that lead to industries and jobs, the question remains: what are schools, industry and parents doing to develop soft skills?

Not only are soft/ employable skills not being taught in schools, Tafe or universities, they are also not valued by their grading systems. Perhaps this is because they are impossible to grade in the same ways as maths, science and traditional subjects are. Should we also be teaching students how to demonstrate proof points in developing these soft skills similarly to how they would in a real world employment 'professional development/ learning environment'? These skills are vital in the changing 21st Century and overarching economic landscape as we continue to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to a January 2021 article in the Australian Financial Review, COVID-19 may have accelerated the future of work, but it's also pushed the fast forward button on skills that will be in high demand in 2021 and beyond.

"Even before the COVID-19 pandemic we were living in a fast-changing world where demand for various skills was changing on a regular basis," says executive coach Arash Arabi, chief executive of Sprint Agile and author of *The Wise Enterprise*. "Now the impacts of the pandemic have resulted in an abrupt and substantial change to the business landscape." His predictions for the top skills of 2021 and beyond are: emotional and social intelligence, systems thinking and systems dynamics, marketing and lean thinking and business agility. "Irrespective of what profession you work in, there are certain transferable skills that will be highly prized during times of uncertainty," he says. "Professionals who think strategically will strive to be better than their competitors. These skills will give you the competitive advantage that may land you that job or promotion next year."

The human-centric skills and qualities essential to surviving the new normal are in active discussion. The list below was published by news.com in September 2019. Arguably, these are the sort of skills that need to be integrated and intertwined with study and pre-workforce qualifications.

**‘Twenty Skills’, a list of human qualities for the future of work by news.com**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Impactful communicator</li> <li>- Active listener</li> <li>- Team player and collaborative</li> <li>- Emotionally connected</li> <li>- Result orientated</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Life-long learner</li> <li>- Human-centric</li> <li>- Influencer and negotiator</li> <li>- Value-driven and ethical</li> <li>- Purpose-driven</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Entrepreneurial spirit</li> <li>- Problem solver and critical thinker, design thinking</li> <li>- Data interpreter</li> <li>- Agility and adaptability</li> <li>- Digitally literate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Good under pressure</li> <li>- Opportunistic</li> <li>- Authentic</li> <li>- Strong judgement</li> <li>- Creative</li> </ul>
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## The role local government can play in skills development for their communities

Local Governments play an important role in identifying the skills needs aligned with their social and economic development, and connecting a pathway with industry and learning institutions. By doing this, they are enabling opportunities for current and new residents.

One example of this is Port Macquarie-Hastings Council with the release of their Skills Audit Summary Report in June 2018. David Archer - Senior Economic Development Officer said “It was identified as a priority in our 2017-21 Economic Development Strategy, and has been used consistently since to guide our efforts, and the efforts of many others across the skills/education/employment industry. We’re still expecting to experience some of the highest employment growth in regional Australia, with projections indicating it will be led by our innovative Health and Social Services sector, requiring 3,300 more skilled workers over the five years to 2024.”

Another council leading the way with their considered focus on skills development is the City of Newcastle. Skills development has been highlighted as a priority area under their Economic Development Strategy with one of their response programs being the launch of New Skills. Under the program, the City of Newcastle is funding training courses to assist Novocastrians and local businesses gain and develop their talent in emerging industries or areas of rapid change.

The program is funding training initiatives in areas including:

- helping local businesses get up to speed in the digital age
- ways to make businesses more accessible for everyone in the community
- how businesses in the hospitality and tourism sectors can build a more resilient business model
- ways to improve your company’s energy efficiency

# HOW DO WE BETTER SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE AND CREATE A BETTER WORKFORCE FOR THE FUTURE?

With the new economy and working environment moving at unprecedented speed, like so many things, we cannot wait for the government to update tiring 20th Century systems and processes.

It is clear the career advisor role requires evolution and external support from industry (e.g. business mentor programs, more frequent work placement programs, etc.) to be effective, meaningful and truly supportive in preparing the young people of today for the workforce of tomorrow.

Businesses and parents are uniquely placed to support young people in their transition from the education environment to the working environment.

Arming parents with information and guidance on how to support their children through this new-world transition is key, but they cannot do it alone. Arguably, industry is just as responsible as the “elders of our society” in supporting the younger population in their transition to the workforce. Mentoring initiatives and school partnerships, such as the one mentioned in Bundaberg State High School’s Link and Launch program, would provide welcome support to the education professionals juggling career advisor roles, while injecting real-world experience into the school environment (possibly tackling the disengagement challenge with fresh content and ‘new blood’).

Allowing the young person to be exposed to many possible opportunities in a career path, and providing guidance and advice when required, will ensure they are given the best opportunity to grow their own career pathway journey. There needs to be a culture of change in understanding that tertiary education is not for everyone and that there are many opportunities available for individuals who do not wish to undertake additional study. There is no amount of education that can be taught through lived experience and learning through actively working.

In some instances, people will complete their education through school and a TAFE certificate or university qualification, and then commence work. In other instances, some will leave school having never completed tertiary study but receive on-the-job training, professional development and enrichment from projects and experiences, supported by a mentor or senior team member.

Circumstances change with interest and passion, and a chosen or ‘designated’ career is almost certainly a thing of the past. Young people may find themselves reconsidering their chosen career path after a time, or perhaps be presented with a new opportunity, or may even decide to undertake additional education and training and pivot in a way they could not conceive imaginable when they first set out.

“The illiterate of the 21st Century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn.” — Alvin Toffler

Below is an excerpt from a recent interview with a young person having recently completed the school to workforce transition:

*Encourage other opinions from parents and caregivers, people of influence and other careers advisors (not just the identified school one) or related education providers, for example a TAFE or university teacher/tutor/lecturer, to seek more than one opinion. The young person also needs to acknowledge a sense of own responsibility and not just depend on what others may say or recommend, and conduct their own research and evaluation into potential paths.*

*Careers advisors should not be putting young people in a box and stress to them that they may have several jobs and career prospects and that what they want to do when they are aged 16-18, they won't want to do in 5, 10 or 20 years' time and that is OK. There should not be an expectation put on students that they will only have one career path and the financial implications of that career, and instead the careers advisors should focus on identifying what the students like and identify their strengths to help them in their next stage of life post-school.*

*As well as this, there should be more guidance on the types of jobs that are available within a sector, with one 23-year-old interviewed saying, "I always thought that in tourism there was only a few types of jobs, it wasn't until I was in the industry that I realised that within every industry, not just tourism, that there are so many paths in that".*



## The self-supporting evolution

The language used in schools plays such an important role in shaping the perceptions of our young people. The goal to become self-supporting should be reiterated to young people when thinking about their post-school journey and goals. Anecdotally, much of the current language is around the pursuit of the highest paying or the (perceived) most successful jobs. The perception that TAFE is the poorer cousin of university, and that your pathway options are in any way limited if you go to TAFE, needs to change. A research project conducted by Griffith University, 'Enhancing the Status of Vocational Education and the Occupations it Serves', showed that the number one influencer on students is their parents, followed by their teachers. This is such an important statistic and provides both direction and a target for changing perceptions.

There are some instances of leading schools that have thought deeply about the language they use. For example, we have come across a few schools who do not use 'careers' and instead use 'pathways', who do not use 'VET' and instead use 'additional learning opportunities'. There is also a move from the government to change VET to 'skills and training'. These are great steps, however, there are inconsistencies across the board around the language being used.

When looking at the goal of being self-supporting and professional or skilled in some way, we also need to identify what will be the best option(s) at the time for the student and what support they will need to ultimately become self-supporting. This is where we, the industry, need to come to the table by offering more meaningful work placement opportunities, being open to mentoring and giving our time freely, with no expectations, to help guide young people with real stories and experience and practical, hands-on work to support their learning and growth.

This is a discussion that will continue to grow and evolve, and it is important to invite everyone to participate and share experiences so we can create solutions, or next steps, to better support our young people.

**Please reach out and connect with us and share your thoughts on how we can, together, create a better workforce for the future.**

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