

# Achieve excellent and affordable post school pathways

After students finish school, post school pathways are essential for young people to find and sustain study or work. This can include vocational education and training, university, or apprenticeships and traineeships. By considering a range of options, young people are able to get higher-skilled jobs, increased wages and longer term employment.

But there are considerable barriers to post school pathways. Accessibility, affordability, and a lack of information about the options available are just some of the barriers, and these issues are compounded for young people experiencing various kinds of disadvantage.

**990,000 jobs** will be created by 2020. Just **70,000** will only require a senior secondary level education.<sup>1</sup>

Many schools spend less than a cup of coffee on career guidance per student.<sup>2</sup>

By 24, only **58.9%** of young Australians from disadvantaged backgrounds are in education, training or work, compared with **83.1%** of those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds.



## THE NSW GOVERNMENT CAN:

- Establish a school-to-work transitions taskforce with the necessary expertise, authority and resourcing to substantially improve transition outcomes.
- Increase funding and full-time positions for careers advisors in NSW Government secondary and tertiary institutions.
- Invest in career guidance programs and establish minimum standards by writing a dedicated career development policy within the Department of Education and integrating career development in tertiary institutions.
- Strengthen supports for career advisers – professional development and training, including on labour trends, working with employers as well as relationship and network development.
- Invest in innovation brokerage programs that bring together schools, employers, community organisations and education providers to improve employment outcomes.
- Decrease fees and increase fees free-scholarships and literacy and numeracy courses at TAFEs and vocational education and training institutes.
- Improve supports for disadvantaged students undertaking courses at these institutes.

Post-secondary education (PSE) is a vital pathway to attain higher-skilled jobs, increased wages and longer-term employment after exiting the school education system. Young people are involved in PSE by studying in vocational education and training, university or undertaking an apprenticeship or traineeship.

Due to the significant social, developmental and economic benefits of participating in post-secondary education, barriers that prevent young people from engagement must be addressed.<sup>3</sup> Accessibility, affordability and a lack of comprehensive information about their options are just some of the barriers that impact and prevent young people from gaining access to post-secondary education.<sup>4</sup> Young people experiencing disadvantage due to financial, situational, educational or locational factors can find it particularly hard to enter higher educational institutions, making further education and training a less viable option. However, if the education system addresses these barriers adequately, post-secondary education can become increasingly accessible to a diverse range of young people.

## SCHOOLS TO WORK TRANSITIONS

The school to work transition can be a turbulent time for young people. This is a period of time described as 'coming of age events which all young people experience as they leave school, consolidate skills, develop a sense of job readiness and make decisions about life and career'<sup>5</sup> In an increasingly complex employment context, all young people experience the increasing difficulty of gaining employment, but some young people face considerably more challenges. The reduction of entry-level job opportunities, increased competition, job automation and the rising casualisation of the workforce have all contributed to systemic barriers that stop young people getting jobs.<sup>6</sup> By age 24, only 58.9% of young Australians from disadvantaged backgrounds are fully engaged in education, training or work. This compares to 83.1% of those from the highest socioeconomic backgrounds.<sup>7</sup> It is vital that young people have the

appropriate educational experiences to prepare them for a changed employment context.

The transition between school and work is particularly fraught because young people are especially transient as they move between school and towards tertiary study or a job and are likely to move out of a parent or guardians' home, move cities, work multiple short-term jobs and change social circles. Similarly, this transition is particularly difficult for young people from regional, remote or rural areas because the existing challenges are exacerbated by poor access to educational infrastructure and employment opportunities.

Many young people feel that secondary school does not equip them with the right skills for work, and that comprehensive information about diverse career pathways is not available to them. Students report not being effectively informed, engaged and advised about their array of career options outside of university streams.<sup>8</sup> This lack of information about alternate career options often makes university the default choice and causes other streams to be stigmatised due to a lack of exposure and understanding.

Career guidance is one of the missing links in the school-to-work transition. Careers guidance has been shown to improve a young person's chances of employment. It keeps people in school, builds confidence and self-awareness and connects pathways to education and employment, which is particularly important for young people who lack networks. Career guidance:

- Has the potential to improve engagement and increase completion rates by 10–20% when effectively.
- Leads to young people being five times less likely to be unemployed or disengaged from education or training if they undertake structured career activities.

Yet career guidance is undermined in NSW:

- Approximately 50% of schools in Australia (with populations of over a 1,000 students) dedicate less than \$3 per student for career guidance.

- More than half of career practitioners do their work on a part-time basis and two-thirds of these practitioners split their time between careers work and classroom teaching, counselling, managing and administration within a school environment.

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### VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Vocational Education and Training (VET) is important for young people as a valued provider of a range of high-quality, flexible and accessible courses delivered consistently to all students, particularly young people experiencing disadvantage. It is an important connection to future employment – just over 30% of students enrolled in VET in NSW are between the ages of 15 and 24.<sup>9</sup>

Ensuring recruitment and retention in the VET sector has the capacity to reduce youth unemployment and increase employment participation. Of the 20–24-year-olds who completed a VET course in 2015, 75% were employed six months after graduation.<sup>10</sup>

In the current system, too many young people in NSW are confronted with significant barriers when entering the VET sector, and this is especially the case for those experiencing disadvantage. Challenges include financial constraints, socioeconomic factors, geographical remoteness and limited literacy and numeracy skills. These barriers are often exacerbated by funding rules, lack of information, and difficulties navigating the complex service systems.<sup>11</sup>

These barriers should be addressed with a sense of urgency, particularly given the prominence of early school leavers in VET, with over 27,000 early school leavers aged 15–19 in NSW enrolled in TAFE and 16,000 with private providers.<sup>12</sup> This should include reviewing the eligibility criteria for fee-free scholarships, expanding these scholarships and improving access to VET FEE-HELP certificates.

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## ENDNOTES

- 1 Karp P, 2018, 'Labor pledges inquiry into universities and Tafe sector', *The Guardian*, 23 February 2018, accessed via: <<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/feb/23/labor-pledges-inquiry-into-universities-and-tafe-sector>>
- 2 An approximately 50% of schools in Australia (with populations of over a 1,000 students) who dedicate less than \$3 per student for career guidance.
- 3 Foundation of Young Australians, 2015, *How are young people faring in the transition from school to work?*, FYA, Melbourne, accessible via: <<http://www.fya.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/How-young-people-are-faring-report-card-2015-FINAL.pdf>>
- 4 Lamb S. & Huo S, 2017, *Counting the costs of lost opportunity in Australian education*, Mitchell Institute Report No. 02/2017, Mitchell Institute, Melbourne, accessible via: <<http://www.mitchellinstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Counting-the-costs-of-lost-opportunity-in-Australian-education.pdf>>
- 5 The Smith Family, 2014, *Young people's successful transition to work: What are the pre-conditions?*, The Smith Family Research Report September 2014, The Smith Family, Sydney, accessed via: <<https://www.thesmithfamily.com.au/~media/files/research/reports/young-people-transition-to-work-report.ashx?la=en>>, p.17.
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- 9 National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), 2017, *Australian vocational education and training statistics: Total VET students and courses 2017*, NCVER, Adelaide, accessed via: <<https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/total-vet-students-and-courses-2017>>, p. 12.
- 10 NCVER, ND, *VET student outcomes*, NCVER, Adelaide, accessed via: <<https://www.ncver.edu.au/data/collection/student-outcomes>>
- 11 Youth Action, 2018, *Vocational Education and Training in NSW*, Youth Action, Uniting, & Mission Australia, Sydney, accessed via: <[http://www.youthaction.org.au/vet\\_in\\_nsw](http://www.youthaction.org.au/vet_in_nsw)>
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