



REPORT: Disadvantaged young people face significant barriers to Vocational Education and Training (VET)

Tuesday February 20, 2018:

A [report](#) released today by Youth Action, Uniting and Mission Australia identifies significant barriers young people, especially those experiencing disadvantage, are facing to achieve a Vocational Education and Training (VET) qualification in NSW.

More than 90 per cent of the 990,000 jobs expected to be created in Australia by 2020 will require a post-secondary qualification. Research shows that young people are taking an average of 4.7 years to find full-time work after they leave education and 2.3 years to find any work at all.

Expensive up-front fees, complex eligibility criteria, confusing course information along with inadequate support for Aboriginal students and students experiencing disabilities, mental health issues and homelessness were key barriers identified by young people and social service workers consulted for the report.

Katie Acheson, CEO, Youth Action said: "Education is one of the most effective pathways out of poverty and disadvantage and right now in NSW there are too many obstacles preventing young people experiencing disadvantage from starting or completing that journey towards employment.

"Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds take up VET courses so they can get their first job, so they can put a roof over their heads and gain some financial stability. The young people we spoke to were optimistic that they could achieve their goals, but told us they just needed a little support to get there.

The report surveyed 50 individuals from organisations that work with young people experiencing disadvantage and:

- 98% said young people undertook VET to enter employment for the first time
- 82% said increased financial support (fee-free courses or scholarships) would assist disadvantaged young people to access a qualification
- 74% said literacy and numeracy issues were significant barriers to completing VET qualifications.
- 78% identified better career guidance as a key strategy to guide and retain students.

Uniting Director Resilient Families, Bob Mulcahy said: "Vocational education and training through TAFE and private providers needs to be simpler to understand, more affordable and easier to access. We also need to make sure students who are struggling with course requirements are identified early and get support.

"Many of the young people we spoke to lacked confidence in their literacy and numeracy skills and their ability to attain them. Uniting would like to see greater availability of free or low-cost literacy and numeracy courses in accessible community locations such as youth centres," he said.

Mission Australia Metro State Leader, Dr Evelyne Tadros said: "When young people face difficulties transitioning from school to further education and employment, it can result in unemployment, underemployment and social exclusion. And the 'scarring' that occurs when someone is out of work for



a lengthy period can have negative impacts on the person's health and wellbeing while also reducing the likelihood of future employment.

"To avoid these negative outcomes, it is vital that we see more investment in evidence-based supports, programs and services including place-based investment into disadvantaged and rural areas. There also needs to be VET access options for early school leavers where mainstream schooling is not appropriate or possible, as well as simplification of scholarship information and other financial supports and ensuring these are available through a range of accessible channels."

Quotes from young people experiencing disadvantage consulted for the report about their recent experience of VET:

- "I want to be happy, it's the most important thing, and if I can get some training and then a job I can't see why I can't get there."
- "Understanding of what people are getting into is more important before they start the course. There should be more information about the courses out there."
- "Supports on TAFE campuses are hidden away, they're really hard to find and there's not enough of them to help you out a lot of the time."
- "Understand me as an individual. (We need) more understanding of individual circumstances, like living in a (homelessness) shelter, mental health difficulties, etc."
- "It's hard to meet literacy and numeracy standards, but we are not told about the support and ways to build them up."

Case studies available on request.

View the full report [here](#).

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Youth Action is the peak organisation representing young people and youth services in NSW. Our work helps build the capacity of young people, youth workers and youth services, and we advocate for positive change on issues affecting these groups.

At **Uniting**, we believe in taking real steps to make the world a better place. We work to inspire people, enliven communities and confront injustice. Our services are in the areas of aged care, disability, community services and chaplaincy. We also get involved in social justice and advocacy issues that impact the people we serve. As an organisation we celebrate diversity and welcome all people regardless of lifestyle choices, ethnicity, faith, sexual orientation or gender identity.

Mission Australia is a national non-denominational Christian organisation, with more than 155 years' experience in standing together with Australians in need on their journey to independence.
