



# Improving the employment prospects of young Australians

Young people face a number of challenges transitioning from education to work. With the youth unemployment rate now 14.0 per cent<sup>i</sup> (15-24 years) and with an average of 18 applicants per lower skilled vacancy advertised on the internet and/or in newspapers, that transition is more difficult.<sup>ii</sup>

In response to the challenges faced by young people in getting a job, the Department of Employment, as part of its *Surveys of Employers' Recruitment Experiences*, asked employers what they thought could be done to improve the employment prospects of young people.<sup>iii</sup> Employers emphasised the importance of issues such as young people's *attitude to work and physical presentation*, the positive impact of *work experience* and well developed *job search and application skills*.

## 1. Attitude to work (36% of employers)

More than one third of employers said that young people can best enhance their employment prospects by improving their attitude to work. Of these employers, many said young people need to be more motivated, while many said that a stronger work ethic was required. Others said young people need to be more enthusiastic, and that they should be more prepared to learn and take direction.



## 2. Responsibility and Reliability (12% of employers)

Many employers said that young people need to be more reliable and responsible. Some emphasised the need for young people to remain working with a business for an acceptable period of time, turn up to shifts, be punctual, and show respect to colleagues and customers.

## 3. Presentation (11% of employers)

More than one in ten employers said that young people should take more care with their personal presentation to improve their employment prospects. While most employers mentioned the importance of presentation in general, many referred specifically to presentation at interviews and when handing in résumés. In particular, employers mentioned that the clothing worn by young people was often inappropriate, and that tattoos, piercings, jewellery and untidy hair were also an issue.



## 4. Realistic work expectations (5% of employers)

Some employers said that young people often had unrealistic expectations of the workplace, including the level of remuneration on offer. Employers considered many young people were unprepared for the demands of the workplace and the nature of the work expected of them. Many employers said that young people wanted to 'start at the top' instead of working their way up through a business.

## 5. Work experience (13% of employers)

Many employers said that work experience or volunteer work, particularly while still at school, is an effective means for young people to improve their employment prospects.

There were a number of ways in which work experience was considered a benefit for young people, the most important being the opportunity to learn about workplace expectations. Employers also pointed out that work experience enabled young people to gain practical skills and insights into the duties associated with specific occupations. Another important benefit of undertaking work experience is that it demonstrates a young person's commitment to employers.



## 6. Further education and training (10% of employers)

Around one in ten employers believed that training and further education was the most effective way to improve the employment prospects of young people due to the acquisition of work specific skills and qualifications. Higher education, TAFE courses, and apprenticeships and traineeships were most commonly mentioned.

## 7. Job search and application skills (8% of employers)

Many employers mentioned the need for young people to improve their job search and application skills.

Employers most commonly mentioned the quality of job applications and résumés and said that young people need to tailor their application to the position for which they were applying. Employers also said that young people need to pay more attention to detail in their applications and résumés, particularly with regard to spelling and grammar. In terms of job search methods, employers recommended that young people approach employers directly and personally follow up on their résumé after it had been provided. Employers also mentioned interview skills, noting that young people should be well presented, demonstrate some understanding of the industry or job for which they were applying, communicate well and appear genuinely interested in the job.



## 8. Employer attitudes (3% of employers)

Finally, some employers said that employers themselves should have a more positive and accommodating attitude towards young people. In particular, they said that employers should be more willing to take on young people and noted that young people may not have had the opportunity to acquire and develop the traits, experience and skills that employers valued.

<sup>i</sup> ABS, *Labour Force, Australia*, October 2014, seasonally adjusted data.

<sup>ii</sup> Department of Employment, *Survey of Employers' Recruitment Experiences* – combined data for all regions surveyed in the 2013-2014 financial year.

<sup>iii</sup> Between October 2013 and April 2014, 3142 employers were surveyed in the Gladstone, Bundaberg-Hervey Bay, Central Victoria, Port Augusta - Whyalla - Port Pirie, Sydney West and Blue Mountains, Illawarra, Caboolture-Sunshine Coast and Tasmania regions. Reported percentages are based on the 69 per cent of employers who provided a response. Some responses were coded to multiple categories.

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