

# AFTER THE ATAR

UNDERSTANDING HOW GEN Z TRANSITION  
INTO FURTHER EDUCATION & EMPLOYMENT

YEAR13 YouthSense





# WE ARE YEAR13

Year13 is Australia's largest and most influential digital platform for high school leavers. It has achieved this mark by combining engaging content with an extensive variety of employment, education and travel-related opportunities for 15-25-year-old youth.

Year13 is run by a team of young Australians who are dedicated to guiding their peers on their own unique path after school. This purpose is fulfilled by empowering young people to follow their passions, and by working with government, employers and educators to bridge the gap in youth engagement.

This research paper was written by Year13 in conjunction with their insight community service YouthSense, and designed to be released at the 2017 Youth Engagement Summit in Sydney.



# FOREWORD



Since its inception in 2012, Year13 has worked with a broad range of government, employment and education stakeholders. From our experience within these sectors, reinforced by the quantitative and qualitative research documented in this paper, Year13 believes there is a long way to go before Australia can deliver a highly functioning system that enables young people to transition smoothly from high school into further work and study. The complexities surrounding youth engagement in both high school and beyond is multifaceted. However, we believe that significantly more can be done by employers, educators and government to effectively engage young Australians.

Year13's research shows that Australian youth are predominantly engaging at school in order to procure an ATAR, rather than as a method of preparing for life after school. The prevalent fear of failure surrounding the ATAR is the cause of immense stress for young people, which in turn is impacting their mental health. The fact that 51% of youth currently see or feel that they ought to see a mental health professional is incredibly concerning.

The primary purpose of education is to mould an individual into an employable citizen who can become an active contributor to society. When a school is ranked by ATAR scores, and student enrolments are based on academic success, it's no wonder schools are focusing so heavily on these numbers at the expense of other things - such as informing youth of the immense range of options for future education and employment.

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With almost half of Australian high school students still having no idea what they want to do after school, many young people are feeling forced to choose pathways that they are ill-prepared for and later abandon, costing the Australian economy millions. We at Year13 are firm believers that young people should be exposed to a vast array of career and study options early in their high school years, rather than during the final months when the stress of exams evoke a higher sense of urgency.

The intention of this paper is to provide a comprehensive picture of the transitional period for young Australians and, through this, empower government, education and employment industries to better engage with the youth cohort. As you will see in a few pages, young Australians have approached our survey questions with an immensely raw and emotive honesty that has inspired us to continue pioneering for change in this space. I believe all of us have a responsibility to work together to influence change and help youth to grow and prosper into the future.



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# AFTER THE ATAR



Understanding How Gen Z Transition  
into Further Education and Employment



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## KEY TAKEAWAYS

55%

OF STUDENTS THINK THEIR SCHOOL CARES MORE ABOUT THEIR ATAR THEN THEM AS STUDENTS

89%

OF STUDENTS USE THEIR PHONE DURING CLASS

51%

OF YOUTH IDENTIFY A NEED TO SEE A MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL

49%

'DON'T FEEL THREATENED AT ALL' BY AUTOMATION

39%

DON'T SEE APPRENTICESHIPS AND DEGREES AS EQUAL

62%

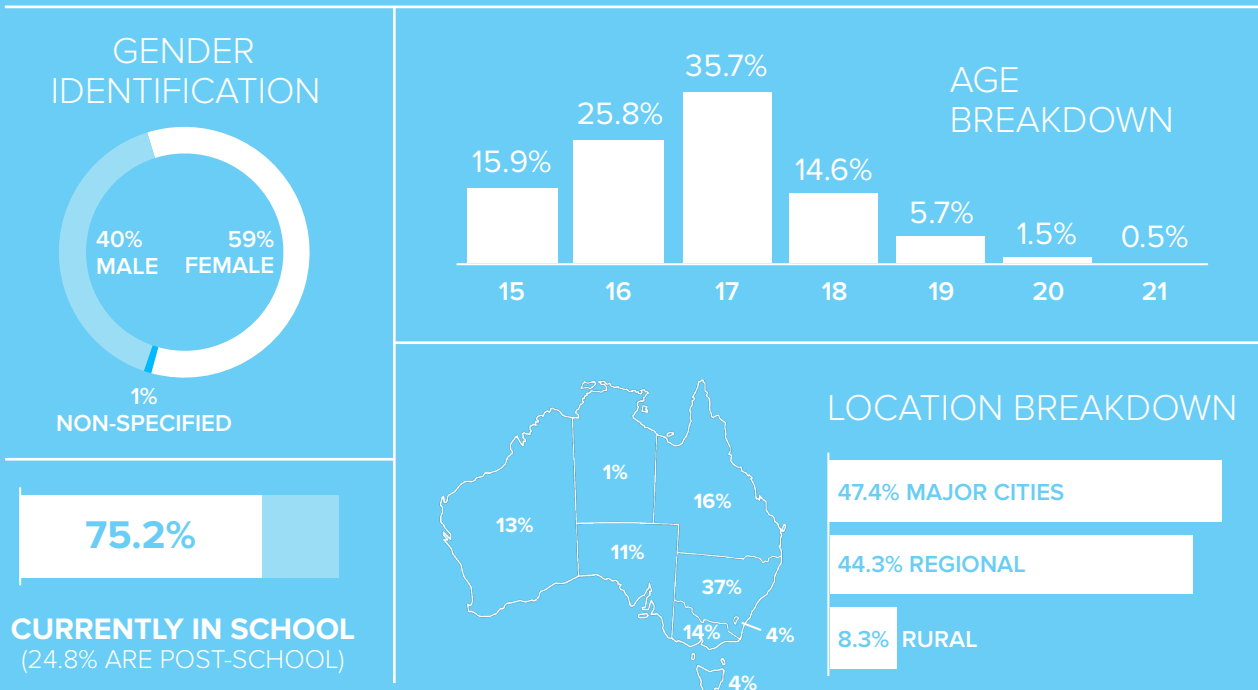
OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS HAVE CONSIDERED DROPPING OUT

# YEAR13 SURVEYS

## HAVE YOUR SAY ABOUT WORK & STUDY

A national survey of Australian youth n=2092. Research conducted April 2017 by Year13.

This survey formed the basis of this research paper, and was designed to gather comprehensive information about how young people aged 15-21 feel about life, high school, and their transitional options. This survey was conducted online and respondents were sourced via social media and through Year13's EDM (electronic direct mail) database of young Australians.



## HAVE YOUR SAY ABOUT YEAR 12

A national survey of Australian youth n=2194. Research conducted February 2017 by Year13.

This survey also informed much of the research in this paper. This study was targeted at Australian senior school students and recent school leavers with the aim of understanding how young people feel prior to, during and after Year 12. The survey was conducted online and pushed through social media and EDMs.

## THE VOICE OF (YOU)TH

A national survey of Australian youth n=1368. Research conducted September 2016 by Year13.

## HAVE YOUR SAY ABOUT YOUR CHILD'S FUTURE

A national survey of Australian parents n=289. Research conducted February 2017 by Year13.

## HAVE YOUR SAY ABOUT VET

A national survey of Australian VET students n=1716. Research conducted May 2017 by Year13 for Westpac Banking Corporation.

# INTRODUCTION



At present, young Australians are finishing 13 years of schooling confused about adulthood, overwhelmed by their post-school options and unsure of which path will guarantee success. They are feeling immense pressure from themselves, their parents and their school, and their mental health is suffering as a result.


Currently 13.3% of youth are unemployed<sup>1</sup>, one in five students are considered disengaged<sup>2</sup>, and one in four qualify for probable serious mental illness (PSMI)<sup>3</sup>. Only 56% of apprentices are completing their training<sup>4</sup> and it takes a university graduate, on average, 4.7 years to find full-time work in their industry of study<sup>5</sup>.

While the social and economic ramifications of these numbers are clear, it is also important to recognise how young people are feeling during this transitional phase. With this understanding, educators, employers and government ("industries") can reshape the way they communicate with youth, therefore improving career and education prospects for all young Australians.

For many youth, the primary objective of senior schooling is to obtain an ATAR. The ATAR (Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank) is a number "less than 30" up to 99.95, that determines a student's entry into university. The ATAR was gradually introduced in 2009 and 2010, replacing the University Admissions Index (UAI), Equivalent National Tertiary Entrance Rank (ENTER) and Tertiary Entrance Rank (TER). Queensland will begin using the ATAR system in 2018, as they currently retain the Overall Position (OP) system.

The ATAR maps a student's aggregate score from exams, assessments and major works against the national average. If a student scores a 90, it is because they performed better than 90% of their peers in Australia. Receiving an ATAR in Year 12 is optional; of the Year 12 students Year13 surveyed, 88% are working towards an ATAR<sup>6</sup>.

**'After the ATAR: Understanding How Gen Z Transition into Further Education and Employment'** is designed to provide industries with insights into how youth are feeling about life, high school, the ATAR and



the transition into further education and employment. This paper will align Year13's findings with industry statistics to paint a vivid picture of youth engagement in the transitional landscape.

This paper is comprised primarily of data mined from two surveys of Australian youth conducted by Year13 in 2017. These surveys were designed to inform communication strategies and to gain a better understanding of how industries could engage with youth more effectively.

'Have Your Say About Work and Study' was conducted in April 2017 and saw 2,092 15-19-year-old respondents from city, regional and rural Australia. 'Have Your Say About Year 12' was conducted in February 2017 and saw 2,194 15-18-year-old respondents from city, regional and rural Australia.

The results from additional Year13 surveys will also be referenced where relevant. 'The Voice of (You)th' was conducted in September 2016 and saw 1,368 respondents aged 16-25. 'Have Your Say About Your Child's Future'

was qualitative research targeted to parents of Australian youth. 289 parents commented on the transition period. 'Have Your Say About VET' was conducted in May, 2017 on behalf of Westpac Banking Corporation and saw 1,716 Australian VET students respond.

The paper is divided into two parts. Part One contextualises the lifestyle of youth pre-transition, and focuses on their feelings towards high school and life in general.

Part Two addresses how young people feel about the options available to them when they finish school. This is organised according to the three major post-school options for youth: 'Employment', 'Vocational Education and Training (VET)', and 'Higher Education'.

Through this research, Year13 aims to equip industries with the understanding they need to close the communication gap with youth and improve outcomes for all young people transitioning from school into employment and/or further education.



A blurred photograph of a school hallway with wooden floors and white walls, serving as the background for the page.

# PART ONE

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LIFE DURING HIGH SCHOOL

“SO YOU WRITE A GOOD ESSAY... LIKE REALLY REALLY GOOD. THEN YOU FIND OUT THAT YOU HAVE TO MEMORISE THE WHOLE THING! SO YOU COULD BE REALLY SMART AND HAVE A REAL DECENT ESSAY BUT THEN STUFF IT ALL UP BECAUSE YOU CAN'T MEMORISE IT IN THE EXAM?! LIKE NAH, NOT FAIR.”  
**- FEMALE, 18**

In 2016, there were 3,798,226 students enrolled in schools across Australia. Between 2015 and 2016 the Apparent Retention Rate from Year 7/8 to Year 12 rose marginally from 84.0% to 84.3%<sup>7</sup>.

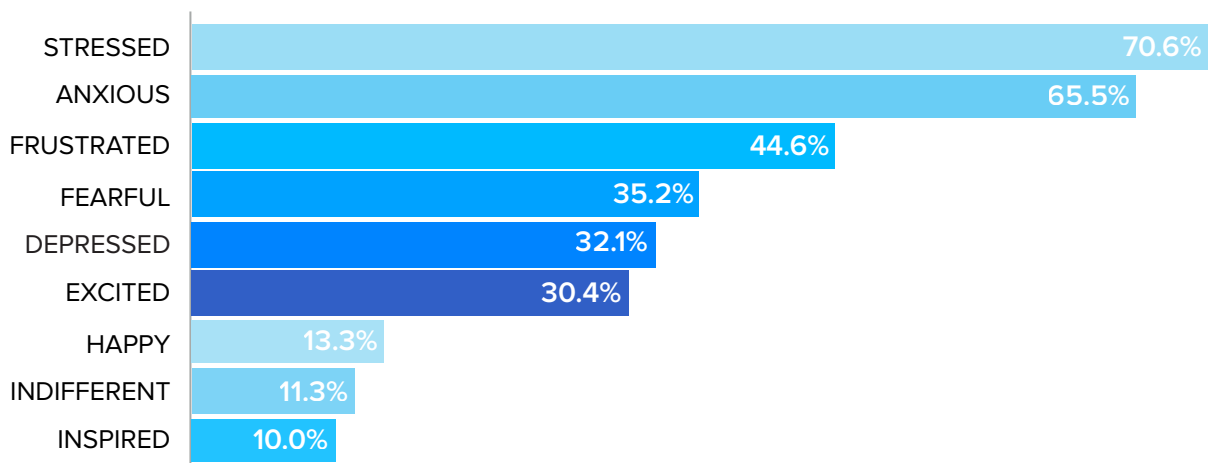
School attributes such as sector, gender mix and the extent to which a school is ‘academic’ are responsible for just under 20% of the variation in ATAR results<sup>8</sup>. This means how young people feel about school, regardless of the school they attend, has a significant influence (over 80%) on their completion rate, academic success and transitional confidence. This statistic served as the primary motivation for Year13’s research.

When Year13’s survey respondents were asked to pick the range of emotions that best

describe how they felt or are feeling about Year 12, 70% of high school students say they are ‘stressed’ followed by ‘anxious’ (66%), and ‘frustrated’ (44%). Just 30% of students say they feel excited about Year 12<sup>9</sup> (see graph below). These negative emotions have a significant impact on young people’s desire to learn and engage with content at school.

When asked what makes them stressed, the primary reasons are ‘the fear of failure’ (18%) and ‘workload’ (17%), followed by ‘mental health’ (15%) and ‘not knowing what I want/ed to do’ (11%)<sup>10</sup>. With young people feeling burdened by so much stress and negative emotion, it is no wonder one in five Australian school students are categorised as inactive class participants, qualifying them as ‘disengaged’<sup>11</sup>.

**WHICH EMOTIONS BEST DESCRIBE HOW YOU FELT/ARE FEELING ABOUT YEAR 12?**



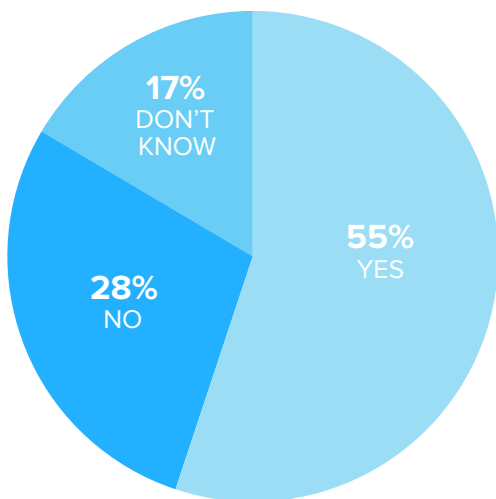
## WHY YOUNG PEOPLE ARE DISENGAGING

Year13's research has revealed a number of significant reasons why young people are disengaging in school.

### A LACK OF SELF VALUE

55% of high school students feel that their school cares more about their ATAR than them as students<sup>12</sup>. Youth are not feeling valued within the classroom in their final years, which impacts how they engage with school content and the trust they put in the schooling system to transition them effectively.

DO YOU THINK YOUR SCHOOL CARES MORE ABOUT YOUR ATAR THAN YOU AS A STUDENT?



### IRRELEVANCE OF THE ATAR

When students were asked to rate the ATAR's importance to their future out of 10 (1 being irrelevant, 10 being necessary), 6 was the average rating<sup>13</sup>, thus revealing the ATAR is lacking in relevance for young people.

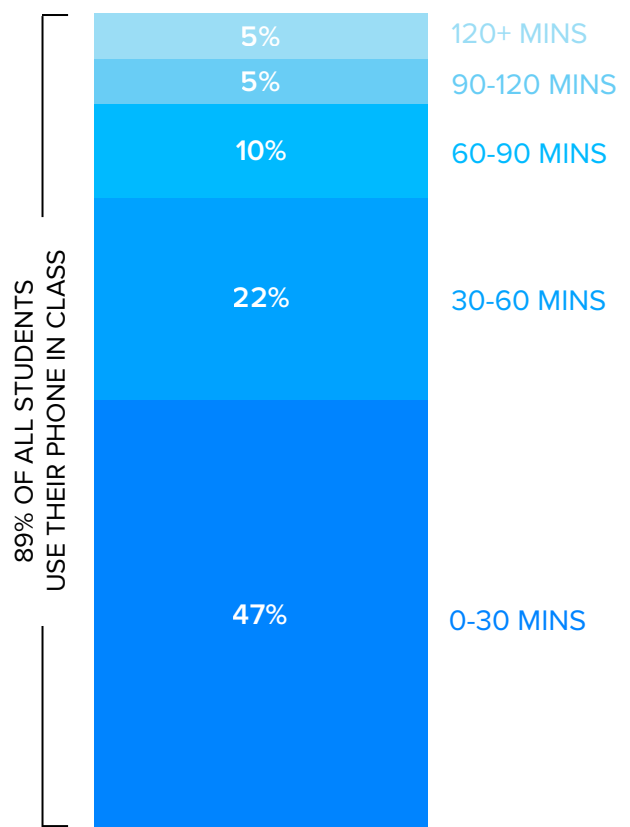
Victoria University's Vice Chancellor and President, Professor Peter Dawkins, is one of many respected educators who support a similar view. Dawkins contends that the ATAR is just one piece of data and that a deeper understanding of students' skills and abilities is necessary, rather than "giving undue emphasis to this thing called the ATAR score"<sup>14</sup>.

“ALL THROUGHOUT HIGH SCHOOL, THE PRESSURE TO RECEIVE A REALLY HIGH ATAR WAS UNBELIEVABLE. IT WAS THE SOURCE OF PRESSURE FOR ME DURING MY HIGH SCHOOL YEARS. WE WERE EDUCATED TO BELIEVE THAT WITHOUT IT, WE WOULD NOT ADVANCE ANY FURTHER IN OUR EDUCATION... IN THE END, THE ATAR IS JUST A NUMBER. - FEMALE, 19”

### THE ROLE OF MOBILE PHONES

89% of all high school students claim they are using their phones during class. The majority of students are spending up to half an hour of their class time per day looking at their phones (47%)<sup>15</sup>.

HOW MUCH CLASS TIME DO YOU SPEND ON YOUR PHONE PER DAY?



It is important to note that over 50% of senior students feel they are learning an equal amount of school content (if not more) from the internet rather than their teachers<sup>16</sup>, so it is no wonder devices play a prominent role in class time.



## HOW YOUTH FEEL ABOUT HIGH SCHOOL

Year13's research indicates that youth disengagement has a significant impact on young peoples' mental health, as well as how stressed they feel about high school and the transition from school.

### THEY COMBAT STRESS WITH MUSIC, TEARS & FOOD

In a multi-select question, most youth claim they combat stress by listening to music (59%)<sup>17</sup>. Statistics from IFPI's 2016 Global Music Report state that music streaming is "the industry's fastest-growing revenue source"<sup>18</sup>. Therefore, it could be concluded that the increasing accessibility to a wide range of uninterrupted and affordable music has been a positive influence on a young person's stress management.

#### HOW DO YOU COMBAT STRESS FROM SCHOOL?

MUSIC.....	59.0%
FRIENDS.....	45.1%
SPORT/EXERCISE.....	39.9%
TV/MOVIES.....	39.7%
EAT.....	38.7%
CRY.....	36.4%
GO OUTSIDE.....	24.4%
FAMILY.....	22.9%
STUDY.....	22.4%
READ.....	18.7%
PSYCHOLOGIST/COUNSELLOR.....	12.6%
MEDITATE/YOGA.....	9.7%
I DON'T FEEL STRESSED.....	2.8%

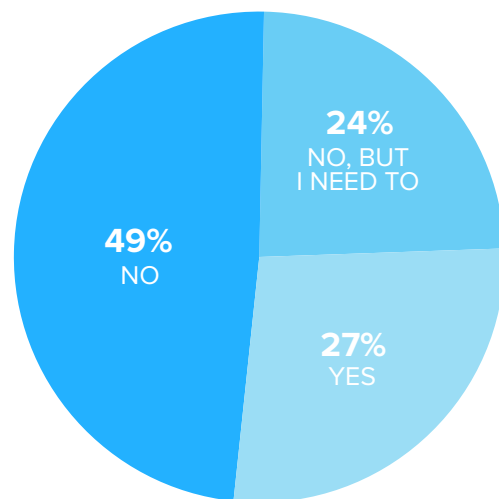
In the same question, 36% of Year13's survey participants said they 'cry' and 38% said 'eat' when stressed. These negative reactions to stress are concerning when paired with data from the National Health Survey. 83% of overweight or obese Australians are eating emotionally<sup>19</sup>. Similarly, the Australian National Preventative Health Agency (ANPHA) reports that stress is an important factor that can increase the risk of being above a healthy weight<sup>20</sup>. When such high levels of stress are

manifested at an early age, the associated health risks can inhibit a young person's development.

### YOUNG PEOPLE NEED ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

The Young Minds Matter report identifies schools as a "front line for identifying mental disorders, providing services, and referring children to services."<sup>21</sup> With 51% of Year13's survey respondents identifying a need to see a mental health professional<sup>22</sup>, it is clear that young people need greater access to counsellors within a school setting.

#### HAVE YOU SEEN A MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL IN THE LAST YEAR?



### YOUNG PEOPLE TAKE GAP YEARS TO 'FIGURE THINGS OUT'

It is estimated that approximately 20% of Australian students who complete Year 12 will take a gap year<sup>23</sup>.

According to Year13's research, the purpose of a gap year has been largely dictated by fear and confusion surrounding career pathways. Often, young people are conflicted about VET, employment, higher education and/or the course they should take, so a gap year seems like the most financially and emotionally reasonable choice.

# YOUTHSAY

“AT THE BEGINNING OF THE YEAR, I STARTED UNIVERSITY, BUT IT TURNED OUT THAT NOT REALLY ASSESSING WHAT I WANTED DURING SCHOOL, LEFT ME IN THE WRONG PLACE AFTERWARDS. NOW, I'M TAKING A GAP YEAR TO FIGURE OUT WHAT I WANT TO STUDY AND DO IN THE FUTURE.”  
- FEMALE, 18

“I BELIEVE ONCE YOU FINISH SCHOOL THERE IS SORT OF A PRESSURE AND STIGMA TO CONTINUE YOUR EDUCATION OR APPRENTICESHIP. MANY YEARS OF STUDYING AND ESPECIALLY AFTER YEAR 12 HAS BUILT UP A LOT OF STRESS AND I BELIEVE THERE WAS TOO MUCH PRESSURE TO CONTINUE WHEN A LOT OF PEOPLE MAY BENEFIT FROM TAKING A BREAK E.G. GAP YEAR OR GAP SEMESTER. - MALE, 19”

“EVER SINCE I STARTED YEAR 11, I BEGAN TO FEEL LIKE NOTHING MORE THAN A NUMBER; A NUMBER STRATEGICALLY TRYING TO WIN A GAME. I'VE REALISED THAT THE HSC IS NOT ABOUT HOW SMART YOU ARE, HOW DEDICATED YOU ARE OR HOW WORTHY YOU ARE FOR YOUR DREAM JOB AT ALL. IN FACT, IT FEELS LIKE A RAT RACE, A COMPETITION THAT TURNS OURSELVES ON EACH OTHER. IT'S NOT ABOUT WHAT YOU LEARN, OR HOW GOOD YOU ARE, IT'S ABOUT MANIPULATING THE MARKERS AND TELLING THEM WHAT THEY WANT TO HEAR. - FEMALE, 18”

“THE FACT OF THE MATTER IS SIMPLE. ATAR DOES NOT TEST INTELLIGENCE, BUT IS THAT A BAD THING? ATAR IS MORE THAN ANYTHING A TEST OF A STUDENTS DEDICATION AND WILL POWER. DON'T GET ME WRONG, SOME STUDENTS ARE ACADEMICALLY GIFTED AND THEY WILL HAVE AN ADVANTAGE IN THE ATAR SYSTEM BUT IF THEY DON'T HAVE THE DEDICATION OR THE DESIRE TO PUSH FORWARD THEY WILL FAIL. - MALE, 18”

“MENTAL HEALTH IS AN EXTREMELY IMPORTANT TOPIC THAT I DON'T FEEL LIKE A LOT OF SCHOOLS COVER THAT WELL. IF SCHOOL IS MEANT TO BE A "POSITIVE EXPERIENCE THAT ENRICHES LEARNING" (AS I'VE HEARD FROM MY PRINCIPAL), THEN WHY IS IT THAT SO MANY OF OUR STUDENTS FEEL ABNORMAL LEVELS OF ANXIETY, DEPRESSION, AND OTHER MENTAL DISORDERS? REDUCING THE PRESSURE AND STRESS COULD BE A WAY TO HELP RESOLVE THIS ISSUE. - MALE, 16”

## THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN YOUNG PEOPLE'S CAREER DECISIONS

In a survey of 289 Australian parents, Year13 explored where they are going for career advice for their children. Of this sample, 47% said they go to 'their children', 41% said the 'internet' and 26% said they go to their child's 'school careers advisor'<sup>24</sup>.

For young people, parents remain the primary influencer and provider of advice for their career choices. 48% of teenagers say their 'parents and carers' were the best source of career advice<sup>25</sup> (see graph below).

With parents turning to their children, and youth turning to their parents for career advice, it could be concluded that there are limited opportunities for both parties to explore options outside the family unit. Stronger external influences from objective sources may be necessary to ensure that young people have a well-rounded view of all their available career options.

“[SCHOOLS SHOULD] ENCOURAGE ENQUIRY-BASED LEARNING AND CRITICAL THINKING. EXPOSE [YOUTH]

TO A BROAD VARIETY OF OPTIONS - TRADE, VOCATIONAL AND ACADEMIC THROUGHOUT LATE PRIMARY/EARLY SECONDARY - STUDENTS STILL HAVE LIMITED UNDERSTANDING OF THE VAST ARRAY OF OPPORTUNITIES.”

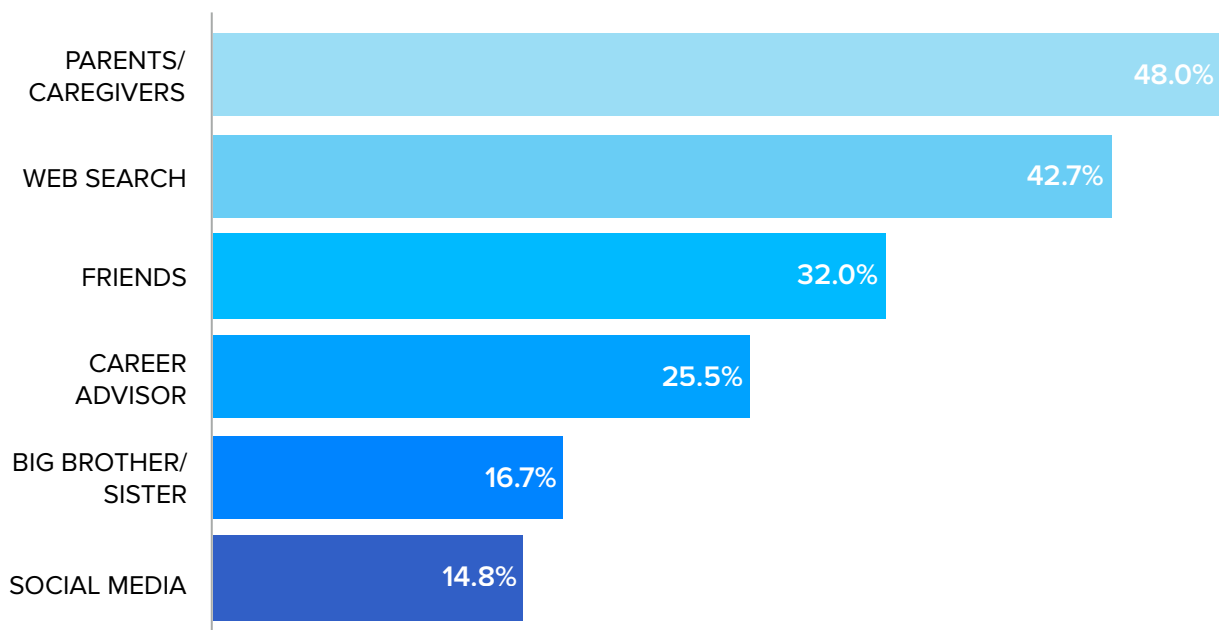
- PARENT, 50-55

The impact of parental influence and bias on their child's career decisions is supported by research gathered in the Longitudinal Study of Australian Youth (LSAY) in 2014, which found that:

*“students whose parents wanted them to attend university are four times more likely to complete Year 12 than those whose parents would like them to choose a non-university pathway... students whose parents expect them to go to university are around 11 times more likely to report they plan to attend university when compared with students whose parents expect them to do something other than university”<sup>26</sup>.*

Despite this, young people are not feeling the most pressure from their parents. When survey respondents were asked 'who do you feel the most pressure from regarding your future?', 'myself' was the most prominent answer (54%), followed by 'my family' (27%) and 'my school' (9%)<sup>27</sup>.

WHERE DO YOU (YOUTH) GET YOUR MOST TRUSTWORTHY CAREER ADVICE FROM?



## HOW YOUTH FEEL ABOUT CAREER ADVISORS

According to research from the Career Industry Council of Australia (CICA), “one in three career practitioners [are] provided with less than \$1,000 annually to undertake career development activities across their entire school. This equates to half of schools with a population of over 1,000 students having less than \$3 per student to spend on career education”<sup>28</sup>.

The top five resources career practitioners would like to enhance their role are: additional time to spend with students (77%), greater contact with employers/industry (68%), networking with other career professionals (64%), additional time with staff to develop integrated career curriculum (62%), other professional training and/or development (57%)<sup>29</sup>. With such limited time, funding, and with 52% of careers advisors working part-time<sup>30</sup>, it is no wonder only 26% of young people turn to them.

Year13’s survey respondents identify similar issues with the career advice system. Despite the fact that most students believe having a career advisor is beneficial and helps in preparing them for the transition from school, many indicated that more one-on-one time with a career advisor and more personalised advice was necessary, and that career advisors needed to have an understanding of a more diverse range of options in order to cater for every student effectively.

“CAREER ADVISORS NEED TO BE PREPARED FOR STUDENTS WHO ARE AIMING FOR A 99 ATAR, AND FOR THOSE WHO WANT TO DROP OUT AND PURSUE AN APPRENTICESHIP, AND THOSE WHO NEED A GAP YEAR TO WORK OUT “HOW TO ADULT”... TOO MANY SCHOOLS CONCENTRATE ON EITHER ONE EXTREME OR THE OTHER AND THAT’S NOT OKAY. - FEMALE, 18”

Research shows the link between school subjects and careers can make school more meaningful for youth<sup>31</sup>. Thus, it is important to ensure students can contextualise their

career options within curriculum learnings. Schools currently do this by providing subject electives in senior school that align to students’ career pathways, however, this arrangement has been criticised by several academics. In a study by the Faculty of Education at Queensland University, Atweh, Taylor and Singh conclude that:

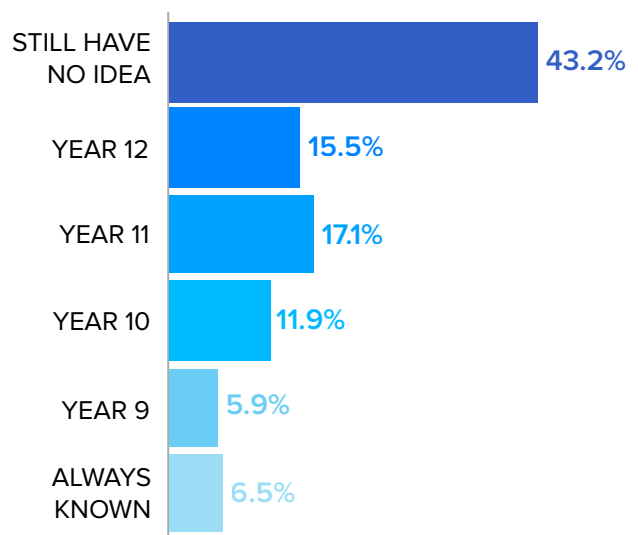
“...subject choices for/in the senior schools are often constructed by the school and students as final and binding. Such choices are often based on limited information about university entry requirements and they do not take into account that in today’s work life it is very common for adults to under go more than one major change in direction in their careers and occupations.”<sup>32</sup>

Similarly, respondents of Year13’s research highlight that it is their non-ATAR subjects that are helping them prepare for their careers, while their ATAR subjects play little role in post-school preparation.

“MOST THINGS IN SCHOOL DO NOT PREPARE US FOR THE ‘REAL’ WORLD... ATAR SUBJECTS ARE PURELY THERE FOR SCHOOL BUT THE NON- ATAR SUBJECTS TEACH YOU ACTUAL SKILLS TO HELP YOU GET A JOB. - FEMALE, 15”

This lack of preparation could contribute to 43% of Year 12 students having no idea what they want to do when they leave school<sup>33</sup>.

WHEN DID YOU DECIDE WHAT YOU WANTED TO DO WHEN YOU LEFT SCHOOL? (YEAR 12 STUDENTS)



# PARENTS SAY

“STOP PROVIDING CONFLICTING INFORMATION TO THE STUDENTS. ON ONE HAND [SCHOOLS] PLACE ENORMOUS WEIGHT ON ACHIEVING A HIGH ATAR AND ON THE OTHER, THEY'LL TELL THE STUDENTS NOT TO WORRY AS THERE ARE MANY PATHWAYS TO GET TO THEIR CAREER GOAL. I SEE STUDENTS FRUSTRATION AND CONFUSION OFTEN LEADING TO MASSIVE STRESS. - FEMALE, 45-50”

“[SCHOOLS NEED TO] IMPROVE VOCATIONAL OPTIONS. UNIVERSITY DEGREES NOW HAVE LESS VALUE DUE TO UNCAPPING PLACES AND ENCOURAGING STUDENTS WHO WERE NEVER CUT OUT FOR UNIVERSITY TO GO ANYWAY. PROVIDE QUALITY PATHWAYS, NOT PUSH EVERYONE TO STUDY SOMETHING THAT ENDS UP HAVING NO VALUE AND CREATES DEBT. - FEMALE, 45-50”

# YOUTH SAY

“WHEN YOU ARE IN SCHOOL, THE EXPECTATIONS FROM TEACHERS, THE PRINCIPAL AND PARENTS IS OVERWHELMING. IT SEEMS THAT YOU ARE LOOKED AT AS MERELY SOMEONE THAT THESE PEOPLE CAN EITHER BRAG ABOUT OR CRITICISE... THE PRESSURE AND STRESS THIS PUTS ON STUDENTS IS INCREDIBLE. - MALE, 18”

“SCHOOL DID NOT PREPARE [ME] FOR JOB APPLICATIONS, HOW TO DEAL WITH REJECTION, HOW TO LIVE A LIFE WITHOUT A STRICT SCHEDULE THAT IS ENFORCED BY BELLS OR A TEACHER TELLING YOU WHAT TO DO AND HOW TO DO IT. [LEAVING SCHOOL] FELT LIKE BEING RUSHED OUT THE DOOR SO QUICKLY AND BEING LEFT ALONE IN THE COLD WITH NO IDEA WHERE I AM. - FEMALE, 17”

“I'M BLESSED TO GO TO A SCHOOL THAT GOES TO TREMENDOUS EFFORT TO CATER FOR STUDENT NEEDS AND PREPARE US FOR OUR FUTURE. I BELIEVE THAT SCHOOLS SHOULD ATTEMPT TO IMPLEMENT WEEKLY/ FORTNIGHTLY MEETINGS FOR GROUPS OF STUDENTS WITH A CAREERS ADVISOR... THROUGH TEACHING IMPORTANT SKILLS, HAVING CAREERS MEETINGS, STUDENTS MAY FEEL LESS STRESSED ABOUT FACING THE 'OUTSIDE WORLD'. - FEMALE, 17”

## HOW YOUTH FEEL ABOUT LIFE IN GENERAL

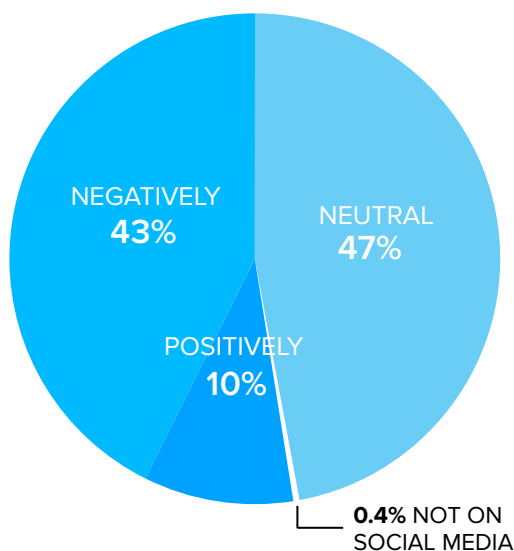
Social, economic, political and technological changes contribute to the complexities of the transitional landscape for school students.

Fewer young people are leaving home<sup>34</sup>, social media is “now beating traditional advertising methods as the most effective form of promoting a business or service,”<sup>35</sup> and 26.4% of Australians aged 16-24 have experienced a mental health disorder in the last 12 months<sup>36</sup>.

### UNDERSTANDING WHERE SOCIAL MEDIA BENEFITS AND INHIBITS THE YOUNG PERSON

Only 10% of youth believe that social media positively affects the way they see themselves<sup>37</sup>. With so much time spent on the internet, it is not surprising that youth mental health statistics are at a problematic high.

HOW DO YOU THINK SOCIAL MEDIA AFFECTS WAY YOU PERCEIVE YOURSELF?



However, 61% believe social media helps expand their options for their career/life aspirations<sup>38</sup>. This highlights the need for education and employment providers to utilise and adapt to social media's pace, by providing youth with engaging content online.

## IN FIVE YEARS, YOUNG PEOPLE WANT TO BE TRAVELLING

When respondents were asked, 'where do you see yourself in 5 years', 'travelling the world' was the most popular answer (33%), followed by 'I just want to go with the flow' (23%) and 'studying' (22%)<sup>39</sup>.

Many young people are therefore prioritising seeing the world over their career or education progression.

### YOUNG PEOPLE ARE MORE INSPIRED BY THE PEOPLE IN THEIR CIRCLES THAN CELEBRITIES

When survey respondents were asked who they believe to be a successful person, the answers are primarily directed at those who had achieved a level of success in their immediate circles, such as their parents or teachers<sup>40</sup>. Global influencers such as celebrities, sports stars and politicians are rarely mentioned and if so, it is their character rather than their celebrity status that inspire them.

“MY DAD, A PSYCHOLOGIST FOR REFUGEES, ALWAYS THINKS ABOUT OTHERS, GOING OUT OF HIS WAY TO HELP NOT ONLY HIS FAMILY, BUT HUNDREDS OF OTHERS. IN MY OPINION, THIS, IN ADDITION TO HAPPINESS, IS SUCCESS. - FEMALE, 18”

“MY EX-HIGH SCHOOL DRAMA TEACHER GAVE ME AN ENTIRE NEW PERSPECTIVE ON WHAT SUCCESS REALLY IS. SHE IS CERTAINLY NOT THE RICHEST PERSON IN TERMS OF MONEY, BUT SHE IS RICH IN TERMS OF HER EXPERIENCES. - FEMALE, 19”

This view is mirrored in a poll Year13 ran at the bottom of 5 randomly selected editorial pieces published to their website in May 2017. When asked 'whose stories inspire you?', 49% of the 704 respondents say, 'young people following their dreams'. 'Celebrities' rate low at 5% and 'social media influencers' at 4%.

## YOUTH DEFINE SUCCESS BY HAPPINESS & RELATIONSHIPS

When respondents were asked to select the top five answers to the question ‘how would you define success?’, ‘happiness and mental stability’ (90%) and ‘positive family/relationships’ (70%) were the most popular answers, as opposed the often assumed ‘fame’ (2%) and ‘having the latest technology’ (2%)<sup>41</sup> (see graph below).

## THERE IS A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HOW YOUTH PERCEIVE THEMSELVES AND HOW THEY THINK OLDER GENERATIONS PERCEIVE THEM

When youth respondents were asked, ‘how do you perceive yourself and your generation?’, the top answers were ‘intelligent’ (65%), ‘worldly’ (54%), ‘respectful’ (49%) and ‘go-getter’ (46%)<sup>42</sup>. In contrast, when asked ‘How are you and your

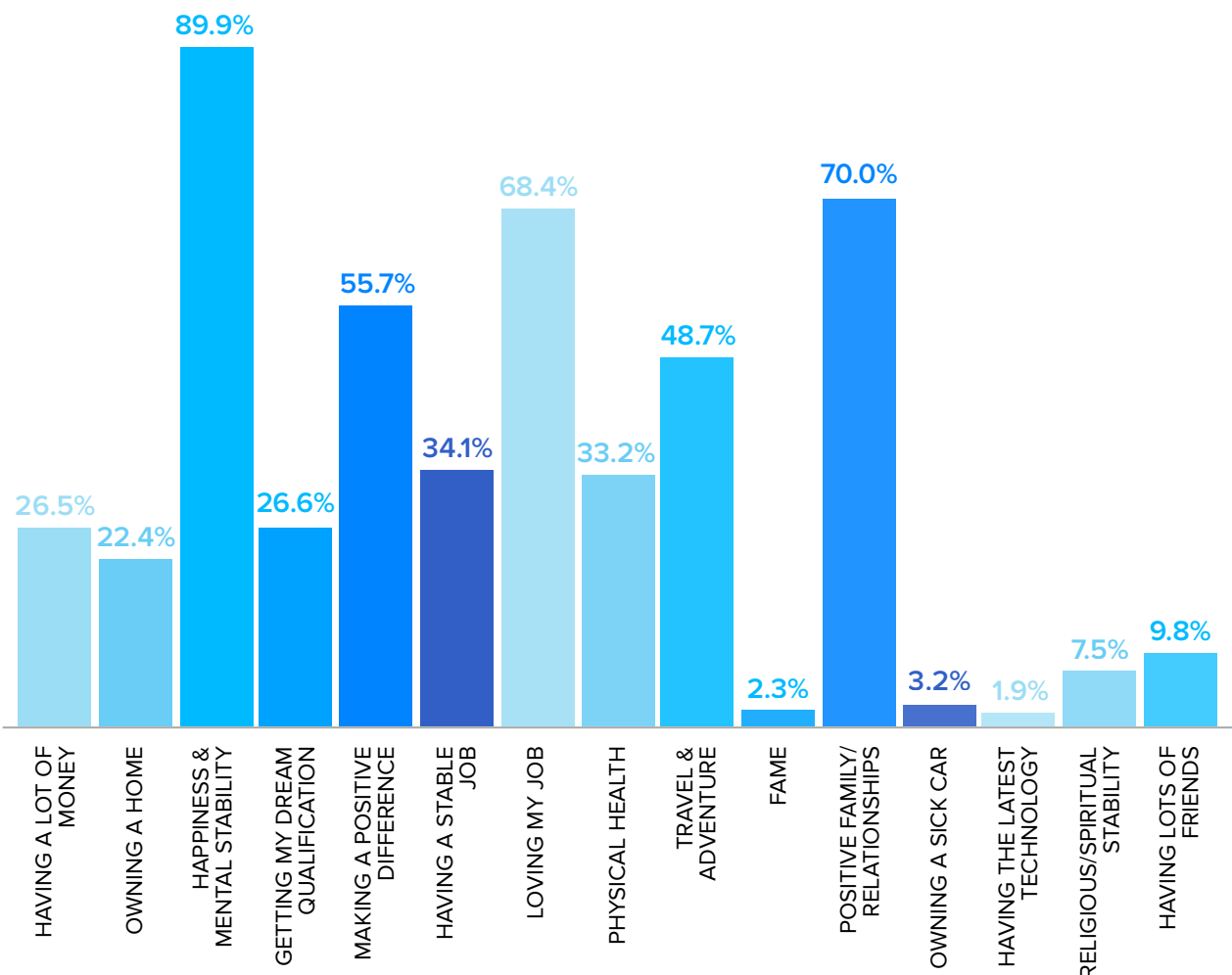
generation perceived by older generations?’, the top answers were primarily negative, with most selecting either ‘lazy’ (76%) or ‘entitled’ (54%). ‘Intelligent’ is the highest ranking positive answer at 24%<sup>43</sup>.

## THEREFORE, THEY DON’T TRUST OLDER GENERATIONS & BRANDS

When Year13’s survey sample were asked whether ‘older generations communicate with them effectively?’, 73% say ‘no’<sup>44</sup>.

For industries with a youth audience, this disparity can have a major impact on the success of communication strategies. External research proves this, with only 6% of Gen Z stating they “trust big corporations”<sup>45</sup> and 40% of young people believing brands don’t take them seriously<sup>46</sup>. However, youth are willing to engage with brands they believe are delivering quality content, with 60% considering them to be ‘an important part of the creative content online’<sup>47</sup>.

HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE SUCCESS?



# YOUTHSAY

“ I THINK A SUCCESSFUL PERSON IS SOMEONE WHO... HAS DECIDED TO PURSUE THEIR PASSIONS NO MATTER WHAT ANYONE HAS TOLD OR TAUGHT THEM, SOLELY BECAUSE THEY BELIEVE IN THEMSELVES. I THINK THAT IF YOU'RE RICH OR FAMOUS BUT YOU AREN'T PASSIONATE ABOUT WHAT YOU DO WITH YOUR LIFE OR HAPPY WITH YOURSELF THEN IT'S NOT WORTH IT. - **FEMALE, 17** ”

“ MANY TEENAGERS FACE THE PROBLEM WHERE THEY HAVE NOT YET FOUND THEIR TRUE PASSION AND STRUGGLE TO FIND WHAT THEIR PURPOSE IS. THEN, THEY TRY TO FIND A JOB THAT PAYS WELL AND IT ENDS UP BEING INCREDIBLY BORING FOR THEM. THEY LIVE WITH NO PASSION, PURPOSE OR DRIVE... FINDING SOMETHING YOU LOVE AS A JOB IS INCREDIBLY DIFFICULT, ESPECIALLY DUE TO A FALSE PERCEPTION THAT MAKING MORE MONEY = MORE HAPPINESS/SUCCESS. - **MALE, 15** ”

“ SOMETHING THAT I HAVE HEARD A LOT IN RECENT MONTHS FROM ADULTS IS 'SCHOOL IS THE EASIEST TIME IN YOUR LIFE !'. THIS MAY BE TRUE FOR SOME, MAYBE NOT FOR OTHERS. I THINK I'M NEUTRAL ON THAT STATEMENT, I LOVE SCHOOL, BUT IT HAS ITS MOMENTS AND I HAVE MY MOMENTS... SO I GUESS I'M KINDA KEEN TO SEE HOW DIFFICULT THE 'REAL' WORLD IS. BUT IN SAYING THAT, I'M STRESSED ABOUT HOW I'LL HANDLE IT... IF I CAN EVEN HANDLE IT; BECAUSE WHAT IF THIS IS THE EASIEST TIME IN MY LIFE? DOESN'T SEEM TOO EASY RIGHT NOW. IT CAN BE SO HARD AND WHEN PEOPLE AROUND ME SAY IT'S ONLY GOING TO GET HARDER, I WORRY. - **MALE, 17** ”

“ THE MAIN THING FOR ME IS NOT KNOWING WHAT I WANT TO DO WITH MY LIFE, AND TRYING TO MAKE DECISIONS SO NOT TO WASTE TIME. IN ADDITION [I'M] JUST TRYING TO FIND OUT WHO I AM. - **MALE, 18** ”

“ NO MATTER HOW MUCH YOU HATED SCHOOL, YOU WILL LOSE SOMETHING ONCE YOU LEAVE. THE STABILITY AND STRUCTURE SCHOOL PROVIDED WAS RIPPED OUT FROM UNDERNEATH ME ONCE I LEFT AND NOW I SPEND MY DAYS JUST WONDERING WHAT TO DO WITH MYSELF. I SEE FRIENDS FAR LESS OFTEN, BUT NOW I'M ABLE TO DO MORE WITH THEM. IT IS BOTH A WIN AND LOSE SITUATION. - **NON-SPECIFIED, 18** ”





# PART TWO

## TRANSITIONING FROM SCHOOL



“ I WASN'T REALLY PREPARED FOR THE WORKING WORLD AT ALL. SCHOOL DOESN'T TEACH YOU ABOUT SUPER FUNDS OR TAXES... THE JUMP FROM HAVING A SET ROUTINE TO HAVING SHIFTS AT ALL HOURS OF THE DAY WAS ALSO VERY DIFFICULT.”  
- FEMALE, 19

## 1. EMPLOYMENT

In Australia, every state has different laws surrounding the age young people can begin employment. Generally speaking, young people can enter all types of employment by the age of 15.

In March 2017, the youth unemployment rate in Australia was 13.27% (the Australian average across all demographics was 5.9%) and youth underemployment was 18% (Australian average was 9%)<sup>48</sup>. The Foundation for Young Australian's report 'Renewing Australia's Promise' states that if Australia was to bring youth unemployment and underemployment in line with the rest of the population, working an additional 125 million hours, it would generate up to \$11.3 billion additional GDP for Australia<sup>49</sup>.

At present, 580,000 young Australians qualify as NEETs (Not in Employment, Education or Training), which translates to 11.8% of young Australians<sup>50</sup>.

*“60% of NEETS are women, and while just 3% of young people are indigenous, this percentage rises to 10% among NEETs. There is also a strong correlation between low educational attainment and struggles in entering the workforce - 37% of students who leave school in Year 10 end up not being in education, employment, or training, compared with just 11% of those with a tertiary qualification.”<sup>51</sup>*

These statistics are a clear example of inadequate transitioning and a lack of support for indigenous youth. Two in three young people aged 16-24 will spend up to 3 months out of education and work<sup>52</sup>. Additionally, the longer a young person is unemployed, the harder it is to find work<sup>53</sup>, with one in five people aged 16-24 spending 12 months or more out of education or employment<sup>54</sup>.

Understanding youth unemployment and underemployment is integral to building initiatives and communication strategies that increases young people's engagement with and accessibility to employment.

13.27%

YOUTH  
UNEMPLOYMENT  
RATE

18%

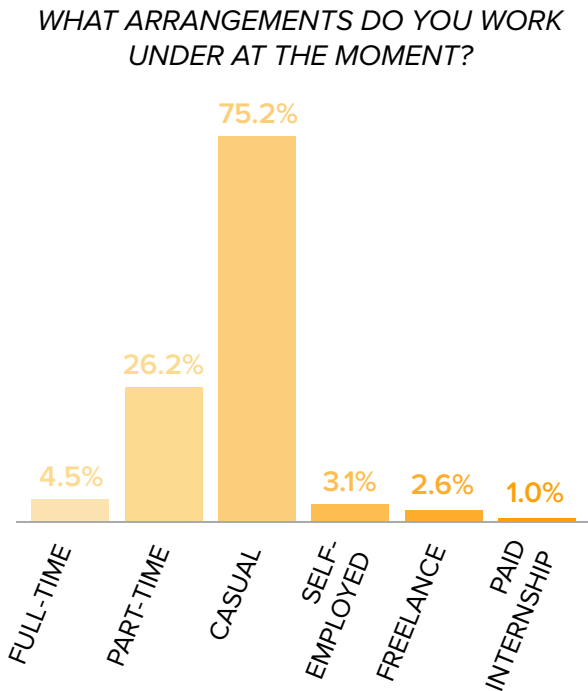
YOUTH  
UNDEREMPLOYMENT  
RATE

11.8%

YOUTH  
CLASSIFIED AS  
N.E.E.T.S

## IT'S IMPORTANT TO YOUTH THAT THEY LIKE THEIR JOB

When employed Year13 survey respondents were asked about their current employment arrangements, 75% say they are working in casual roles, 23% are working two or more jobs, and 54% say they want to work more hours<sup>55</sup>.



While 94% of employed respondents believe it is important to like your job, only 58% say they actually do like their job<sup>56</sup>, a factor that could potentially be impacting youth mental health and youth underemployment/unemployment rates.

## UNEMPLOYED YOUTH ARE LOOKING BUT CAN'T FIND WORK

Of the Year13 survey respondents who are unemployed, 57% say they are not working due to study commitments, and 42% say they are 'looking but are having no success'<sup>57</sup>. This highlights the need for employers to more effectively communicate their available opportunities to youth.

## YOUTH UNDEREMPLOYMENT IS AFFECTED BY THE ATAR

66% of employed Year 12 students receiving an ATAR are working less than 10 hours, and

the majority do not want more hours. In contrast, 63% of employed Year 12 students not receiving an ATAR are working more than 10 hours per week, and the majority want to work more hours<sup>58</sup>. These young people are ready and willing to work more hours, but their school commitments make increased working hours impossible.

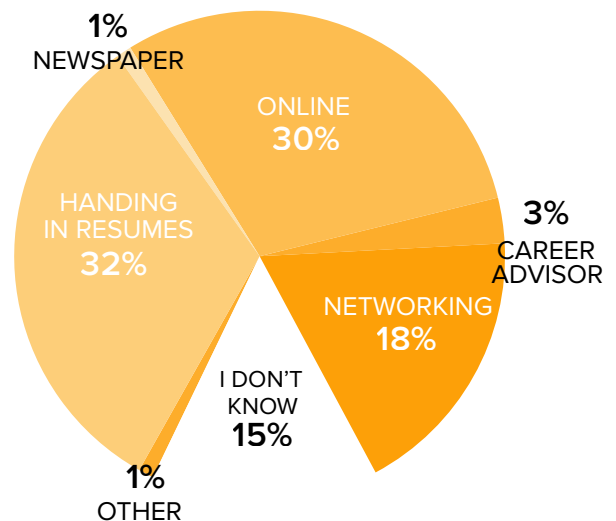
**“I'M INCREDIBLY WORRIED ABOUT BEING ABLE TO FINANCIALLY SUPPORT MYSELF... THE JOBS THAT I HAVE AT THE MOMENT DON'T ENABLE ME TO WORK THE HOURS THAT I NEED, BUT THEN AGAIN, NEITHER DOES THE FACT THAT I NEED TO BE STUDYING CONSTANTLY. - FEMALE, 17”**

## YOUNG PEOPLE BELIEVE THE MOST SUCCESSFUL WAY TO GET A JOB IS BY HANDING IN RESUMES

Most young people believe the best way to find a job is to 'hand in resumes to potential employers' (32%). However, the majority can only name 0-5 companies in the industry they want to work in, making it difficult for youth to know who to supply their applications to<sup>59</sup>.

Interestingly, 'handing in resumes' is only the most popular answer for rural and regional respondents (44% and 34% respectively). Metropolitan youth prefer to look online for work, with 32% seeking work online and 27% preferring to hand in resumes<sup>60</sup>.

## WHERE DO YOU THINK IS THE BEST PLACE TO FIND A JOB? (NATIONWIDE)



## FOR UNEMPLOYED YOUTH, PARENTS REMAIN THE FINANCIAL PROVIDER

In the Life Chances Study conducted by the Brotherhood of St Lawrence in Melbourne, 80% of 21-year-olds in high-income families received financial help from their parents, in contrast to 19% in low-income families. Another 19% of 21-year-olds in low-income families “were providing financial support rather than receiving it, giving substantial help to ill or unemployed parents.”<sup>61</sup>

“THE MOST DIFFICULT THING FOR ME WAS TO SEE ALL MY FRIENDS MAKE IT INTO UNI WHILE I HAD TO MAKE PERSONAL SACRIFICES FOR MY FAMILY... I HAD TO PUT UNI ASIDE AND WORK FOR THE TIME BEING TO HELP PROVIDE AND SUPPORT MY FAMILY.”  
- MALE, 17

In Year13’s survey, 90% of unemployed youth are relying on their parents to financially survive, largely due to increased participation in education<sup>62</sup>. It is this lack of financial independence that could be increasing the amount of control and influence parents have over young people’s employment decisions.

## UNEMPLOYED YOUTH FROM RURAL COMMUNITIES DON’T THINK THERE IS ANY WORK AVAILABLE

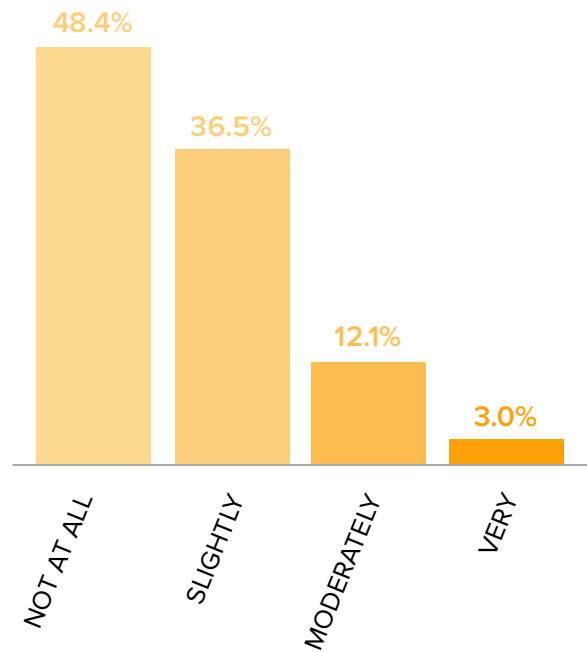
37% of those unemployed in rural areas believe there is no work in their area, compared to 10% in a major city. Regional respondents sit somewhere in the middle, with 19% believing there is no work in their area<sup>63</sup>.

## YOUTH ARE NOT CONCERNED ABOUT AUTOMATION OR OUTSOURCING

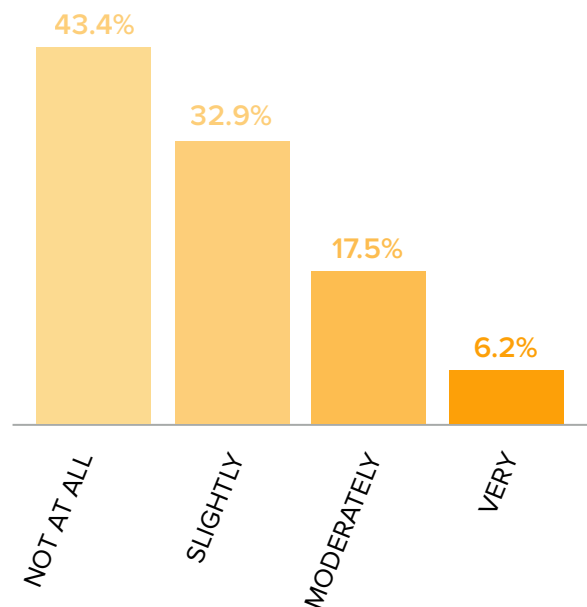
In 10 years, 40% of jobs won’t exist due to automation, and it is estimated that 70% of young people are currently entering the workforce in jobs that will be radically affected by automation<sup>64</sup>. According to Year13’s research, young people don’t feel

that automation or outsourcing is a concern, despite the reality of these threats. In fact, 49% ‘don’t feel threatened at all’ by automation and 44% ‘don’t feel threatened at all’ by outsourcing<sup>65</sup>. This indicates a lack of education about future job markets which, if improved, could significantly affect the career decisions of young people (see graphs below).

HOW THREATENED DO YOU FEEL BY AUTOMATION?



HOW THREATENED DO YOU FEEL BY OUTSOURCING?



# YOUTHSAY

“ I USED TO WORK BUT I QUIT THIS YEAR SO I COULD FOCUS ON COMPLETING YEAR 12. - **FEMALE, 18** ”

“ [I WORRY ABOUT] TAKING ON THE RESPONSIBILITY OF HAVING TO COMMIT TO A FULL TIME JOB I MAY OR MAY NOT LIKE, TO SUPPORT MY DAD WHO FACES CONSTANT FINANCIAL HARDSHIP, AND TO ALSO SUPPORT MYSELF AND MY NEW BORN BABY SISTER... [I WORRY ABOUT] NOT BEING ABLE TO TELL YOUR PARENTS YOU HATE YOUR JOB BECAUSE "WE'VE ALL BEEN THERE, IT'S NO DIFFERENT". LOOKING AT SOCIAL MEDIA IN FEAR THAT EVERYONE ELSE IS DOING BETTER THAN YOU WHEN REALISTICALLY WE'RE ALL IN THE SAME BOAT... NOT BEING ABLE TO BE A KID ANYMORE, TO HAVE THE ONGOING SUPPORT AND NETWORK THAT SCHOOL PROVIDES. HAVING TO FACE THE WORLD ON MY OWN. - **FEMALE, 17** ”

“ WE KNOW EVERY ELEMENT OFF OF THE PERIODIC TABLE, AND WE KNOW HOW TO WRITE 7 PARAGRAPH ESSAYS IN 1 HOUR, BUT THE MOST VALUABLE LESSONS WE NEED TO KNOW, WE DON'T! FOR EXAMPLE, WE DON'T KNOW HOW TO DO TAX, OR FILE FOR A TAX RETURN; WE DON'T KNOW HOW TO ACTUALLY GET A JOB OR WHAT EMPLOYERS ARE LOOKING FOR; WE DON'T KNOW HOW BILLS WORK! ALL THESE LESSONS WE HAVE TO TEACH OURSELVES, AND THAT'S WHY SO MANY PEOPLE STRUGGLE WHEN THEY LEAVE HIGH SCHOOL... THE 'REAL' WORLD TAKES A 180 TURN AND SLAMS RIGHT INTO OUR FACE! - **MALE, 16** ”

“ PEOPLE AREN'T GOING TO SUPPORT YOU AS MUCH AS THEY DID IN HIGH SCHOOL. EMPLOYERS ARE GENERALLY COLD AND APATHETIC AND DON'T CATER TO THOSE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS. - **FEMALE, 18** ”

“ SCHOOL [DOESN'T] REALLY PREPARE YOU FOR THE "REAL WORLD" AT ALL. TAXES, WRITING A GOOD RESUME, LEARNING ABOUT RENTING/ALL THE DETAILS INVOLVED ETC... HIGH SCHOOL IS WEIRD- ONE DAY YOU ARE SITTING IN A SITUATION WHERE YOU HAVE TO ASK TO GO TO THE BATHROOM, THEN A MONTH LATER YOU ARE OUT IN THE WORLD ON YOUR OWN, EXPECTED TO BE ABLE TO KNOW WHAT YOU WANT TO DO AFTER 12 YEARS OF JUST BEING TOLD WHAT TO DO. THE TRANSITION FROM YEAR 12 TO REAL LIFE IS A HUGE TIME OF CHANGE IN A YOUNG PERSONS LIFE. - **FEMALE, 20** ”

“ I WORK FULL-TIME AT COLES SUPERMARKETS WHICH I FEEL IS NOT A CAREER. ALL I WANT IS TO BECOME AN APPRENTICE ELECTRICIAN BUT FINDING SOMEONE WHO WILL TAKE ME ON AS THEIR APPRENTICE IS THE MOST DIFFICULT THING TRANSITIONING FORWARD.”  
- MALE, 18

## 2. VET (VOCATIONAL EDUCATION & TRAINING)

The Vocational Education and Training (VET) system plays a pivotal role in bridging the gap between employers and the skills needed by workers. VET uses sector partnerships with both industry and government to build education and training curriculums that meet current and future employment demands, highlighting an education pathway directly into employment.

While VET provides necessary skills for the advancement of society, significant issues have developed in the attraction and retention of students. Substantial changes over the last decade, but more acutely in the last few years, has seen a 2.9% decline in VET student commencements from 2015 to 2016 (trade and non-trade), and a decrease of 16.1% in completions between 2015 to 2016<sup>66</sup>.

Specifically, apprenticeships and traineeships have also experienced a decline. In September 2016, 278,500 apprentices and

trainees were in-training, down 5.7% from the same time in 2015<sup>67</sup>.

To exacerbate the issue, the funding model for VET courses was changed on 1st January, 2017, from the VET FEE-HELP scheme to VET Student Loans (VSL). The recent change could be confusing to those outside the VET industry, particularly when compared with the long-established and well-understood higher education funding scheme, HECS-HELP.

The VET education system is also heavily misunderstood by youth and their influencers. VET is often perceived as a trade-focused education system and many young people are unaware of the breadth of subjects and courses offered by both TAFEs and RTOs.

With schools, career advisors and parents encouraging students to work towards university, VET is often seen as a second-tier option by youth, despite the fact that most VET courses provide a more specialised education than broader university degrees. The learning style of VET is far more practical than traditional university qualifications.

2.9%

DECLINE IN  
VET STUDENT  
COMMENCEMENTS

16.1%

DECREASE IN  
VET COURSE  
COMPLETIONS

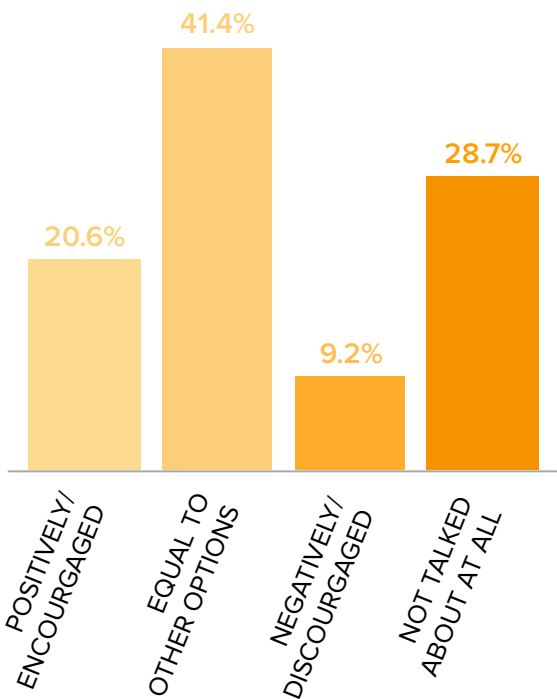
5.7%

DECREASE IN  
APPRENTICES  
& TRAINEES

## MOST HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS DON'T CONSIDER AN APPRENTICESHIP OR TRAINEESHIP

74% of Year13 survey respondents didn't/will not consider an apprenticeship or traineeship when they finish/ed school<sup>68</sup>. However, nine out of ten jobs predicted to have the greatest growth in the next five years can be achieved through training courses provided by the VET sector<sup>69</sup>. This could highlight either a lack of knowledge among youth about the benefits of VET, or the persisting stigma that surrounds pursuing a VET pathway after school.

HOW DID YOUR SCHOOL POSITION APPRENTICESHIPS?



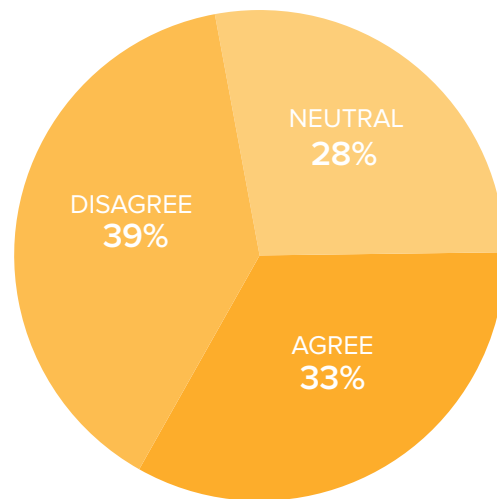
According to a national survey of 1,010 Australians conducted by McCrindle Research, 79% of parents would prefer their children to go to university after school rather than take a VET pathway. Interestingly, in the same survey, 28% felt *“the main reason Australians choose university over VET is because university graduates find work more easily.”*<sup>70</sup> However, 78% of VET graduates are employed immediately after completion, in contrast to only 39% of 20-25-year-old university graduates<sup>71</sup>. This means that young people’s transitional choices are being negated by a preference that is largely based on biased and incorrect information.

When Year13’s readers were asked in a poll at the bottom of 5 random content pieces what they think the ‘main reason trades aren’t taken as seriously as other professions’, 46% of the 1,442 votes state that ‘schools prioritise higher education over trades’, while 18% voted that ‘parents don’t value trades as much as higher education’.

“AT MY SCHOOL WE ARE PUSHED TO THE ATAR PATH. I WISH I LOOKED MORE INTO TAFE COURSES AND THE VET PROGRAM. I COULD HAVE GOTTEN INTO UNI THROUGH TAFE PATHWAYS WHICH WOULD HAVE TAKEN AWAY ALL THE UNNEEDED STRESS OF THE ATAR.”  
- FEMALE, 17

The negative stigma and misinformed assumptions surrounding VET thus appears to be largely facilitated by young people’s influencers (parents and teachers). This is reflected in Year13’s survey results, which indicate that only 33% of young people consider apprenticeships and degrees as equal<sup>72</sup>.

‘I SEE APPRENTICESHIPS AND UNIVERSITY DEGREES AS EQUAL’



## YOUTH BELIEVE A DEGREE IS THE MEANS TO A HIGHER INCOME

49% of Year13 survey respondents agree with the statement ‘a degree is the best means to a higher income’<sup>73</sup>. This is reciprocated in a paper published by Skilling Australia Foundation titled ‘Perceptions are not reality:



myths, realities and the critical role of vocational education and training in Australia' which finds that 21% of people believe one of the primary reasons Australians are choosing university over VET/TAFE is because of the perceived belief that VET graduates earn lower wages than university graduates. Of these Australians, 68% indicated that they believe the average VET graduate earns at least \$10,000 less than the average university graduate and 31% believe that the wage gap is more than \$20,000<sup>74</sup>.

However, the median full-time income for a VET graduate is \$56,000, compared to the graduate salary of \$54,000 for students completing a Bachelor's degree<sup>75</sup>.

VET students undertaking apprenticeships and traineeships also have the ability to earn money throughout their training. The table below highlights the disparity between VET earnings and higher education debt:

YEAR	AUSTRALIAN CARPENTRY APPRENTICESHIP	BACHELOR OF ARTS
YEAR 1	+ \$25,713	-\$6,750
YEAR 2	+ \$29,826.68	-\$6,750
YEAR 3	+ \$33,939.88	-\$6,750
YEAR 4	+ \$40,109.16	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>+ \$129,588.72</b>	<b>-\$20,250</b>

\*Carpentry Apprentice (4 years), Civil Construction (Outside of QLD), weekly hire, full-time, under 21-years-old, finished Year 12, Building and Construction General On-site Award 2010 (MA000020)

\*\*The P.A.C.T Pay and Conditions Tool. (2017). Fair Work Obudsmen. [online] Available at: <https://calculate.fairwork.gov.au/CheckPay>.

\*\*\*The University of Sydney. (2017). Bachelor of Arts- Courses - USYD. [online] Available at: <http://sydney.edu.au/courses/bachelor-of-arts>.

## VET STUDENTS ARE HAPPIER THAN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

In a Year13 survey of 1,716 VET students conducted on behalf of Westpac Banking Corporation, when asked how they feel about their training or studies, 57% of VET students report they are 'excited', 51% say 'happy', 45% satisfied and 30% say they are 'inspired'<sup>76</sup>.

In contrast, the top four answers amongst high school students regarding their studies

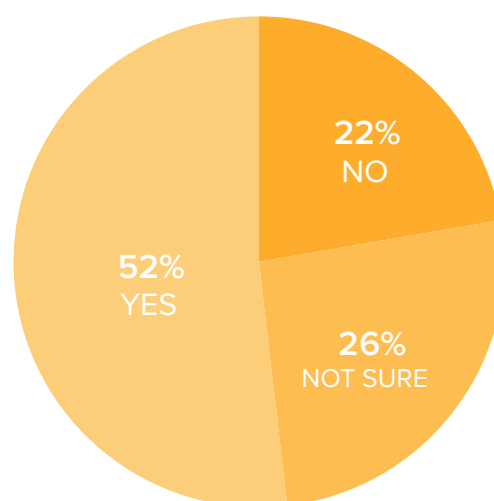
are: 'stressed' (69%), 'anxious' (68%), 'fearful' (39%) and 'frustrated' (39%)<sup>77</sup>.

**“[ATAR] WAS A NIGHTMARE... I ACTUALLY COULDN'T [DO IT] WITHOUT BEING STRESSED AND ANXIOUS AND FATIGUED ALL THE TIME. SO I DROPPED ATAR AND WENT INTO VET. I THEN FOUND OUT THAT I COULD SPEND MY WEDNESDAYS OF YEAR 12 AT TAFE STUDYING A CERTIFICATE IV IN PREPARATION FOR NURSING... THIS COURSE WAS THE PERFECT FIT AND PRETTY MUCH STRESS FREE (I WAS DOING SOMETHING I LOVED).”**  
- FEMALE, 16

## MORE RURAL YOUTH KNOW ABOUT SCHOOL-BASED APPRENTICESHIPS THAN CITY YOUTH

School-based apprenticeships provide young people a head start in their chosen career path whilst still in senior school, however only 52% of Year13 survey respondents say that school-based apprenticeships were offered at their school<sup>78</sup>.

DID YOUR SCHOOL OFFER SCHOOL-BASED APPRENTICESHIPS?



It is interesting to note that there does exist a discrepancy in the offering of school-based apprenticeships depending on location. 71% of rural students say their school offered school-based apprenticeships to their students, compared to 42% in the city<sup>79</sup>.

# YOUTHSAY

“I'M PLANNING TO START AN APPRENTICESHIP WHEN I LEAVE DESPITE BEING GIVEN NO INFORMATION ON THEM AT ALL, AS I'M A GIRL WITH GOOD MARKS NO ONE THOUGHT THAT PHYSICAL WORK WOULD BE AN OPTION, SO THE BOYS AT LEAST HAVE AN IDEA OF WHAT THEY'RE DOING AS IT GOT DISCUSSED WITH THEM FROM VARIOUS TEACHERS. I AM AIMING TO COMPLETE A TVET COURSE IN MY PROFESSION FOR HSC BUT THE SCHOOL IS MAKING IT EXTREMELY DIFFICULT AND IS HIGHLY DISCOURAGING OF THEM. - **FEMALE, 17**”

“MY SCHOOL HEAVILY ENFORCED "GET A GOOD ATAR AND GO TO UNI OR THERE ISN'T MUCH FOR YOU DO TO". THAT IS COMPLETELY WRONG - I DROPPED OUT [OF SCHOOL] 2 WEEKS AGO AND GOT AN APPRENTICESHIP AS A CHEF AND I LOVE IT. - **MALE, 16**”

“THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY LOOKED DOWN ON INDUSTRY LINKS (SCHOOL-BASED APPRENTICESHIPS), HOWEVER LOOKING BACK I WISH I HAD SELECTED THAT ROUTE INSTEAD OF ATAR. I COULD HAVE GRADUATED WITH A QUALIFICATION, TWO YEARS JOB EXPERIENCE AND, HIGHLY POSSIBLY, AN ACTUAL CAREER. ALL THE PRESSURE WAS TO GO TO UNI AND A LOT OF PEOPLE IN MY YEAR WERE AIMING FOR IT JUST TO GRADUATE... THEY COULD [HAVE GONE] TO TAFE FOR HALF THE AMOUNT OF TIME, A FRACTION OF THE COST AND GOT INTO THE INDUSTRY SOONER. - **FEMALE, 19**”

“TRADES/APPRENTICESHIPS/TAFE COURSES [SHOULD BE] MORE INCLUSIVE PARTICULARLY FOR GIRLS, AS I FEEL THAT FELLOW FEMALES ARE OFTEN LEFT FEELING THAT COURSES SUCH AS BEAUTY/HAIR ETC. ARE 'MORE SUITABLE' FOR THEM THAN TYPICALLY 'MALE' TRADES (E.G. ELECTRICIANS, MECHANICS, ETC.) - **FEMALE, 17**”

“THE MOST DIFFICULT THING IS WAKING UP ON THE FIRST DAY OF YOUR APPRENTICESHIP AND REALISING YOU ACTUALLY HAVE TO PUT IN INITIATIVE AND HARD WORK IN FRONT OF YOUR EMPLOYER AS YOU ARE ACTUALLY BEING WATCHED ONE-ON-ONE AND BEING PAID TO LEARN... AT SCHOOL TEACHERS DIDN'T GIVE YOU THAT ONE-ON-ONE FOCUS YOU NEEDED TO ACHIEVE YOUR PERSONAL BEST LIKE AN APPRENTICESHIP DOES. - **MALE, 18**”

“ATTENDING UNIVERSITY AND ENTERING THE WORKFORCE WILL REQUIRE ME TO START TAKING TOTAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR MY OWN PROGRESS... I’VE NEVER KNOWN WHAT IT’S LIKE TO BE TRULY INDEPENDENT IN THAT WAY.”  
- FEMALE, 16

### 3. HIGHER EDUCATION

The university sector operates under the “demand driven system,”<sup>80</sup> which means that universities can admit as many students as they see fit. The issue Australian society is currently facing is that there is an abundance of students graduating with qualifications within highly competitive industries, but not enough employment opportunities for all of them.

In 1986, it took graduates an average of one year to gain full-time employment. Now it takes graduates an average of 4.7 years<sup>81</sup>. Joshua Healy, a senior research fellow at Melbourne University, suggests that the situation may be even worse than the data suggests, because when students graduate into a difficult job market, many simply return to study at postgraduate level<sup>82</sup>.

35% of Year13’s survey respondents believe postgraduate study is necessary to achieve their desired job<sup>83</sup>. The theory is that this will

increase their qualifications while the job market improves, however these expectations aren’t necessarily aligned to what eventuates.

University student completion rates is also at a concerning low. According to government data, one third of university students fail to complete their degrees within six years of enrolment<sup>84</sup>, and one in five university students drop out of their chosen course within the first year<sup>85</sup>. Interestingly, these statistics are aligned to a 2004 survey of first year Australian university students, which found that a third of commencing students felt “ill-prepared to choose a university course on leaving school”<sup>86</sup>.

This is also supported by Year13’s research which suggests that 43% of Year 12 students still don’t know what they want to do when they leave school<sup>87</sup>. It could potentially be concluded here that the lack of preparation in high school is therefore effecting university completion rates and first-year drop-out rates.

4.7

AVERAGE YEARS IT TAKES UNI GRADS TO FIND FULL-TIME EMPLOYMENT

1 in 3

UNI STUDENTS FAIL TO COMPLETE THEIR DEGREES WITHIN 6 YEARS

1 in 5

UNIVERSITY STUDENTS DROP OUT IN THEIR FIRST YEAR

## YOUNG PEOPLE FACE PRESSURE TO ENTER UNIVERSITY

47% of all survey respondents say they face either 'too much' or an 'incredible amount' of pressure from their high school to enter university<sup>88</sup>. It is this pressure that may ultimately lead them to undertake an undergraduate degree that they are not interested in or fully prepared for, further increasing university drop-out rates.

“SCHOOLS I THINK REALLY NEED TO FOCUS MORE ON EACH INDIVIDUAL STUDENT... NOT TO BE PUTTING RIDICULOUS AMOUNTS OF PRESSURE TO GET AN ATAR THAT WILL GET YOU STRAIGHT INTO UNIVERSITY, BECAUSE UNIVERSITY ISN'T RIGHT FOR EVERYONE. - FEMALE, 18”

## THE COURSES UNIVERSITIES OFFER ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT THING

Most young people choose their university based on the course offered (79%), because it is 'close to home' (36%) or because it is perceived as a 'prestigious' university (32%). Of the options provided, respondents rank 'college facilities' (12%), 'my friends were going there' (12%), and 'where my parents wanted me to go' (8%), as the least influential reasons they chose their university<sup>89</sup>.

## MANY ARE FEELING STRESSED AT UNIVERSITY

When asked how university students feel about their life at the moment, the top answer is 'stressed' (20%), followed by 'tired' (18%), 'satisfied' (16%) and 'nervous' (13%)<sup>90</sup>.

While it is an improvement on the emotions of high school students, the feelings of university students are still quite clearly negatively skewed.

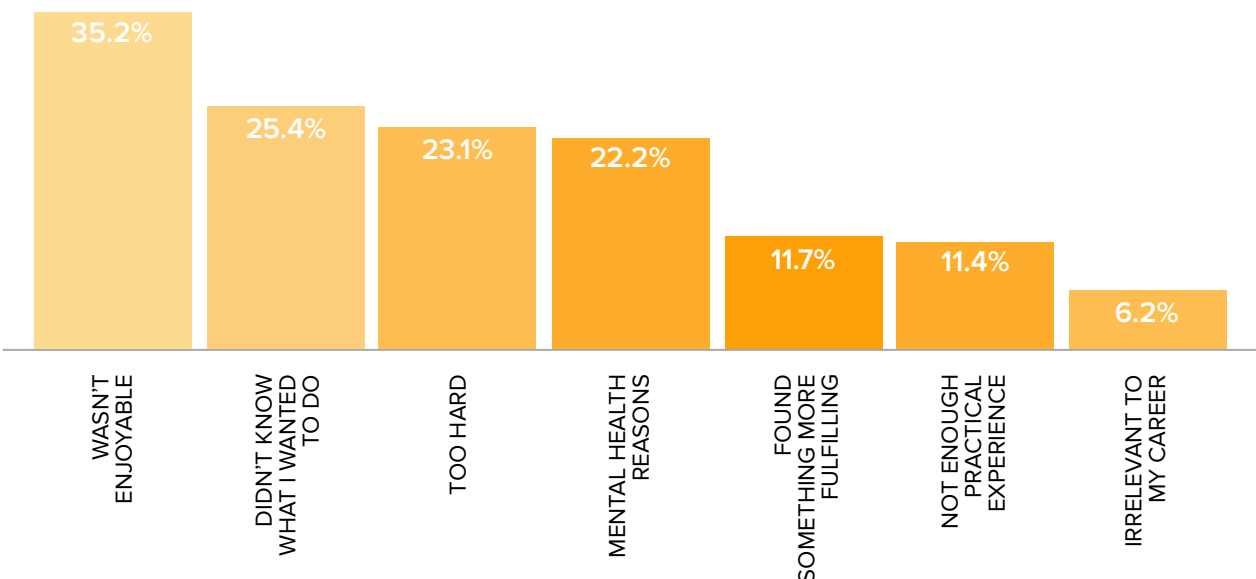
## UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ARE WORRIED ABOUT THEIR DEBT

67% of university students are concerned about their HECS-HELP debt<sup>91</sup>. These worries could also be contributing to the negative feelings university students are experiencing, potentially exacerbating drop out rates.

## MOST UNIVERSITY STUDENTS CONSIDER DROPPING OUT

Of the survey respondents who were studying or had studied at university, 62% considered dropping out at some point. In a multi-select question, the majority state they considered dropping out because university 'wasn't enjoyable' (35%), because they 'didn't know what they wanted to do' (25%) and/or because it was 'too hard' (23%)<sup>92</sup> (see graph below).

WHY DID YOU CONSIDER DROPPING OUT OF UNIVERSITY?



# YOUTHSAY

“HOPEFULLY I CAN GO TO UNIVERSITY BUT THEN I'LL HAVE AN EXTREME AMOUNT OF DEBT. IF I DON'T GO TO UNIVERSITY THEN I'LL HAVE NO IDEA WHAT TO DO. NO TRADES INTEREST ME AND I'M SCARED TO FAIL IF I GET A BLUE COLLAR JOB. I DON'T WANT TO STRUGGLE FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE BUT WHAT EVER OPTION I GO WITH IT LOOKS LIKE IT'S INEVITABLE.”  
- MALE, 15


“[SCHOOLS] COVER HOW TO APPLY FOR UNI BUT DON'T PREPARE YOU FOR THE STRESS OF HOW TO GO ABOUT ACCEPTING YOUR OFFER AND SORTING YOUR LIFE OUT AFTER YOU'VE ACCEPTED. EVEN MENTALLY PREPARING YOU HOW TO PROPERLY ADULT WHEN YOU LEAVE A RURAL COMMUNITY TO GO TO UNI. - FEMALE, 18”

“IT WAS HARD ACCEPTING THE FACT THAT THINGS WERE GOING TO CHANGE. I WAS THE SCHOOL CAPTAIN IN YEAR 12 AND EVERYBODY KNEW ME, AND I KNEW EVERYBODY. NOW I'M AT UNI WHERE I'M BACK TO BEING AT THE BOTTOM AND NOBODY KNOWS ME, NOBODY LOOKS TWICE. THAT'S NOT A COMPLAINT, RATHER JUST A WEIRD SENSATION TO TRANSITION AWAY FROM A COMMUNITY WHERE I KNEW EVERYONE, TO A HUGE UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY WHERE I HAVE TO FIND MY FEET AGAIN. IT'S NEW AND IT'S EXCITING, BUT I'D BE LYING IF I SAID IT WASN'T DIFFICULT.  
- MALE, 18”

“AS THE COST OF LIVING AND UNIVERSITY DEGREES CONTINUE TO RISE IN AUSTRALIA, AND THE AMOUNT OF JOBS AND HOUSES AVAILABLE CONTINUE TO DROP, IT WILL BE INCREDIBLY HARD FOR ME AND MANY OTHERS IN MY SITUATION TO MOVE TO A NEW CITY TO STUDY AT UNIVERSITY AND AFFORD AND MAINTAIN THE COST OF LIVING, AS WELL AS HAVING A STABLE JOB. - FEMALE, 15”

“I HAD CLOSE FRIENDS AT SCHOOL AS WELL AS HAVING TEACHERS WHO WERE VERY SUPPORTIVE AND CARING. GOING INTO UNIVERSITY, I FOUND THE FACT THAT THERE WAS ALMOST NO SUPPORT AVAILABLE VERY DIFFICULT. I ALSO FOUND THAT NOT SEEING MY FRIENDS EVERY DAY MADE ME QUITE SAD. BEFORE I DROPPED OUT OF UNI, I WAS NOT MYSELF - VERY SAD AND UNHAPPY. AFTER DROPPING OUT I'VE BECOME A LITTLE HAPPIER - ALTHOUGH I DO STRUGGLE QUITE A BIT WITH NOT GETTING ENOUGH SHIFTS AND NOT SEEING MY FRIENDS AS MUCH. - MALE, 17”

# FINAL THOUGHTS



Understanding how Gen Z transition into further education and employment is integral to combatting the multitude of issues that young Australians experience. Industries have a responsibility to develop solutions that alleviate the struggles young people are currently facing: high youth unemployment, low apprenticeship retention, mental health issues and high university dropout rates. Year13 is driven to use their influence with young people and their relationships with industries to bridge the engagement gap.

The surveys that informed this research have illuminated how and why young people are engaging (or disengaging) with school and their post-school pathways. Year13's trust and recognition amongst this demographic have allowed respondents to be honest and open about their struggles with transitioning from school into the 'real world'. Young people have talked about their need to see mental health professionals and their stress associated with Year 12 and the ATAR. Thousands have explained what they find scary about leaving school in optional extended response questions. All have been honest about their opinions of apprenticeships vs. university degrees and youth unemployment.

This newfound understanding is vital to the way in which industries engage with and market their opportunities to young people. Year13 believe that research is fundamental to building effective youth engagement strategies that show young people just how many options and pathways are available to them. Young people are calling out for opportunities to explore their options, without the pressure and stress to act. They need time to align to employment and education pathways so they can make informed and confident decisions.

Whilst there is considerable work to be done in high schools, Year13 believe that employers, educators and government play an essential role, and that co-designing a solution is fundamental to progress.

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