

MEDIA RELEASE
For Immediate Release
21 May 2025

Dreaming of Jobs That Don't Exist New OECD Report Sounds Alarm on Teen Career Misalignment

A major new international report has sounded the alarm on the growing mismatch between teenagers' career aspirations and the realities of the labour market, warning that without urgent reforms, Australia risks leaving a generation unprepared for meaningful work.

The OECD's 2025 report, *The State of Global Teenage Career Preparation*, draws on data from more than 690,000 15-year-old students in 81 countries, including Australia, to assess how well young people are being equipped to navigate education, employment, and career transitions in a rapidly changing world.

The findings are stark. While educational aspirations are higher than ever, the report reveals that too many teenagers, particularly in Australia, are unclear, unprepared, and uninformed about their future career options and the pathways required to achieve them.

Key findings from Australia include:

- 36% of Australian students are “career uncertain”, meaning they are unable to clearly identify a job they expect to work in by age 30. This mirrors a rising trend across OECD nations (39%) and is associated with poorer employment outcomes later in life.
- 66% of Australian students expect to work in high-status professional roles, such as doctors, lawyers, and engineers, double the actual labour market demand for these positions. This figure is among the highest across OECD countries.
- Only 34% of students had completed an internship or work placement, and just 45% had participated in a workplace visit or job shadowing, despite strong evidence that these activities lead to better long-term job outcomes.

Social inequality persists

The report also underscores the pervasive influence of social background on students' career expectations, with academic ability playing a secondary role. In Australia, high-performing students from disadvantaged backgrounds are significantly less likely to expect to complete tertiary education than lower-performing peers from wealthier households.

“This report is a wake-up call,” said David Carney, Executive Director of the Career Industry Council of Australia (CICA). “We’re seeing young Australians with incredible potential fall through the cracks, not because they lack ambition, but because they lack access to the right guidance, information, and exposure to the full range of career possibilities.”

What needs to change?

The OECD calls for urgent, systemic reforms to ensure that every young person is supported to make informed, confident, and realistic career decisions. These include:

- Embedding career education early in the school curriculum, not just in senior secondary years.

- Increasing access to employer engagement activities such as job shadowing, industry visits, and mentorship.
- Investing in career development services that are inclusive, equitable, and aligned with labour market trends.
- Tackling aspiration gaps by ensuring that high-potential students from disadvantaged backgrounds receive targeted support and encouragement.

Research cited in the report indicates that students who participate in career development activities are more likely to complete further education, secure employment in line with their interests, and feel satisfied in their jobs by their mid-20s.

Yet Australia's overall engagement in such activities remains patchy, leaving students to navigate increasingly complex education and employment systems with limited support.

A national opportunity

As Australia looks to build a resilient, future-ready workforce, the case for strengthening our national career development system has never been clearer. The OECD warns that the economic and social costs of inaction are significant: persistent skills shortages, declining workforce participation, and young people at risk of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training).

“The message is simple,” said Mr Carney. “We need to stop treating career guidance as an optional extra and start recognising it as a national investment in our future prosperity.”



Download the full report:

https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/the-state-of-global-teenage-career-preparation_d5f8e3f2-en.html



Explore the OECD Career Readiness Dashboard:

<https://www.oecd.org/en/about/projects/career-readiness.html>

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