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Off To Work We Go...

Preparing South Australian school
students for their work futures

Acknowledgements

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All three reports are available for download from ccyp.com.au/ccyp-reports

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Commissioner's Introduction

Much of our society and schooling system focuses on preparing children and young people for their futures. From a young age, children are asked 'what do you want to be when you grow up?' As they get older this question changes to 'what are you going to do when you finish school?' or 'what are you studying to become?'

At their core, these questions are about encouraging young people to explore the decisions they must make in order to pursue their ideal job and with it a lifelong career. For many young people – even those who think they know what career path they may wish to pursue – responding to these questions is daunting. Particularly as most young people these days are told by their parents and educators that they may have two or three different 'careers' throughout their working lives, and that on average, they can probably expect to change jobs between 5 and 15 times.

This is in stark contrast to previous generations for whom gaining secure employment post school was the start of the 'unlocking' of adult life, forming relationships, starting a family, and beginning financial independence. Now the trend is for this transition to take much longer, with work less secure and pathways less direct.

Although it can be said that young people these days have a greater diversity of job opportunities and career options available to them, we also know the journey from school to work is not straightforward. Given school is a key environment in which careers education is delivered, it made sense to ask young people for their views on what they think is required to be future work ready, and whether they felt their careers education at school is preparing them.

This report is the first in a series of three reports on the subject with the second and third smaller reports designed to work as companion pieces to this major report.

The first companion report – *'Spotlight on Parent/Carer Careers Advice'* – presents insights provided by parents and carers who would like to be better supported to help prepare their children for the world beyond school. This includes meeting the challenges they face in finding current, reliable and easy to access information about future employment opportunities and career pathways.

The second companion report – *'Spotlight on Work Experience'* – asks for the relationship between schools and businesses to be redefined, so that better outcomes for both young people and employers can be achieved through work experience. The report argues that co-designing work experience opportunities with input from all stakeholders, including young people in particular, has the potential to alleviate the casual nature of current arrangements, and help build a more robust and regulated work experience system that could benefit all.

This report brings these two companion reports into focus through a deep dive into survey responses received from 745 South Australian young people aged 12 to 18 years who were asked what they think needs to be done to ensure they are future work ready. It includes recommendations on what changes they would make to the education system to ensure it is more capable of meeting their career development needs, beginning in primary school.

Key Recommendations

Young people surveyed made two strong recommendations relevant to schools, career advisors, business leaders, industry, government, key influencers and decision-makers. If these recommendations were introduced they said this would make a significant difference to the effectiveness and experience of their school careers education:



That an independent up to date source of careers information on post-school options be developed specifically for South Australian school students, catering to both primary and secondary years. This resource would ideally include careers information, and which provides a better online user experience, with access to content that can be tailored to meet individual needs, including contemporary self-help resources.



That young people be involved in the design and implementation of school career education programs, including opportunities for regular career-based discussions across a broad range of subject areas, a series of guest speakers at every year level, dedicated career skills development lessons, relevant work experience opportunities, and personalised school career counselling services.

‘Ensuring young people are future work ready means taking into account the impact rapid technological, social and economic change is having on what skills they need to transition from school into the workforce. It also means ensuring these skills are taught while young people are at school – not left for them to either acquire or work out by themselves post school’.



Careers Education Context

The vision of the Alice Springs Education Declaration to which Ministers throughout Australia commit, is for Australia to have ‘a world class education system that encourages and supports every student to be the very best they can be, no matter where they live or what kind of learning challenges they may face’.

This Declaration recognises that it is also essential to prepare young people for a society undergoing complex and unfamiliar challenges. The role of education in this environment involves a focus on the ongoing learning needs and holistic development and wellbeing of young Australians for the purposes of individual opportunity and achievement, social cohesion and economic development.

Since commencing in my role as Commissioner for Children and Young People I have spoken with thousands of South Australian children and young people on a wide range of issues that are important to them. One of the recurring conversations I have had with children and young people, both in regional towns and in metropolitan centres, has been about their fear of not being future job ready. They have told me that they feel their school careers education is falling short, that they don't feel well enough prepared to navigate their way successfully from school into the workforce, and that they're not being taught the skills they'll need to do so, or early enough.

Not only have I heard that many young people are worried about what skills they will need to ensure they can find work, many have also told me that their limited knowledge about the ‘future of work’ is having a detrimental impact on the decisions they need to make now.

These conversations have prompted me to examine careers advice young people receive at school and to work with them to identify the barriers and challenges that currently exist. My hope is that by working more closely with young people and exploring what they say they need, and how and when they would like to access this information, we can identify the gaps and fill them.

Children and young people's initial preparation for work includes general capabilities such as literacy and numeracy, whilst jobs and careers are generally explored in the middle-senior years of school. However, many children often learn basic things about some jobs much earlier, examples of this include school visits made by Emergency Services and Police personnel. Children also

learn about work through play, and through their relationships with peers, their extended family, and their broader social environment.

Research has found that career aspirations are formed early on, with a majority of 7 year olds able to provide a considered answer to the question of what they would like to be when they grow up.¹ Another study found over 80% of year four students could state with some degree of accuracy what type of work they wanted to do.²

Prior to careers exploration in high school, much of the knowledge children and young people attain in relation to careers, depends upon the informal exposure they have had to various jobs, combined with the environments in which they are raised.

Research shows that children who are not interested in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM subjects) at age 10, are unlikely to pursue these subjects later in their schooling.³ More formalised contact points with careers education early on in children's lives, can create potential for better long term engagement in learning areas that relate to their interests and passions.

Formal contact with the world of work can also help demystify and debunk commonly held misconceptions about the types of jobs available in particular industries, including gender stereotypes. These efforts⁴ can support education alignment with future skill demands and better prepare young people for post school opportunities.

In South Australia, during the middle-senior years, students have some opportunity to explore interests in a particular career or field through their Personal Learning Plan (PLP) which in some instances is combined with a number of career advisory sessions. The PLP is a SACE subject that requires young people to plan for their future, including choosing the subjects they will need to complete in senior years to enable them to embark on a particular career pathway.⁵

PLP is seen as an important foundation subject for determining a child's post-school direction and decisions. Many schools see PLP as the main mechanism by which young people refine their post school decision-making, helping students determine their preferences for either direct entry into the workforce, or pursuit of further education via an apprenticeship, internship or university degree.

PLP activities can be exploratory and can support students to get a first taste of what it is like in the workforce through opportunities to undertake work experience placements. Some young people have suggested that PLP would be more beneficial if it was required to be undertaken earlier, so that subject choices for senior years could be determined after gaining any insights it provided.

Work experience is commonly seen as a mechanism in which young people are able to explore and validate their subject choices. However, many schools have reported challenges in balancing their focus on achieving academic results with the process and regulatory barriers of setting up work experience opportunities. This challenge can make facilitating work experience too difficult. (See *Spotlight on Work Experience* report)

Young people have also told me that their parents and carers are important in guiding them in their career choices. They believe the knowledge and experience their parents and carers bring, not only helps inform them about career options, but has greater value because it comes from a trusted source. Parents themselves have told me they feel inadequate when it comes to advising young people about potential careers, and how these impact on their subject choices, and that they would like to see resources made available that support them to better guide their children. (See *Spotlight on Parent/Carers Careers Advice* report)



A Snapshot View of the ‘Future of Work’

The ‘future of work’ is a term we use to describe the coming technological, social and economic changes to the workplace. It includes changes arising out of Industry 4.0 which are characterised by developments in artificial intelligence, machine learning, robotics and the Internet-of-Things.

One of the dominant narratives of our time, relates to how machine learning and robotics is changing the way we do things, and in turn the impact this is having on the kinds of jobs that will be available for future generations. There is uncertainty and concern that employers large and small are leaning toward a greater dependence upon technology, thereby reducing the number of jobs available.

Commentary on the future of work varies. The most positive of it suggests there will be a new wave of demand in the workforce, with in excess of 1.75 million jobs created worldwide.⁶ Some others suggest that job growth will outstrip job loss in Australia by as many as 10 to 1.⁷ Less positive estimates on the future of work, forecast that smart machines will be capable of replacing 71% of the jobs Australian vocational students are currently studying for.⁸

Further estimates suggest that 50% of work activities are technically capable of being automated by applying today’s technology.⁹ The view of futurists and economists is divided. However, whatever future work opportunities may look like, there is no doubt that changes in job types and their availability will impact on the skills and knowledge young people will need to attain them.

Much of our traditional approach to careers education has been based on the premise that we will be preparing children and young people for career ‘pathways’. These traditional pathways have been a clear feature of the journey from education to work over the last several decades. But linear transitions are becoming less reflective of the actual journey young people are more likely to make from education into work.

Increasingly the career pathways that existed for much of the 20th century are being replaced by more flexible arrangements. They’re characterised by casualisation of the workforce and include the likelihood that young people today may experience as many as ‘17 changes in employers across 5 different careers’ throughout their working lives.¹⁰

Foundational skills such as those attained via STEM will be important, but they will not be the only skills needed. Research suggests young people will need to have a broader range of skills in their personal tool kits; skills including problem solving, communication, teamwork and creativity.¹¹ There are those who emphasise too, the importance that wellbeing and an optimistic outlook will play in achieving career success.

Along with a mix of these future work skills, key cognitive skills will also be in high demand. Businesses across a range of industries will need to embed adaptive capacity within their workforces to be able to effectively compete with disruption and greater complexity.

The seven skills for the future that young people should be taught while they are at school are:

- 1 Critical thinking and problem-solving
- 2 Collaboration across networks and leading by influence
- 3 Agility and adaptability
- 4 Initiative and entrepreneurialism
- 5 Effective oral and written communication
- 6 Accessing and analyzing information
- 7 Curiosity and imagination.¹²

Challenges for School Career Advisors

The development of future work skills should be at the core of preparing our young people for their lives beyond school. Educators, government, employers and community all have a role to play. How prepared young people are impacts on every part of our State, from workforce participation and competitiveness, to standards of living and wealth inequality.

Over the past three decades, the South Australian economy has undergone significant structural change. These changes have been marked by increased competition, reorganisation and technological advancement, as well as a continued move towards a more knowledge based, service-orientated economy that has far less dependence on manufacturing.

Unsurprisingly this has also led to significant changes in the composition of the labour market.¹³ Broadly speaking, the nature and pace of this structural change has made labour market conditions for young people more difficult.¹⁴ In particular, it has meant that opportunities to enter the workforce have become harder, as a broader shift towards higher-skilled positions has been matched by an overall decline in the demand for low skill and entry-level positions.¹⁵

As structural changes gather pace, young people face greater challenges to getting their foot in the door. It is this structural change in labour market conditions that has also increased the time it takes to transition from education to employment, with young people now required to spend far more time in education to attain the higher-skills needed for these new positions.

As a result, there are increasing numbers of young people getting their first experience of work later in life. At the same time, some employers report that there is a lack of basic skills amongst potential workers.¹⁶ Whether perceived or actual, both scenarios have a detrimental impact on young people's employment and growth opportunities.

To add to the complexity, we keep telling young people that 'the jobs of the future don't yet exist' – or alternatively 'that the jobs available now are unlikely to exist in the future' thereby creating a perception that there is very little young people can do that will equip them for this unknown future.

In the midst of this uncertainty, it is true that many of the jobs available today may not be the same as those available in 10 or 20 years' time, and that the skills young people will need to succeed in them are likely to change more rapidly than they did for those seeking work straight out of school a generation or so ago.

There is no doubt it is becoming increasingly difficult for teachers, educators and career counsellors to stay up to date with the rapid changes taking place in the workforce, and the

impact this has on how well they can advise on career choices that young people look to them for guidance and ideas around.

While the majority of young people are able to navigate their journeys from school to work reasonably easily, and can comfortably make adjustments down the track should their career aspirations change, this is not true for all.

Many young people in their senior school years have reported that they are repeatedly told how important it is for them to choose subjects well 'because what subjects they choose now will determine what options will or won't be available to them down the line'. Add to this the message that their ATAR score will be crucial to future options and not surprisingly anxiety levels in senior students can grow. For some, this can make their final senior years particularly tough, mainly because of the pressure they feel to succeed.

Helping students choose subjects that will give them the best possible chance of succeeding in careers for which they have an interest and aptitude, is only part of the challenge. We need to reassess careers education and how students can be better supported to make the transition from school to work.

Choosing a career should be a process undertaken over many years that explores who you are, and what you enjoy doing, aligning these personal insights with natural aptitude, vocational instinct and learnt skills.

Conversations with those who are directly involved in preparing young people for the transition from school to work identified some concerns. They describe situations in which they are preparing young people for life after school largely in isolation and with minimal support from business, industry, post-school educators and government, with too much focus on

performance and achieving a high ATAR score, relevant only to those who wish to continue on to university.

Careers advisors and educators have said that what they would prefer to see, is the introduction of a systems-based approach to careers education. One that builds connections with industry and encourages collaboration and shared responsibility between all stakeholders who are involved in shaping future work conditions and opportunities – this includes other educators, industry and workers advocates, as well as federal and state governments who would ideally work alongside local government, business and the broader community to create more opportunities for young people here in South Australia.

By building linkages while children and young people are at school and starting careers education much earlier, particularly for those who are more vulnerable and disadvantaged, the likelihood of young people moving into careers sooner is much higher. This includes communicating the national and local trends in industry and jobs of the future in the sectors identified as key to South Australia, and not pigeonholing young people into careers based on their socio-economic backgrounds. Many young people have career aspirations that extend far beyond what many assume they might wish to pursue, including careers in music and the arts, as well as in academia and business entrepreneurship.

Taking a systems approach would enable South Australia to build a workforce capable of becoming more adaptable and relevant, able to achieve the productivity and innovation gains that will be central to ensuring Australia's job competitiveness remains high in what is likely to remain an increasingly globalised world.

What Young People Said

In 2019, 745 South Australian young people aged 12 -18 years were asked about their understanding of what it meant to be future job ready. They said that being prepared for adult life and work is very important to them, and that this includes being prepared for further education, training and life in the workforce.

While many young people said they felt they were getting the knowledge they needed, others said that they felt they were missing out, and that this was a major source of concern to them. They feel pressure to know what to do after school, while still at school.

Results from the survey highlighted that whilst some young people feel equipped to tackle the world of work and jobs of the future, many do not. Those who do not, said that they do not feel well enough informed or prepared. Nearly a quarter of the young people surveyed reported that they know 'not much' or 'nothing at all' about what jobs are available now.

Most young people commented on the 'unknowns' about the future of work, and how aware they are that rapid change will occur. This includes knowing that there is likely to be a variety of ways in which technology will become the norm in industries as a result of robotics and automation. They wanted

adults to educate young people about the kinds of changes likely to occur across various industries. They also wanted them to be able to explain how young people can best position themselves to manage new workforce realities.

Young people spoke about wanting to develop more creativity, innovation and enterprise skills alongside 'life skills' not only relevant to work. They know they will need to be equipped to fulfil newly created roles and to manage multiple career changes over their lifetime. They also know that to enable them to flourish in future work environments they will need to be able to apply adaptive skills. Young people said they need to know how they can prepare for entry into the workforce now.

Being prepared and knowing what options are available to them underpins their aspirations around what is possible. It also supports them to identify jobs where they can apply their personal interests, skills, and learning.

Choosing Subjects

A number of young people highlighted a disconnection between employment and education and the impact this has on how they make their subject choices. They said that the pressure on young people and families around subject choice is significant, particularly given it is so strongly linked to future careers or jobs they think they would like to pursue. Young people routinely describe the difficulty they face in having to decide what subjects to do without really knowing what career options will be available to them.

“ I have no clue what I want to do. Maybe an editor? I considered law but I'm not so sure about that anymore. I think it's stupid that we have to know what we want to do with our lives at such a young age! (Female, 16)

Others describe being torn between following their interests, passions and aspirations, and knowing where these will lead. They describe situations where they are being told that everything will change except what they are doing in school.

“ The problem is I know what subjects I'm interested in eg stem and tech, but I don't know what jobs they lead to.' (Female, 15)

Consequently significant numbers of young people report that they are unsure how they will be able to apply what they learn in school, when no-one seems to not know what they are being prepared for. Or alternatively, how to independently prepare themselves for future work opportunities that are not yet there.

The following extended comment from a student is insightful and summarises a consistent theme:

“ Actually just *telling* us about different jobs in detail instead of being vague and hand-waving it away with 'the jobs you will have don't exist yet', which is both disheartening

and supremely unhelpful. For example, they could delve into what undergraduate degree, skills, day-to-day things you would need to become a laboratory pathologist and the median salary/types of opportunities in the field...except for other careers too. I know there is a push-and-pull between STEM careers and 'do what you want to do', but I also want to know the realistic real-world feasibility of living off what you will make in a career.' (Female, 17)

Top 5 things young people would like to know more about



Future Jobs that match personal interests (529)



Skills required for specific jobs (451)



Variety of jobs available (415)



Educational requirements for a particular career (405)



Career pathways and subject selection (397)

Some of the information young people sought was in relation to what different and non-traditional jobs will be available, including which jobs are available to school-leavers today, ie not just those that may come online in the future.

Younger respondents were those who wanted to know more about different types of jobs available, while older respondents were more interested in which jobs matched with their interests and skills.

Older respondents expressed frustration at not being able to find a reliable source of career advice able to provide basic careers information, and which wasn't just aimed at university students.

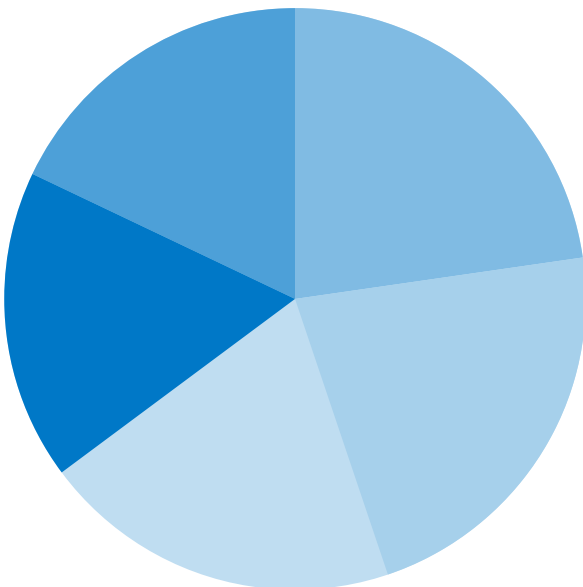
“ A website that isn't directed to uni students. Like if I wanted to research the process of being a cop I'd like to find the best ways to prepare myself at a young age.” (Female, 14)

In preparing for future work, being able to align a job with your interests was the number one thing survey respondents said made a job or career pathway attractive to them.

“ Passion and interest. It would be great for me to work on a job in which I am interested in or for which I have a passion.” (Male, 14)

According to young people an appealing job is one that;

- ▶ allows me to have good work/life balance
- ▶ I would find rewarding
- ▶ matches my personal interests
- ▶ pays well
- ▶ I would find interesting.





Mix of Skills

Young people are aware of the importance of learning a mix of skills. For many, these include the skills required to succeed in life as well as in the workforce. They described life skills as those necessary to tackle whatever challenges arise in either their personal or working lives.

“ *A plethora of skills, not just for my future studies or job, but for my own life and experiences. Communication, quick thinking, flexibility, collaboration, research skills, know how to take care of myself, know who I am, where my limits are, know how I can help people in both my professional and personal life. I'll need leadership skills, need to know how to perform the basics of life skills at the very least. There are many more.* (Male, 15)

According to young people the most important skills and things to know before you leave school are:

- Coping skills, social skills and independent living skills
- Problem solving skills
- Diversity and inclusion
- Finance management
- Jobs of the future

A third of young people surveyed said that they did not believe they were learning the skills they needed. Generally young people felt most confident about their literacy and numeracy skills - areas that have been given significant focus in recent years. Individuals who identified that they had low confidence in these two skill areas, generally recognised this about themselves, and added that they knew they needed help to improve. This was in contrast to non-academic areas in which young people said they had least confidence. These skills included being ready for life beyond school and knowing what they wanted to do next. They described these as 'life skills'.

Those who felt they were not learning life skills at school, were most likely to discuss the need to be taught practical skills such as budgeting, managing taxes, time management, and improving their interpersonal skills, so they were more confident at communicating and networking well.

“ *How to manage money, make decisions independently and ways to use time wisely.* (Female, 15)

“ *The skills of reading, writing and speaking a first language are the most important skills. More 'real life' skills of rent, tax, and other money-based classes are important.* (Male, 16)

Are you learning future skills currently?

“ **No, not at all.** We're just conditioned to do the same thing as everyone else did before us...we're not learning anything new/up to date. Our world is continually changing and school barely addresses this. And this is coming from someone who does well in school.’

“ **Yes.** However, I believe I am not learning a good work ethic. The amount of homework assigned to students and the amount of pressure on us to complete it is too much; it is really, truly difficult to create a healthy balance of schoolwork and home life for ourselves - to develop personal methods of keeping up with assignments - when there is so much to do that you cannot possibly finish it all. I speak from personal experience, as well as the

experiences of many classmates, when I say that our school does not prepare us for future working life. Instead we are given so much that we cannot possibly be sure if our strategies are effective or not, because we are always sacrificing the quality of our work for quantity.’

“ **Yes and no,** different opportunities allow these learning skills however not all students are exposed to these kinds of opportunities. Deserving students that want to work hard should be allowed to attend excursions that show them how to network, communicate. STEM girls with UniSA was a very good program that I did that opened up a lot of opportunities, showing me different skills necessary for the work force.’

When asked about whether they had confidence in their 'enterprise skills' which they know are regarded as key skills for the future, young people were generally mixed in how confident they were that they possessed the right combination. Some said they felt confident in their ability to be creative, innovative, and enterprising, while others did not. Some were not sure what enterprise skills really were.

“ *'Perseverance, co-operation, resilience, punctuality and innovation.'* (Male, 17)

“ *'Subjects that will help me learn the skills and work experience.'* (Female, 14)

“ *'Having courses or subjects that involve components of the industry work.'* (Male, 15)

Delivering Career Skills and Information

Young people want to see improvements made in the way careers education and skills are delivered at school. Their ideas range from career-based subject discussions to more opportunities for specialist speakers to visit schools, and at every year level. They would also like to see more career skills development lessons being taught, as well as opportunities for work experience and longer and better career counselling services tailored to their interests and needs.

- “ ‘By having people from these fields talk about it to us!’ (Male, 14)
- “ ‘By having honest industry representatives talk (by physically coming in or through recorded interview) about the opportunities and experiences related to various jobs.’ (Female, 17)
- “ ‘Being able to contact someone about said careers, most teachers only know about their subjects or how to become a teacher.’ (Female, 16)
- “ ‘Having a time where we can sit down and have a chat with someone from that field and find out how to get a good start in that career.’ (Male, 16)
- “ ‘The school could bring in 10 people (could be a doctor, lawyer, nurse etc) and students in Year 9+ should be able to ‘sign up’ to a session they’d like to participate in. In this session the person would talk to us about their job, maybe bring things in to show us and we can ask some questions regarding our own interest in that career. This would enable students to feel more excited about their future career paths and would give us more information about certain jobs and based on our subjects/grades, where we can go.’

Some young people, think there are things that should be completely rethought. In particular young people commented on the PLP. They felt that in its current form it did not assist them at all.

- “ ‘No[t] through PLP. PLP is a bludge and waste of time (I got an A btw) it’s easy and pointless. More compulsory work experience.’

Some young people felt that they were not engaged enough in particular subjects, or weren’t being given the opportunity to do subjects they thought would be useful to them. They said there was either too much focus on a particular area, or that they were required to doing subjects that were not relevant to them.

They felt that the majority of young people are mostly being left to explore career ideas and aspirations on their own. They can only access the help of career advisors for short periods of time and were mostly directed to find information online through careers and employment websites that they found were mostly aimed at university aged students.

- “ ‘Career websites, parents, friends, newspaper, etc.’ (Female, 13)

During this exploration and planning phase, young people said that their family played a very important and yet very understated role in their careers education. From a young person’s perspective, family members are regarded as the source of the most trusted information available to them on careers.¹⁷ They said family members can be helpful in determining which options match best with their interests, helping them to make subject choices that align with their long term career aspirations and based on a deeper knowledge of who they are and what their individual strengths and interests have been since they were young.

Young people said that engaging with parents and carers, and upskilling them on new age jobs with revised pathway options, is critical to any strategy designed to support them with career advice. They said that parents and carers should be explicitly invited to attend events, expos, and career markets, and be given access to up-to-date independent information on careers and job opportunities, so they can guide young people more confidently.

Young people said that they found that finding information on what jobs will be impacted by advances in technology and future workplace developments, as well as other more basic information around workforce composition and behaviours, required considerable research effort. This creates a major barrier to accessibility, impacting on vulnerable young people who come from disadvantaged families particularly, and who therefore may not have regular or continuous access to the Internet.

Many young people said that they felt that school is the best place for future work information to be conveyed. They said that the type of content they want to be able to access at school is the same content many parents are looking for when they're trying support their child's subject choices and career explorations from home, and that parents should be invited to attend school career events and become more involved in career education activities wherever possible.

How could schools better prepare you for these jobs?

- “ ‘Teach us more about jobs and the real world instead of stuff that we will never need or use. Don't overload us with unnecessary work because that causes stress, anxiety, depression and kills the mood for friendship’
- “ ‘I believe that the schools should provide more career counselling and help students investigate the skills they need.’
- “ ‘Have multiple opportunities for work experience rather than just one. Also have more career specific subjects (like cinematography or game design.’
- “ ‘Helping us discover these new industries that are becoming more popular within our society and having PLP as a class really helps me with learning about how to get a job and the responsibilities within having a job.’

Online Careers Resources

Young people surveyed said that many existing websites contained variable and outdated content, presented in a style that diminished the reliability of its sources. In the context of facing ongoing workforce 'disruption' and a need to know what 'jobs of the future' will become available, young people expected key career exploration websites to include information that is up to date. They also said that they needed access to content on how industry changes are likely to affect what jobs are available in the near future, as these are the jobs they will be seeking to gain first.

Young people said they have few options that support them to explore career ideas in detail. They often have limited time available to spend with school career counsellors, and that they have far fewer opportunities for career exploration in real world settings.

“ *Having more than 5 minutes to discuss my future plans with teachers, knowing where to look up or ask about more information instead of it being told lots of irrelevant information, having people actively care about my future.*’
(Female, 17)

Young people said that those websites that did allow them to explore jobs, careers and their interests, lacked an engaging user experience, or had little connection with their younger school aged audience. Poor linkages and other design issues also meant that, rather than be able to 'click through' and explore the website content with ease, information was dispersed throughout, ultimately leading young people, who are on the whole very computer savvy, to arrive at the conclusion that it did not meet their requirements.

“ *Information that is clear, concise, and accessible (preferably online). It would also be helpful if the information was organised, so it is easier to sort through different types of information and to more easily locate relevant information.*’
(Female, 16)

Their frustration around accessing online information about careers included having to retype searches, being unable to quickly find basic information that would allow them to build on their research enquiry, or easily get an idea of what the study, skills or experience typical of work in a particular field might be. The importance of accurate and up-to-date information was deemed critical, as was a good user experience for the young person accessing it.



Where to Next?

If we are to enable more young people to become future work ready, it is essential their perspective be included in any solutions. The education system, schools, industry, and government all need to engage with young people. We must work to bring all stakeholders into a system of careers support for the next generation of innovators, entrepreneurs and community and business leaders no matter what their background, and ideally from primary school age.

This means accepting that it is everyone's responsibility to find meaningful work for our school leavers and to ensure the education system we deliver is teaching them the suite of skills they will need. Doing this will not only attract and build new opportunities for South Australia, it will drive future growth and prosperity for young South Australians. Hoping for this outcome will not be enough. What is required is planning with strategic intent, followed by action with likeminded collaborators.

This means planning for the entry of young people from school into the workforce and creating mechanisms to allow this to occur seamlessly. This is a system where employers' needs are matched with the skills South Australian young people are acquiring, confident that if they do so there will be a job opportunity available to them when they leave school. This way, not only will young people get their 'foot in the door', they'll be acquiring the practical skills they'll need to succeed.

This can only be done by determining what the future of work in South Australia looks like – what skills will be needed for future jobs, and what pathways will lead young people to them.

South Australian children and young people need time and space to make and explore their interests, and to determine which career or set of careers they may wish to pursue. They need multiple opportunities to 'try things out'. They need careers education that inspires them to be motivated and ambitious about their futures.

Young people have told me their parents and carers are important in guiding them in their career choices, because they are a trusted source of information. It is critical then, that any future strategies for career development take an approach that increases the knowledge of parents and carers as the preferred primary source of career advice and information for young people.

A future strategy must also address the needs of educators, with a particular focus on career advisors and local small to medium enterprises, as well as on larger scale employers across various industries; all working together to organise work experience opportunities that add real value for young people and employers.

They also need easy access to contemporary industry insights and data on entry level employment opportunities that are local and linked directly to South Australia. This involves industry actively promoting the jobs and skills they will require in the South Australian workforce now and over the next 10 years. This resource would support young people to identify potential pathways to entry-level employment, allowing them to make subject choices that are more relevant to their career aspirations.

These proposed solutions need government support, but they could also be orchestrated with assistance from private enterprise, small and medium sized businesses, worker advocacy organisations, and industry. They would build the capacity for creation of an 'employment ecosystem' that supports young people to make the transition from school to work in a coordinated and systematic way.

I strongly recommend that key cross sector stakeholders come together with government to build the relationships and infrastructure needed to support current and future South Australian generations of young people to transition more easily from school to work in the ways proposed.

Who are we?

The South Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People is an independent statutory position, established under the Children and Young People (Oversight and Advocacy Bodies) Act 2016 ('the Act'). The Commissioner promotes and advocates for the rights, development and well-being of all children and young people in South Australia. The Commissioner is committed to advocating for children and young people's involvement in decision-making that affects them, giving particular consideration to the needs of vulnerable and at-risk children and young people. A key objective of The Commissioner for Children and Young People is to position children and young people's interests, development and wellbeing front and centre in public policy and community life and to advocate to decision makers to change laws, policy, systems and practice in favour of children and young people.

In the Commissioner's work she listens to the views of children and young people, collaborates with them and represents their diverse voices in the public arena with a special focus on those who struggle to have their voices heard. Much of her advocacy is directed by the experiences and issues that children and young people talk about and have asked her to focus on. Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) says Children and young people have a right to have a say on all issues that affect them and for their views to be taken seriously. By improving our children and young people's participation in decisions that impact on them, we can strengthen our democratic institutions and structures and build a strong state for the future of all children and young people

Endnotes

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251 Morphett Street, Adelaide SA 5000
GPO Box 1146, Adelaide SA 5001
08 8226 3355 | commissionercyp@sa.gov.au

 @ccyp_sa
 /ccypsa
 ccyp.com.au

 Commissioner
Y for Children &
Young People