



What SA Kids Have Told us About Work & Work Experience

Commissioner for
Children & Young People
September 2019

The youth unemployment rate in South Australia has hovered at around 15 percent for the past several years – much higher than the rate for the general population. Youth underemployment is even higher.

Full and part-time work has been in decline since the '80s, replaced by casual and contract work, which is particularly prevalent among jobs aimed at young people. This work is often insecure and has knock on effects for the rest of a person's life, including limiting any ability to apply for loans or build a consistent pattern of savings to help convince a bank to say yes to a loan application.

Young people today face a drastically changed job market with qualifications and experience increasingly necessary for entry-level jobs. Young people from low-income households or regional areas are unable to find enough opportunities for volunteer work and unpaid internships that would help them get a foot in the door. They said there is a need for clearer legislation to limit exploitation, requiring internships that pay young people for their time, and which subsidise them for the travel invariably required to get them to their place of internship, particularly when you live in a regional area where access to public transport is limited.

Young people feel inadequately prepared for the job market. They feel the current education system is letting them down. They want more information made available to them about careers and work, including knowledge about their rights as an employee, how to manage interviews and prepare resumes, and how to prepare for the other realities of work life. They also want training such as FLO and TAFE courses to be more fully integrated into mainstream schools.

Young people say they need more experience of work. This is particularly important for young people who come from disadvantaged backgrounds and who have fewer networks to call upon.



These young people told the Commissioner that from their point of view:

- they don't know enough about what types of jobs and careers are going to be available to them when they finish school, and would like to be taught this while at school
- opportunities for meaningful work experience are declining and therefore increasingly difficult to source
- businesses appear to be more reluctant to offer young people work experience these days
- few employers coordinate work experience opportunities through their local school/s
- those who are lucky enough to find work experience often find it disappointing because the tasks are not well organised and no-one manages their experience in a way that counts.

Arranging work experience largely falls to families. For time pressured families this can mean trying to arrange placements with friends and family. For young people whose families have few networks, finding a work experience placement can be especially difficult.

It also means the full exposure to the broad range of opportunities that young people need to determine what careers are of interest to them, is simply not available. Having limited or no choice devalues the whole work experience effort from the outset, sending the wrong message to young people at a crucial decision making time.

Young people who have completed work experience have said they don't often have a quality experience; they receive little training, no feedback, are assigned menial tasks and are given no understanding of the pathways they could take to pursue a career in the field they are gaining work experience within.

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This State's work experience strategy could build a system that works to the advantage of young people. One that prepares them for life after they finish high school. Work experience placements which have been established within industries that offer apprenticeships and traineeships could be strengthened in a systemic way.

If we want to grow confident, creative, connected young people who are able to participate in the jobs of the future, we will need to look at the work and career ecosystems that we put in place around them and with direct input from them. The disjointed approach we currently use, where no-one really takes responsibility for work experience overall, just won't get us there.

Taking an 'ecosystem approach' means that government, community, business and education leaders will be thinking beyond their piece of the puzzle. They will instead be focussed on finding ways to work together to build a system that supports young people to prepare for the high tech, high touch, high care jobs of the future, as well as learn the skills to manage portfolio work, self-employment, contracting and freelancing, which are likely to be a feature of the jobs of the future.

Though technical skills will be required in the majority of future roles, employers also want workers who can positively interact with their co-workers; who can problem solve, show initiative and are workplace ready. More than this, they need future workers who have:

- strong social skills to be able to collaborate, persuade, coach and mentor
- strong interpersonal skills to work with increased diversity and complexity
- agility to learn from experiences and apply these learnings to new contexts
- adaptability and resilience to take advantage of rapid changes occurring; and
- a preparedness to take risks, fail, and try again repeatedly.

New models of work require new models of work experience. These models should be built by the people who will use them; young people, employers and educators collaborating together.

Young people have said that to be successful, conversations with them and their families should be at the heart of developing strategies around the future of work. Young people want to acquire the skills of the future to enable them to overcome any barriers they may face to gaining employment in jobs for which they have a passion and/or a vocation. They don't want to settle for 'just any job'.

- “ *'Make work experience easier ... offer an incentive for businesses to take kids on and have them experience that career. Also make careers more accessible and more specific to the students.'*
- “ *'It's hard to get work experience as a robotics engineer or theoretical physicist'.*
- “ *'School... kids start it, but they often drop off. And you hear about jobs but 80 kids apply and you don't get it. The training itself is really expensive, and if you don't have a job you can't afford it.'*
- “ *'Establish clear child labour laws/guidelines. Have counsellor's and teachers at schools learn these laws and rights thoroughly, so they can inform/chat with and help kids about how they can stand up to bosses and not be exploited.'*