

# What Kids Say About Education





**Education and Learning**

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**Work and Work Experience**

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# Introduction

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*Wouldn't it be great to know what children and young people think – what they really think; what matters to them, what worries them, what they want for the future? When we talk about things like health, wellbeing, learning, play, work and the environment, what do these things mean to children and young people? What challenges are they facing?*

The easiest way to find out what children and young people think is to ask them, and in my role as South Australia's Commissioner for Children and Young People that's what I do. Information contained in this guide has been sourced from many conversations, discussions and consultations with children and young people of all ages and backgrounds living, studying and working throughout South Australia.

Many of us make decisions and take actions that affect children and young people's lives every day. We do this as parents, carers, community leaders, professionals, service providers and elected and appointed public representatives. What we decide and do, colours and affects how children and young people experience the world, as well as how they understand their place within it.

The following guide provides insights into what children and young people think about their education. They know how important a good education is and that they need to acquire the skills and knowledge they need to secure jobs of the future. They want teachers who are willing to engage them with learning in interesting and different ways along with a better understanding of child development. They would like teachers to reach out to students they can see might need extra support, and for careers education to begin in primary school so they know what pathways to take for 'jobs of the future' before they have to make subject choices. They also want access to work experience and internships that will provide genuine opportunities for the development of their knowledge and networks.





## Education and Learning

*Children and young people talk about wanting to be more engaged in their learning, and many want more support in school. While they are still learning about themselves, and the world, they want teachers to find a balance between treating them as competent, while being mindful of their developmental needs.*

Children and young people would like to see teachers given the support and training they need to be the best teachers they can be for their students. This includes having a rethink on the traditional way students are taught. It also means reconsidering class sizes, as well as where and how lessons are being taught.

Children and young people frequently talk about wanting to be more engaged in their learning and how they want teachers to use new and innovative methods to teach. Some current practices include the requirement for students to take notes whilst teachers talk. In their words, this old method of teaching leads children and young people to 'zone out' in the classroom. Students who are struggling in the mainstream system find this approach particularly unhelpful, saying it doesn't work.

Many young people have told the Commissioner that they want more support in school. This includes providing help in class time, as well as offering individual assistance after-hours. It is often difficult for children and young people to ask for help, and they want teachers to be more proactive in reaching out to their students.

Children and young people often tell the Commissioner about the one 'good teacher' that made a difference to their learning and their life. This is especially so when they do not have a strong role model through a parent or other adult.

A number of children and young people have spoken to the Commissioner about teachers who need to find a better balance between treating children as competent, while still being mindful of their developmental levels. Young people said that as they are still learning about themselves, their world, their relationships and the curriculum, their experience would be improved if teachers were trained with a greater emphasis on 'social studies and child development.'

To help create a positive change to teaching methods and relationships, young people said that there must be a mechanism introduced that enables students to provide feedback on how effectively teachers help them to learn. In most other service-based organisations, customers and clients are asked to provide feedback on the service they receive, so that services can be modified and improved accordingly.

A teacher's method of teaching could be reviewed by his or her students on an annual basis to provide feedback and indicators of which methods are working best for their students. The results would allow teachers to tailor their methods to suit their students in a more personalised way. This could also be achieved by assessing an individual student's learning style to see which they prefer and then adapting teaching methods to suit.

Children and young people have consistently said that they want all children and young people to have the same opportunities. They want those 'doing it tough' to have the same quality of education and opportunities as those who are more well-off.



*'A lot of young people can't even afford the things they need (health, school uniforms, school supplies).'*

The cost of education is a big issue for many children and young people, especially those who come from households that are struggling. They worry about whether their parents or guardians can afford to get everything they need for education, school sport, or extra-curricular activities such as learning a musical instrument or taking singing or dancing lessons, and this affects their own well-being.

Children and young people understand that education and formal qualifications are increasingly vital in the modern world. They know that to succeed and follow their dreams they will need experience and training, and they are hungry to take on any challenges they can as early as they can. However, many young people said that the opportunities to gain qualifications are unequal and in some cases inaccessible to some, and that this is not fair.



*'Improve education – in general, raise standards of education – Equal opportunities for all children, no matter where you live, how much money you have.'*



*'Students have opinions and they matter. Don't forget that they want to be listened to. Do not forget about us and when you make decisions they do actually affect us.'*

## Things I can do as an adult to make a difference to children and young people's education

- Thinking about **your teaching role** in dealing with young people: doing what you can to engage, inform and educate them.
- Being aware, where you can, of aspects of today's **school curriculum** for children and young people, and how this may affect and inform their understanding of health matters, their health literacy and wellbeing.
- Being an **advocate** for education as an important part of young people's development; doing what you can to support engagement with school and educational activities, even if facing barriers to do so.
- Having **educational materials** to support health literacy for young people and promote **educational opportunities** to support their development, health and wellbeing.



## Work and Work Experience

*Young people of today face a drastically changed job market, in which qualifications and experience are increasingly necessary in entry-level jobs. Many young people work in casual or contract jobs, which are often insecure. This in turn affects other aspects of their lives, and limits options available to them.*

The youth unemployment rate in South Australia has hovered at around 15% for the past several years – much higher than the rate for the general population. Underemployment is even higher. Full and part-time work has been in decline since the '80s, to be replaced by the casual and contract work common to young people nowadays. This work is often insecure and has knock-on effects on the rest of their life, such as the ability to apply for loans or build consistent savings.

Young people of today face a drastically changed job market, in which qualifications and experience are increasingly necessary in entry-level jobs. Young people from low-income households, or regional areas, have told the Commissioner that they are unable to take on volunteer work and unpaid internships that would help them get a 'foot in the door'. They called for clearer legislation which would limit exploitation by requiring internships to pay young people for their time and subsidise travel from regional areas.

Young people feel inadequately prepared for the job market by the education system. They want more information available about their rights as an employee, how to manage interviews and resumes, and other realities of work. They want training such as FLO (Flexible Learning Options) and TAFE integrated more fully into mainstream schools.

*'School, kids start it, but often they 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.'*



Young people say they need more experience of work and more information on career opportunities. This is particularly important for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who have fewer networks.

- meaningful work experience is declining, and young people find it difficult to find
- many young people don't know about the types of jobs and careers available to them
- businesses appear more reluctant to take young people for work experience
- few employers coordinate with schools.

Arranging work experience largely falls to families to arrange. This means time-pressured families can arrange placements with friends and family, while young people whose families have few networks and resources find it difficult. It also means the full exposure to the broad range of opportunities available is lost.

Young people who have completed work experience have said they don't often have a quality experience: they receive little training, no feedback, undertake menial tasks, and gain no understanding of the pathways.

Work experience in industries that offer apprenticeships and traineeships is an option that could be strengthened in a systemic way. A state-based work experience strategy could build a system that works to the advantage of young people and prepares them for post-school life. If we want to grow confident, creative, connected young people, able to participate in the jobs of the future, we will need to look at the ecosystem around them.

An 'ecosystem approach' means community, business and education leaders thinking beyond their piece of the puzzle, and working 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 the skills to manage portfolio work, self-employment, contracting and freelancing.

*'Establish clear child labour laws / guidelines. Have counsellors & 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 & not be exploited.'*



*'Make work experience easier. As in offer careers money to take in kids and have them experience that career. Also make careers more accessible and more specific to the students. Because it's hard to get work experience as a robotics engineer or theoretical physicist.'*



Technology is required in a majority of roles, and employers want workers who can positively interact with others, solve problems, show initiative and be workplace-ready. Future workers more than ever before will need:

- strong social skills to be able to collaborate, persuade, coach and mentor
- good interpersonal skills to work with increased diversity
- agility to learn from their experiences and apply knowledge to new contexts, and
- adaptability and resilience to take advantage of rapid change, to take risks and fail, and try again.

New models of work require new models of work experience, and these models should be built by the people who will use them: young people, employers and educators.

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, and how best to acquire the skills of the future and overcome barriers.

## Things I can do as an adult to make a difference to children and young people's education

- Thinking about **work opportunities** in your interactions with young people. Knowing that the way you speak can have a big impact on their perception of the options and choices available to them.
- Being aware of the **work landscape** that young people of today are operating in.
- Taking account of the fact that young people in insecure work face **additional barriers to accessing care** and treatment. Being open to conversations with young people about costs and their decision-making, so they can make better-informed decisions for their health.
- Having **information** about local suitable work experience opportunities for young people available in your practice or health service.
- **Promoting work experience opportunities** in other organisations you are involved with, such as professional bodies.
- Having a strong **work experience policy** in services that is informed by input from young people.