

# CREATING A BETTER “NORMAL”

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THE SKILLSROAD 2020  
COVID-19 YOUTH REVIEW

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## HOPE IS ON THE HORIZON.

This may seem an unlikely statement, given that 2020's been a year like no other (to put it mildly!). But the very real challenges we face have also created practical opportunities to start building a better, more resilient future for young Australians. **The time for positive change is now – are you ready to reset?**

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# HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

Our goal is to arm employers, educators and parents/carers with the knowledge and tools they need to turn this pandemic into an opportunity, rather than a long-term threat. We want to support them to play their part to help youth navigate this difficult situation and empower youth to make the future better.

To do so, we combined data and findings from two proprietary Skillsroad surveys undertaken this year with relevant supporting research and insights to review the nature of the challenges Gen Z and young millennials are currently dealing with, and how this may impact their working lives going forward.

We start by providing a sweeping overview of how Gen Z generally differ from previous generations, and then delve into five "Challenge Statements" relevant to the cohort as identified during our research. Each statement ends with practically actionable resources and insight to help employers, educators and parents identify the next steps they can take to support Australian youth going forward.

## KNOW YOUR GENERATIONS

For the purposes of this Youth Review, we define the different generations as follows:

### GEN ALPHA

Born since year 2010

### GEN Z

Born 1995 to 2009. In 2020, between 12 and 25 years old.

### MILLENNIALS

Born 1980 to 1994. In 2020, between 26 and 40 years old.

### GEN X

Born 1965 to 1979. In 2020, between 41 and 55 years old.

### BOOMERS

Born 1946 to 1964. In 2020, between 56 and 74 years old.

### BUILDERS

Born 1928 to 1945. In 2020, between 76 and 92 years old.

Definitions: mccrindle.com.au.

# WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

**1. Australian youth employment has been hard hit by the pandemic.**  
42.3% of working respondents became unemployed or stood down because of COVID-19. They are worried about there being enough jobs in the future – and about liking the career they pick.

**2. 55%** of youth are open to changing their plans if it means optimising career stability and future financial security.

**3. Mental Health issues are youth's current biggest concern.** They feel isolated, unsafe and need better tools to navigate a rapidly changing world. Support should be "pushed" to them, and not just wait for them to be "pulled" to resources when they need it.

**4. There is a correlation between youth "doing good" and "feeling good".** Youth who reached out to others during the pandemic (volunteer work, helping neighbours etc.) are more likely to answer "yes" to the statement "the future looks bright to me". And they WANT to do good: 54% of respondents have reached out to other people to make a difference during the pandemic, while 65.4% of those feel the future looks bright.

**5. Gen Z embraces diversity and multiple identities as core to who they are.** Improving how diversity and difference is approached and embraced in the workplace will lead to better talent uptake in the Vocational Education & Training (VET) sector and positive career outcomes for more Australians.

**6.** The later youth start engaging with industry- and career-related advice, the more likely they are to worry about liking their future careers.  
48% of respondents said they want "career discussion started earlier in school", while 68% of respondents said they want more information about "the jobs of the future".

# INTRODUCTION



**Australia is dealing with the day-to-day uncertainty of trying to get back to “business as usual” - but we have a long road to travel.**

Official figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) paint a grim ongoing picture, consistently showing that women and young Australians (Gen Z and younger millennials) continue to be hardest hit by the effects of the pandemic<sup>1</sup>.

This isn't particularly surprising, considering the industries most impacted by the pandemic: the retail and hospitality (accommodation and food) industries are both large employers of Australian youth. Our Skillsroad 2020 COVID-19 Youth Survey identified that almost half of all respondents who had become unemployed were either working in hospitality (24.21%) or retail (21%) prior to the pandemic. Further, over half of all young people who had been stood down were working in hospitality (31.24%) or retail (21.51%) prior to the pandemic.

**THIS HAS IMPACTED YOUNG AUSTRALIANS' FUTURE CAREER PLANS, WITH THOSE STOOD DOWN OR BECOMING UNEMPLOYED MORE LIKELY TO AGREE THAT THEIR CAREER GOALS HAVE BEEN DELAYED:**

■ **64%** of unemployed respondents strongly agree/agree

■ **55%** of stood down respondents strongly agree/agree

■ **40%** of respondents who were neither unemployed or stood down still strongly agree/agree

Despite this grim picture, young Australians haven't put their plans on hold. This reflects in, for example, the continuous and increased usage of Skillsroad's proprietary career planning tools and resources throughout the pandemic. Jobs Boards such as Seek have seen an upsurge in job applications for any available roles, with the numbers of applicants per job at the end of June

at 16% above pre-coronavirus levels. But competition for available jobs is fierce, with one young job seeker, for example, recently joining 4,100 applicants for the same role. Experts estimate that there are at least 12 people for every one job available<sup>2</sup>.

Gen Z and young millennials have had to deal with huge challenges and changes in their relatively short lives, making them more pragmatic and focused on their future. But our young people are not immune to the psychological and practical impacts of losing or finding a job, as we explain later in this report.

**YOUNG AUSTRALIANS NEED RELEVANT, PRACTICAL CAREER-RELATED ADVICE, RESOURCES AND SUPPORT NOW MORE THAN EVER BEFORE.**

This obviously places a burden on employers, educators and parents – when the whole world is in upheaval, it's challenging to know the best advice to give, let alone what will make an actual difference in youth's lives going forward. However, there is a silver lining to all of this – we have a unique opportunity to create a new, better “normal” going forward – and Gen Z and millennials are already on board with this. It's time to capitalise on the practical opportunities available to us to start shaping the kind of future we want.

The world of work that emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic will be different – and likely more aligned with the ideals of millennials and Gen Zs. During the past few months, young people have seen how quickly the environment can heal, how rapidly business can adapt, how old systems can be ineffective when dealing with change, and how the societal value placed on the jobs we do (and why we do them) can change<sup>3</sup>.

**A POST-PANDEMIC SOCIETY CAN BE BETTER THAN THE ONE THAT PRECEDED IT – BUT ONLY IF WE EMBRACE OUR YOUNGER GENERATIONS' TENACITY AND WILLINGNESS TO CHANGE, AND WORK WITH THEM.**

Skillsroad undertook the 2020 Skillsroad COVID-19 Youth Survey to encourage Gen-Z and young millennial Australians to speak their minds and share their hopes and concerns for their future careers with us. We developed and delved into five “Challenge Statements” based on what survey respondents shared with us, and created actionable resources that employers, parents and educators alike can use to effect positive change and practically support our youth in shaping a better future. Our findings offer insights that can inform career-related advice, the creation of lesson plans and resources, overhauling business talent acquisition and retention strategies, improving change management plans, starting career conversations with the young people in your life, and generally creating a positive outcome for all stakeholders.

**Are you ready to create a better normal? The time is now. We'll show you how.**



## OUR YOUTH IN A NUTSHELL

Before jumping into our Challenge Statements, it's worth gaining some general insight into who Gen Z are, and how they differ from previous generations. Research has repeatedly shown that generational differences are real, and inspired by the different cultural and societal "worlds" we grow up in. These differences can be frustrating, especially in the workplace. Understanding Gen Z better will be very valuable: it will help you to determine what they see as important, how this may influence their day-to-day interactions with older generations, and where potential generational clashes might creep in.

As a rule, Gen Z and younger millennials are pragmatic, but they do dream big. While money, salary and stability matter, other things matter as much (and sometimes more), such as work-life balance, flexible hours, mental health support and office perks. Our survey found that the top five most important factors that would attract respondents to a future job is the pay (70%), job stability (66%), flexible working hours (62%), work/life balance (57%) and opportunities for career advancement (55%).

That said, this cohort do not want to be stuck or stagnate in any way and avoiding cognitive dissonance between who they are/what they stand for and what they do is key. This is especially important when reimagining what the workplace might look like in future.

As more boomers enter retirement, Gen Z and younger millennials will replace them, bringing an entirely different worldview and perspective on their careers and success into the workplace.

These are some of the key features that characterise this powerful new generation, and which should be considered when trying to communicate with them and attract them as future employees<sup>4</sup>.



Remember: While generational "stereotypes" exist for a good reason and can be helpful in determining general approaches and advice, it is still better to get to know people on an individual level to understand how best to work with and communicate to them.

### 1. CAREER ASPIRATIONS

**Gen Z prefer to work in industries that they interact with in their personal lives, as opposed to industries they aren't frequent consumers of.**

#### ■ OPPORTUNITY

Reach them at a young age where they live and play, via targeted communications and networking days, in-classroom resources, business/industry open days for younger kids and introducing School-Based Apprenticeships (SBATs) or work experience opportunities in your business.

#### ■ CHALLENGE

Gen Z can sniff out fake or inauthentic interest or "concern" a mile away. If you're keen on engaging young people make sure you do it for the right reasons, and keep their needs front of mind.

### 2. CAREER DEVELOPMENT

**Gen Z desire diverse and entrepreneurial opportunities within the safety of stable employment and will favour companies who can provide this.**

#### ■ OPPORTUNITY

Invest in your internal training, development and mentorship programs to make sure that you offer enticing opportunities for long-term career growth and skills development. Challenge them with the space they need to utilise all their natural skills within the business.

#### ■ CHALLENGE

An open mind to recognise the value of investing in entry-level personnel is crucial, as is the ability to keep up with the latest training developments.

#### ..... GENERATIONAL CLASH

Gen Z's perceived mercuriality when it comes to long-term workplace commitment may ruffle the

feathers of "loyalty is core" boomers.

### 3. WORKING STYLES

**Gen Z prefer individual tasks over team-based activities, HOWEVER they value physical connection. They prefer independence but not isolation.**

#### ■ OPPORTUNITY

Regular feedback sessions will help them perform optimally – and make sure that you get your points across. Think macro-management as opposed to micro-management.

#### ■ CHALLENGE

"Teamwork makes the dream work" might not hold as much sway with this cohort. Take this into account and offer flexibility when it comes to ways of working.

#### ..... GENERATIONAL CLASH

Boomers are more collectivist by nature and might not take kindly to Gen Z's thirst for independence and "doing their own thing".



#### 4. ETHICS ARE KEY

**Gen Z no longer form opinions of a company solely based on the quality of their products/services, but holistically based on their ethics, practices and social impact.**

##### ■ OPPORTUNITY

Improve your business' long-term profitability, resilience and ability to innovate by aligning your business with best-practice policies when it comes to sustainability, pay equity, diversity and ethical and social accountability to create a picture they can see themselves becoming part of.

##### ■ CHALLENGE

Much work needs to be done to tackle entrenched stereotypes and resistance to change within business and industry environments.

##### GENERATIONAL CLASH

Surprisingly, Gen Z and Gen X share many characteristics when it comes to wanting an ethical, healthy workplace: Gen Xers took the lead on many of the improvements we've seen in work/life balance so far, for example. However, where Gen X actively worked to change this, Gen Z prefer it "ready to go": which may cause conflict. Gen Z also sometimes tend to lump Gen X into the "Okay, boomer" mindset, which can be unfair.

#### 5. CORE VALUES

**Gen Z prioritise financial security over "personal fulfillment". They are concerned about their future stability and more likely to be homebodies, in contrast to the "world traveller" approach of millennials. COVID-19 will change the way we travel, which means Gen Z might become even more "travel conservative" in future, keeping sustainability, health and financial security concerns in mind. It might not be much of a hardship, either, given how they live, experience and connect globally online.**

##### ■ OPPORTUNITY

Take their stability and financial security concerns seriously: pay what is fair and what their talent

is worth. Initiate support programs to help them pay off study debt or give them access to training opportunities to help them invest in new future skills they can monetise.

##### ■ CHALLENGE

Good wages are a strong drawcard – but not the only one. Remember that Gen Z still want meaningful work in a space that aligns with their values. They want access to support that will make a difference to their lives.

##### GENERATIONAL CLASH

Older millennials might not get why travelling the world and enjoying all kinds of diverse experiences isn't top of the agenda for the homebodies Gen Z are shaping up to become – an end-of-year weekend away bonus or Christmas party on a yacht is less likely to incentivise performance compared to flexible working hours, monetary incentives or daily access to office fruit.



#### 6. BEHAVIOUR AND CHARACTER

**Gen Z's attachment to social media will pose implications to how they interact and want to be perceived.**

##### ■ OPPORTUNITY

Embrace and keep up to date with technological developments: your brand lives just as much online as in "real life". Mobilise your young staff to become an "advisory panel" to help you keep an eye on the digital landscape: this will have a positive effect on future business resilience as well.

##### ■ CHALLENGE

Don't try to speak "Gen Z" when communicating with them – it's obvious when you're trying too hard. And remember that brand reputation online can make or break a business.

##### GENERATIONAL CLASH

Boomers and Gen X would do well to brush up on their ability to engage in open dialogue across multiple platforms (and change their opinions if needed).

#### 7. DIVERSITY

**Gen Z defines diversity along different lines than generations before them.**

##### ■ OPPORTUNITY

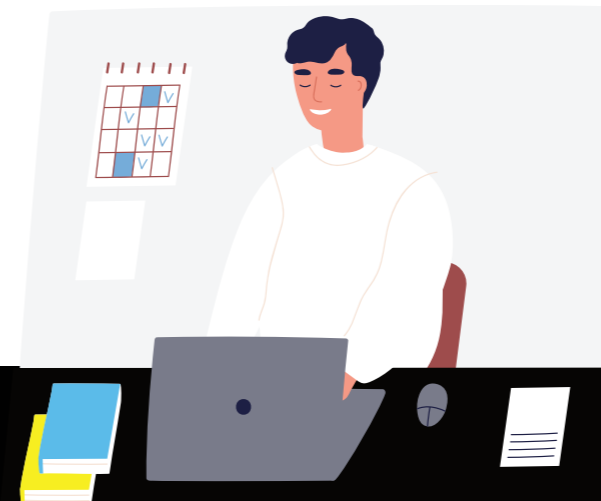
Research has proven repeatedly that embracing diversity in the workplace improves productivity, innovation, business resilience and profit. There really is no excuse to not get on board with this anymore.

##### ■ CHALLENGE

If your business or industry shows a marked lack of diversity, it will stand out like a sore thumb to Gen Z candidates. Diversity is not something they actively think about: it's simply part of their make-up and view of the world.

##### GENERATIONAL CLASH

Boomers who hold on to authoritarian top-down ideology and "black and white thinking" as a way to enact and enforce power will come up against the brick wall of Gen Z's undefined ID, mobility and multiple realities.



#### 8. EDUCATION

**Gen Z value education and learning very highly.**

##### ■ OPPORTUNITY

Organisations that focus on investment in learning and skill/capability development become more attractive to this education-oriented cohort. Improve your internal resources, training and mentorship programs to entice the best talent.

##### ■ CHALLENGE

Training can't just be an "also ran" or "do it yourself" approach – regular upskilling opportunities are necessary. This might mean overhauling current systems and investing more in what you offer.

**FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS IN ALL JOBS WOULD HELP. HAVE MORE FLEXIBILITY FOR STUDENTS TO BE IN PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT, AND BETTER ACCESS TO FACE-TO-FACE, FREE COUNSELLING AND LOWER WAITING TIMES FOR THESE SESSIONS. INTRODUCE MORE ACTION-BASED HELP THAT FOCUSES ON BEHAVIOUR AND HABITS.**

**FEMALE, 23, NSW**

## METHODOLOGY

The original Skillsroad 2020 Youth Skills Survey was open from 31 January to 7 February, just before the pandemic hit Australian shores. Questions covered an array of sections:

- demographic data,
- schooling,
- careers and concerns,
- industry employment,
- work expectations.

The results of this survey already emphasized certain trends, but we decided to repeat the survey later on in the pandemic, to test its impact on Australian youth's mental health and future concerns. This review combines relevant data from the first survey with results from the second, pointed out as "pre-pandemic" and "later-pandemic" data where applicable.

The Skillsroad 2020 COVID-19 Youth Survey was open from 26 May 2020 to 9 June 2020. Youth were invited to complete the survey using an online survey tool. For both surveys, invitations to participate were sent to the Skillsroad database via eDM and SMS. Additionally, an extensive social media advertising campaign targeted 15 to 24-year-old youth, and school- and career advisor networks were used to target a broad geographic cross-section of the youth community in all states and territories of

Australia. Participation was voluntary and all responses remained confidential.

The second survey included a focus on wellbeing and concerns created by COVID-19.

In total, 6,311 people took part in the survey and 5,425 met the target cohort of youth living in Australia (defined as being 15 to 24 years old and an Australian resident).

The survey included a total of 46 questions. Skip logic was implemented to ensure respondents only answered questions relevant to them.

Questions covered an array of sections:

- demographic data,
- schooling,
- careers and concerns,
- industry employment,
- work expectations,
- thoughts during a time of uncertainty,
- general wellbeing.

To ensure the sample provided an evidence-based approach to understanding youth, questions were asked to assess their attitudes, fears and current realities.

Additional sources were used (see reference section) to help identify trends and gain greater insight into the bigger picture.

## KEY DATA LEARNINGS

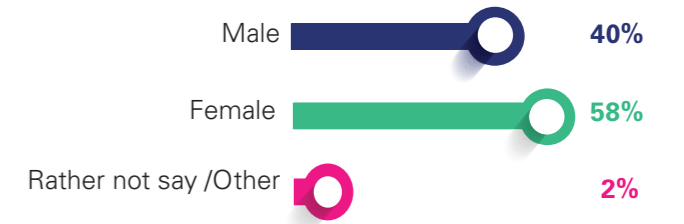
### TOTAL COMPLETIONS

6,311

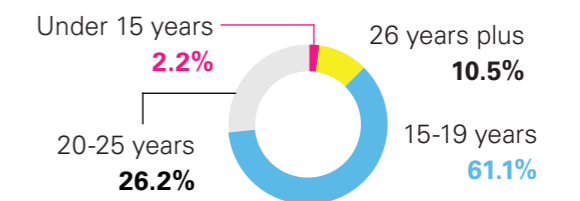
### 15-24 YEARS

5,283

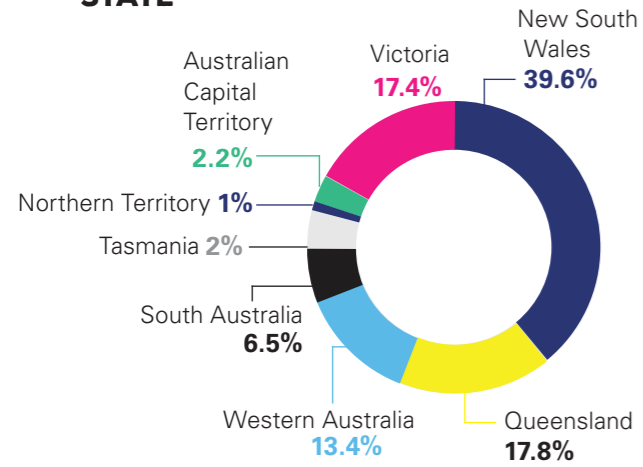
### GENDER



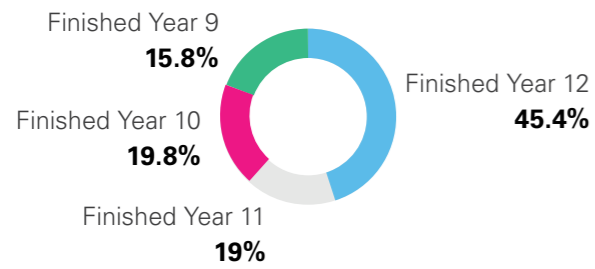
### AGE BREAKDOWN



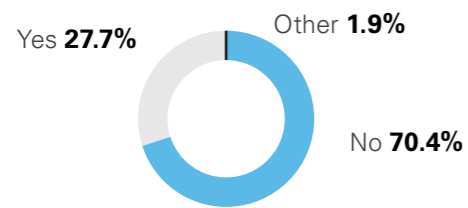
**STATE**



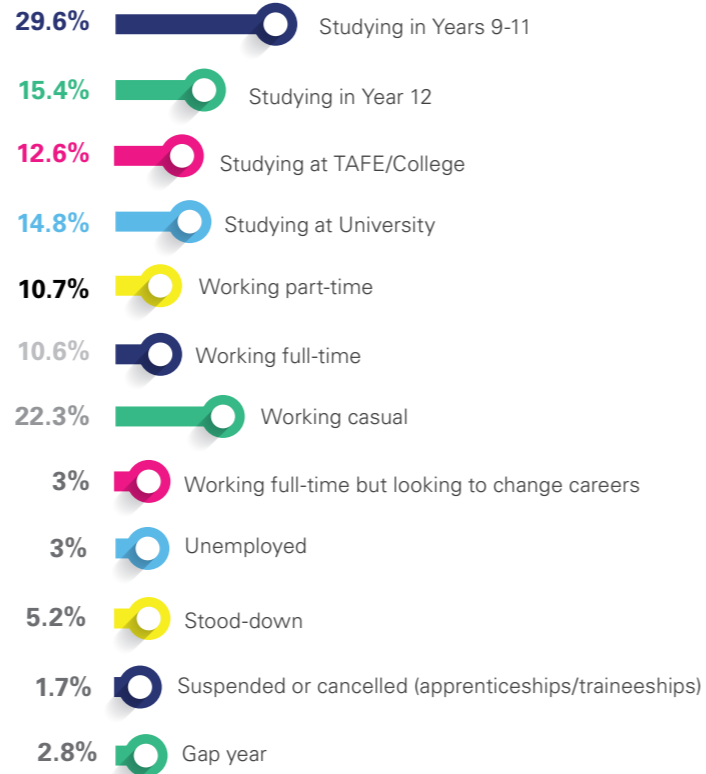
**WHAT IS YOUR HIGHEST LEVEL OF SCHOOL EDUCATION?**



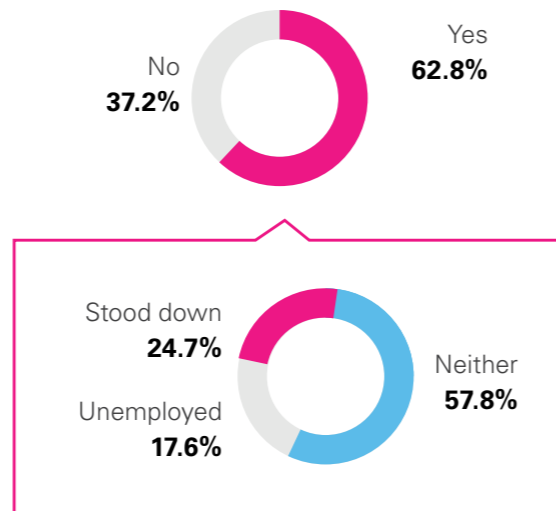
**ARE YOU RECEIVING ANY GOVERNMENT BENEFITS?**



**WHAT ARE YOU CURRENTLY DOING**



**WERE YOU EMPLOYED/WORKING PRIOR TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC?**



**GROUP-BY-GROUP BREAKDOWN OF RESPONDENTS WHO BECAME UNEMPLOYED OR STOOD DOWN AS A RESULT OF COVID-19:**

UNEMPLOYED: 17.6%  
 STOOD-DOWN: 24.7%  
 NEITHER: 57.8%

Current Activity	Unemployed (17.6%)	Stood-down (24.7%)	Neither (57.8%)
Studying in years 9-11	15.5%	24.4%	60.1%
Studying in Year 12	15%	29.3%	55.7%
Studying at TAFE/college	20.7%	23.2%	56.1%
Studying at University	17.5%	30%	52.6%
Working part-time	8.6%	22.5%	69%
Working full-time	3.5%	11.1%	85.7%
Working casual	8%	28%	64%
Working full-time but looking to change careers	5.8%	10.5%	83.7%
Gap year	22.8%	26.3%	50.9%





# STATEMENT 1

**THE KIDS ARE DOWN, BUT NOT OUT: PROVIDING MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING SUPPORT FOR YOUNG AUSTRALIANS IN THE WORKPLACE WILL IMPROVE PRODUCTIVITY AND RESILIENCE**



**YOUNG PEOPLE'S BIGGEST CONCERN ABOUT GROWING UP IN AUSTRALIA IS MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES AT 16.7%. THIS IS FOLLOWED BY HOUSING AFFORDABILITY, NOT ENOUGH JOBS, BEING TREATED UNFAIRLY OR DISCRIMINATED AGAINST, NOT WORKING IN THEIR DREAM INDUSTRY AND CLIMATE CHANGE CONCERNS.**

**YOUNG WOMEN HAVE HIGHER MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS THAN YOUNG MEN, 19.5% VS. 12.3%.**

## EXPLANATION

Mental health has always been important to and openly talked about by Gen Z and young millennials – but COVID-19 has kicked things into higher gear, given that it's caused massive mental health problems (such as anxiety, depression, substance abuse, post traumatic stress disorder and suicide) worldwide. The recent 2020 Deloitte Millennial Survey has pointed out that **48% OF GEN Z AND 44% OF MILLENNIALS ARE STRESSED ALL OR MOST OF THE TIME, DUE TO FINANCIAL CONCERNS, FAMILY WELFARE, AND CAREER EXPECTATIONS.**

In Australia, a research team from Swinburne University has been tracking the spike in mental health problems among 18 to 25-year-olds for the past five months, finding that depression scores were almost four times higher than usual for the age group. Anxiety and stress levels were nearly as bad.<sup>5</sup>

It is crucial for educators, businesses and the government to get on board when it comes to creating and distributing open and practically actionable communications and access to relevant support and resources for young Australians. This is especially important for young Australians who live in remote areas: our research shows that while the difference between their responses and those of youth living in metro and regional areas aren't

vast, they always seem to be slightly behind the others when it comes to the "preferable" answer: being mentally healthier and more sure of their capability to recover, and feeling secure in their chances of future success.

Gen Z and young millennials do not want to go looking for solutions only when they need them, but require mental health and wellbeing programs and awareness to become part of the everyday fabric of their lives: see it as a constant "push" of resources and awareness to them to help them stay healthy, rather than a "pull" to resources only when they need them. Think "support and prevention are better than cure".

It's important to note that Gen Z and younger millennials were already very focused on mental health and wellbeing pre-pandemic, and much more open about their struggles than generations before them. Going forward, having access to ongoing support wherever they may be will become the new norm. Many social platforms have already started paving the way for what this may look like: SnapChat launched its "Here for you" mental health tool earlier than expected in response to the pandemic, while meditation app Headspace opened free access to usually paid-for resources for frontline workers. TikTok has a dedicated hashtag, #MentalHealthAwareness, for users to share their stories, fight stigma, educate the community, and advocate for others.<sup>6</sup> This hashtag has received 7.7 billion views so far – and counting. Live-streaming platform Netflix launched celebrity chats on Instagram Live to address Gen Z's pandemic woes. "Wanna Talk About It?" is a weekly live series featuring actors from some of the platform's most popular teen movies, who

ask mental health experts for tips on how to cope during the COVID crisis. Questions include "how do we manage anxiety?" and "what self-care actually means."<sup>7</sup>

Now, before we start labelling our youth as "snowflakes" who should "toughen up", keep in mind that being open and proactive about mental health and wellbeing is an approach that benefits all aspects of society, including future business survival, growth, and productivity.

**IT'S NOT ABOUT WRAPPING OUR YOUNG PEOPLE IN COTTON WOOL, BUT ABOUT GIVING THEM THE TOOLS NEEDED TO BECOME RESILIENT AND NAVIGATE A RAPIDLY CHANGING WORLD.**

Older generations had their own challenges and dealt with it in different ways. We know today that some of those ways (such as suppressing mental health concerns and seeing being open and talking about it as "not manly", for example) caused damage, leading to severe societal challenges and unhealthy coping mechanisms for generations of men and women alike. It's not enough to just say "she'll be right". Going forward, our youth will deal with an abundance of new challenges, often not caused by them but left as their responsibility to solve – and exacerbated by the pressures of being globally connected. Young Australians are navigating the process of discovering their identity in full scrutiny of the world on social and digital media.

The pressure is immense, and judging by the comments of our survey respondents, they are desperate for easy, ongoing access to practical mental health and wellbeing tools that take their unique experiences into account. They want to know that they're not alone and be able to engage in open conversation about their fears without being shamed or judged. Since we will rely on them to navigate our future, it is our responsibility to support them as best we can.

**“ BEING AN ESSENTIAL WORKER THAT'S HAD TO WORK THROUGHOUT THIS WHOLE PANDEMIC, I WOULD LIKE TO HAVE A VISIT FROM A COUNSELLOR TO CHECK ON ME. FOR ME, I ALREADY HAVE A WEAK IMMUNE SYSTEM AND BEING A MECHANIC, JUST THE PART OF JUMPING IN AND OUT OF CUSTOMERS' CARS ALL DAY NOT KNOWING IF YOU'RE GONNA GET SICK WITH COVID-19 TAKES ITS TOLL ON MORALE AND CREATES MORE STRESS THEN NEEDED. TO BE FAIR, THOUGH, IT SHOULD GO FOR ALL ESSENTIAL WORKERS WHO'VE WORKED THIS PANDEMIC. ”**

MALE, 22, NSW



**ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS FOR EMPLOYERS**

It starts with an acknowledgement: your future and current employees' mental health and wellbeing concerns are important. And not just because they're human beings who should be respected as such and encouraged to be open about their challenges, but also because mentally healthy employees are more productive, resilient and innovative – which is good for your bottom line.

**For employers to make the most of youth in the workplace consider this:**

- Commit to taking your employees' mental health seriously and secure the support of all levels of management to do so.
- Clarify how you will approach this: proactive workplace policies, practical procedures, special days, wellbeing programs, special training etc.
- Communicate your approach, policies and procedures clearly and regularly. Embrace diverse platforms and ways of delivering your message: meet your employees where they feel most comfortable.
- Create an open, encouraging culture where employees can expect support rather than stigmatisation.
- Be loud and proud about your commitment!

[Click here to access tools and resources to help you get started.](#)

“KIDSHHELPLINE IS REALLY GOOD BUT COULD BENEFIT IF THERE WERE EVEN MORE WORKING IN THE 'TEXTING' CONTACT, BECAUSE MANY PEOPLE PREFER THAT OVER CALLING.”

NON-BINARY, 16, NSW



**ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS FOR EDUCATORS**

If responses to the comment section of our survey have emphasised one thing, it's that young Australians want more support from educators, and open access to practical resources in this space. It makes sense, considering that this is where they spend a lot of their time learning the skills they need to thrive in the future. However, given the pressure and time constraints educators are under, it can be immensely challenging to offer "enough" support, or even determine what "enough" might be. Skillsroad offers a range of resources and practical tools that educators can use in online and offline classroom settings to better support their students while saving time and taking some of the pressure off themselves.

[Click here to access tools and resources to help you get started.](#)

“STRONGER FOCUS ON MENTAL HEALTH IN SCHOOL (HELPING TO UNDERSTAND AND NORMALIZE IT) AND A BETTER UNDERSTANDING FROM STAFF AND TEACHERS WOULD BE NICE”

MALE, 19, NSW

**ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS FOR PARENTS**

Parents are at the front line of caring for their children's mental and physical wellbeing during the pandemic – and we know it's been exhausting keeping your best foot forward while dealing with your own inner struggles, too. You know your child better than anyone else does, which is why we won't tell you what to do. But we do want to support you in any way we can to make it a little bit easier to engage your teens in conversation and support them through this time.

[Click here to access tools and resources to help you get started.](#)

“MAYBE HAVE CERTAIN TIMES DURING THE SCHOOL YEAR WHERE [TEACHERS] REFLECT ON WHETHER A STUDENT'S GRADES HAVE DROPPED OR IF A TEACHER HAS SEEN AN ODD BUT REOCCURRING MOOD CHANGE. THIS COULD HELP YOUNGER KIDS AND YOUNG ADULTS BE MORE AWARE OF MENTAL HEALTH AND [NOT BE SHUNNED], IT MAY HELP THEM REACH OUT AND ACTUALLY TALK TO SOMEONE AND GET HELP AND PREVENT SELF-HARM, SUICIDE, DRUG ABUSE, EARLY DRINKING STAGES THAT ARE ALL USED FOR COPING MECHANISMS.”

FEMALE, 15, VIC



“[WE NEED] HELP FOR FAMILIES TO STAY SAFE AT HOME (I.E. GETTING ALONG, CREATING HEALTHY ENVIRONMENTS AND ROUTINES OR ACTIVITIES, PREVENT DOMESTIC ABUSE AND VIOLENCE), DEVELOPMENT OF PROGRAMS FOR LEARNING HOBBIES, ESSENTIAL SKILLS AND THINGS TO DO AT HOME FOR THIS TIME AND FOR GENERAL LIFE.”

RATHER NOT SAY, 18, SA

## ADDITIONAL DATA

**13.69%**  
**OF RESPONDENTS**  
**ARE CONCERNED**  
**THAT THERE “AREN’T**  
**ENOUGH JOBS.”**

■ There is a correlation between youth who have (or don't have) healthy coping mechanisms and their sense of direction in life:

- Those who answered “not really coping well” to the question “How are you coping?” disagreed (24.33%) or strongly disagreed (14.47%) with having a sense of direction in their lives.
- Those who mentioned using coping mechanisms such as getting help from online forums, exercising, watching the news, learning new skills, meditating or talking with friends and family all “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with having a sense of direction in their lives.
- Those who answered “not really coping well” disagreed (37%) and strongly disagreed (16.51%) with the statement “it does not take me long to recover from a stressful event”

### ■ EDUCATION IS POWER:

Youth who completed Year 12 reported lower levels of mental health worries (14.45%) compared to those who finished Year 11 (21.42%) and those who finished Year 10 (21.20%).

- Those who selected “drugs/alcohol” as their coping mechanism disagreed (29.52%) and strongly disagreed (7.53%) with the statement “it does not take me long to recover from a stressful event”.
- 45% of youth living in metro or regional areas agreed or strongly agreed with having a sense of direction in their lives, compared to 39% of youth in remote areas who agreed or strongly agreed.
- 24% of youth living in remote areas disagree with the statement “it doesn't take me long to recover from a stressful event”, compared to 19% of youth in metro and regional areas who disagree.



“ In all honesty, I don't know how the government could help today's youth regarding their mental health and wellbeing. But what I know for certain is that **WE ARE STRUGGLING**. I feel as though young people are being dismissed because of all the resources that we have access to; the older generations do not see our struggles as a large priority. I'm not saying that the government should stop what they are doing and go to each individual young person to ask how they are doing and if they need assistance with anything. **BUT something needs to change!** ”

**FEMALE, 17, NSW**

**You don't always need a doctor or prescriptions, usually what you need is casual & regular chats that keep things light-hearted, focused on the present and actively achieving things. I have had way more progress with a case manager than I ever had with a psych. Not to mention the stress involved, just finding an available counsellor, never mind finding one you like.**

**FEMALE, 24, SA**

**“Something the government could introduce to support my health and well-being could be more, accessible programs to help find suitable careers and the study pathways to those, suited to my skills and personality. This is something that I feel like I have had no support on and find myself struggle to find.”**

**FEMALE, 19, QLD**

**“[WE NEED] STRESS HELP/ WELLBEING SUPPORT FOR YOUTH TO HELP KIDS THROUGH THE STRESS OF THE EARLY YEARS OF WORKFORCE ENVIRONMENTS.”**

**MALE, 19, WA**

**I FEEL AS THOUGH ACCESSIBILITY [TO MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT] MAY BE AN AREA TO IMPROVE ON, SUCH AS CHANGING THE PLATFORMS FOR HELP. SOME YOUTH MAY FIND A SENSE OF NORMALITY BY TALKING TO SOMEONE HELPING THEM OVER SNAPCHAT OR INSTAGRAM AS OPPOSED TO A CONFRONTING WEBSITE.**

**MALE, 18, NSW**



## STATEMENT 2

**DOING GOOD DOES YOU GOOD: GEN Z AND YOUNGER MILLENNIALS ARE MORE LIKELY TO CHOOSE FUTURE PATHWAYS THAT MAKE A POSITIVE DIFFERENCE**



**54% OF RESPONDENTS ANSWERED “YES” TO THE QUESTION “HAVE YOU REACHED OUT TO OTHER PEOPLE TO MAKE A POSITIVE DIFFERENCE?”**

**THOSE WHO ANSWERED “YES” HAVE THE HIGHEST SCORE ON “THE FUTURE LOOKS BRIGHT TO ME”**  
**64.5%**

### EXPLANATION

Research has repeatedly shown that doing good does you good: there is a correlation between caring for and reaching out to others and positive improvements in personal wellbeing. By giving back, you feel better. This also relates to Gen Z and millennials’ drive to make a positive difference to the world and take ownership of making these changes, regardless of how tough times may be.

While we’ve seen that our younger generations are hard hit when it comes to mental health and wellbeing issues, they’re also remarkably resilient. Gen Z and millennials are survivors. They are deeply affected by the pandemic but seem able to see opportunity in the darkness, viewing this crisis as a chance to reset and drive the change they want to see. They’re not just hoping for a better world to emerge after the COVID-19 pandemic – they want to lead the change.<sup>8</sup>

More than any other generation, Gen Z consider the impact of their choices on the world. As mentioned earlier, they form holistic opinions about business, industry and products based on their ethics, practices and social impact, and avoid engaging with what clashes with who they are and what they

stand for. (Unless they’re engaging as activists to engender change, as the hugely successful global School Strikes 4 the Climate illustrate.) The Deloitte Global Millennial Survey 2020 explored the views of more than 27.5K millennials and Gen Zs and found that despite the individual challenges and personal sources of anxiety they are facing, they “have remained focused on larger societal issues, both before and after the onset of the pandemic. If anything, the pandemic has reinforced their desire to help drive positive change in their communities and around the world. And they continue to push for a world in which businesses and governments mirror that same commitment to society, putting people ahead of profits and prioritising environmental sustainability.”

Given the emphasis placed on the importance and value of frontline and essential workers during the pandemic, it’s likely that greater exposure to and understanding of these important roles will play a part in the uptake of certain careers going forward. It might also explain why health/aged care industries seems to be popular as a potential future career pathway among Skillsroad COVID-19 Youth Survey respondents. This creates an opportunity for these newly respected industries to engage with future employees.

**“ WE DO NOT FEEL SAFE AT THIS GIVEN POINT IN TIME; THIS IS A CHALLENGE AND IT IS IMPORTANT THAT OUR GOVERNMENT ACKNOWLEDGES THIS. IT’S NOT EVERY DAY THAT WE ARE PUSHED TO SURVIVE A PANDEMIC AND WE DESERVE TO BE CELEBRATED FOR OUR ACHIEVEMENTS SO FAR. COVID-19 HAS BROUGHT WITH IT MANY THINGS, MOST BAD AND DETRIMENTAL TO OUR EVERYDAY WAY OF LIFE, BUT IN LIGHT OF IT ALL, THERE IS A SILVER LINING. WE HAVE LEARNT TO APPRECIATE WHAT’S IMPORTANT. WE HAVE LEARNT TO VALUE THE PEOPLE AROUND US AND TO FIND PEACE IN KNOWING THAT NO MATTER WHAT, WE’RE NOT ALONE. THE AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITY HAS EVOLVED INTO ONE OF COMPASSION. WE STRIVE TO GET THROUGH THIS TOGETHER USING OUR SOLIDARITY NOT ONLY AS A SEPARATE NATION STATE, BUT TOGETHER AS AN INTERNATIONAL AMALGAMATION. SO, WHAT SUPPORT COULD THE GOVERNMENT PROVIDE? WELL, SEEING PUBLIC FIGURES LIVING OUT OUR MORALS WILL BE A GOOD START. CREATING ONLINE FORUMS FILLED WITH POSITIVITY AND GUIDANCE PARTICULARLY FOR US STUDENTS [WOULD HELP]. ”**

**FEMALE, 18, NSW**



## ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS FOR EMPLOYERS

What drives your company? Do you follow your stated values? Do you have a purpose that Gen Z would get on board with? If no, could you change? If yes, could you do even better? These are all questions you should ask to get you thinking about the type of company you want to be going forward.

**For employers to make the most of youth in the workplace, consider this:**

- Put a mission statement in place and make sure to practice what you preach.
- If none of your products, services or ways of operating are sustainable or ethical, where could you start to make a change? Even a small change can have a big impact to those looking to engage with your company. E.g. "We have fair trade coffee/tea available for all staff in the communal kitchen areas, and we have recycling programs in place."
- What does your business do to "give back" to your community or those in need? Do you engage in certain local events, charities or causes? How do you look after your customers and staff?
- Do you have policies in place to manage workplace ethics and sustainability – and do you make sure to live it and enforce it?

[Click here to access tools and resources to help you get started.](#)

## ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS FOR EDUCATORS AND PARENTS

We all know that kindness is important, but it also seems to be something that falls by the wayside when the pressure of life catches up with us. Encouraging our youth to be kinder won't only do them good, but help our whole society to become stronger.

Our resources will help you encourage young Australians to make kindness and giving a normal part of their lives.

[Click here to access tools and resources to help you get started.](#)



## ADDITIONAL DATA

**54%** OF RESPONDENTS ANSWERED "YES" TO THE QUESTION "HAVE YOU REACHED OUT TO OTHER PEOPLE TO MAKE A POSITIVE DIFFERENCE?"

OF THOSE WHO ANSWERED "YES", **18.8%** PLAN TO WORK IN THE HEALTH CARE INDUSTRY

**72.7%** ARE HELPING PARENTS/FAMILY, **37.5%** VOLUNTEER AND **37.7%** SAID THEY ARE LEARNING NEW SKILLS TO HELP AND SUPPORT SOCIETY.

THOSE WHO ANSWERED "YES" HAVE THE HIGHEST SENSE OF DIRECTION IN THEIR LIVES **64.5%**

**62.2%** OF THOSE WHO ANSWERED "YES" ARE "FEELING OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THEIR FUTURE"

THOSE WHO ANSWERED "YES" SCORE HIGHEST ON "THE FUTURE LOOKS BRIGHT TO ME" **64.5%**

**34%** OF THOSE WHO ANSWERED "YES" DID VOLUNTEER WORK

HEALTH/AGED CARE SEEMS TO BE THE MOST POPULAR INDUSTRY THAT YOUTH ASPIRE TO WORK IN IN FUTURE **15.3%**



# STATEMENT 3

**DIVERSITY MATTERS: IMPROVED EDUCATION/ COMMUNICATION AROUND AND AWARENESS OF THE VET SECTOR AS A VIABLE CAREER OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL GENDERS CAN LEAD TO BETTER UPTAKE OF DIVERSE TALENT; THE TOPPLING OF POPULAR STEREOTYPES AND POSITIVE CAREER OUTCOMES FOR MORE AUSTRALIANS**



**42.3% OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS LOST THEIR JOBS, BROKEN DOWN AS 43.4% YOUNG WOMEN, AND 40% YOUNG MEN.**

**5.2% OF WOMEN EMPLOYED FULL-TIME LOST THEIR JOBS SINCE FEBRUARY, COMPARED TO 3.8% OF MEN.**

**ABS STATS CONSISTENTLY SHOW THAT YOUTH AND WOMEN ARE HARDEST HIT BY THE PANDEMIC (DUBBED A "PINK RECESSION")**

**11.5% OF WOMEN LOST THEIR HOURS COMPARED TO 7.5% OF MEN.**

## EXPLANATION

Research has consistently shown that there is a much lower uptake among young women of opportunities in the VET sector, and that different career paths are still heavily gendered. TableauPublic data from Business Reporting which quantify NSW apprenticeships, traineeships and funded training approvals by industry or vocation, for example, show that there is **NOT A SINGLE VET QUALIFICATION WHERE THE SPLIT BETWEEN MALE AND FEMALE APPRENTICES IS EVEN: IT'S EITHER TOTALLY WEIGHTED AGAINST MALES OR AGAINST FEMALES.**<sup>9</sup>

"Women make up just 3% of those employed in the electrotechnology and telecommunications trades, and only 1% of those working in construction, engineering and automotive trades," says Dr. Donna Bridges (Lecturer of sociology at Charles Sturt University and leader of a team of sociologist and academic researchers at CSU, who has done in-depth research on Women in Trades).<sup>10</sup>

According to the CSU-team's research, lower-skilled and lower-paid jobs like hairdressing have increased the number of women being employed in trade industries, but manual trades like electricians, carpenters and mechanics remain at incredibly low levels of women workers. Young women who pursue a non-professional path also risk a low-wage

future in female-dominated trades like hairdressing. "As soon as students walk out of the school gate into an apprenticeship, the males will start taking home about 20% more in their pay than their female peers." Their research also states that while Government, industries and education providers have tried to overcome skills shortages in manual trades by encouraging more women to pursue these careers, "the gender imbalance remains entrenched due in part to a culture that resists diversity".

There are various reasons for this imbalance that don't hinge on something as simple as "preference", and which includes existing stereotypes and societal bias, not least of which is that many girls and their parents and educators write these opportunities off as "just trades", while many trade industries have "macho" cultures that repel women. There is a need for better communication of and access to VET sector information and opportunities for young women – not only to improve access to career opportunities going forward, but also to elevate innovation, productivity and profitability in business and industry.

### BUT WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

We go into many of the reasons why embracing diversity in the workplace is good for business and the future of our economy later on. But there is one crucial reason that has been grimly illustrated during the COVID-19 pandemic: the industries and working cohort hardest hit were women, and young women specifically. Jobs in hospitality, retail, childcare services, the beauty industry (hairdressers,

beauticians etc.) and other traditionally "female" gendered roles were heavily impacted, while many working women had to juggle the burden of full-time work, childcare and home-schooling, often dropping out of employment to do so.

At the same time, essential services such as healthcare and education (also traditionally female skewed and likely to be paid less/valued less as a career path) proved how important they are for society's wellbeing and have become more attractive as a potential career path because of it. However, the main focus of economic recovery stimulus does not adequately speak to these concerns or opportunities.

**SIMPLY PUT: COMBATING GENDER STEREOTYPES AND IMPROVING AN UPTAKE OF DIVERSE EMPLOYEES IN ALL ROLES CAN LEAD TO BETTER EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES FOR ALL AUSTRALIANS, HELPING US WEATHER STORMS IN A MORE BALANCED AND ROBUST WAY THAT DOES NOT HAVE SUCH AN OUTSIZED NEGATIVE IMPACT ON HALF OF SOCIETY.**

Research by KPMG has found that "stubborn gender stereotypes" continue to harm the careers of women, especially those who opt to care for children and elderly family members. According to the 2019 She's Price(d)less report:

■ The gender pay gap is the equivalent of \$445

million a week or \$23 billion a year.<sup>11</sup>

■ Deeply entrenched gender stereotypes about the roles men and women play in paid work and caring continue to be a driving force behind the gender pay gap.

■ Gender discrimination continues to be the biggest contributing factor to the pay gap, accounting for almost two-fifths (39%) of the gender pay gap.

■ The combined impact of years not working due to interruptions, part-time employment and unpaid work contributed to 39% of the gender pay gap.

■ Occupational and industrial segregation continue to be significant contributors to the gender pay gap at 17%.

■ In addition to gender discrimination, the report cited the combined impact of years not working with part-time employment and unpaid work contributes 39% to the gender pay gap.

■ Lower pay rates in the sectors dominated by female employees account for around 17% of the gender pay gap.

### WHERE DO INDUSTRY GENDER STEREOTYPES COME FROM?

Stereotypes around career paths and industries germinate in a range of places:

■ Expectations from parents, peers and/or career advisors. Parents may discourage their daughters to pursue a trade, for example, because they fear their daughters will be at risk in a male environment, or that there is too much heavy or "dirty" work. Boys might be discouraged from pursuing caring-related

work because it's seen as "unmanly". On their end, schools and education facilities can help to reinforce the gendered division of labour by sending mostly boys on work experience programs, and promoting VET options as something "boys do".

■ A lack of credible and comprehensive information about what working in trades really involves. Trades are often seen as options for students with "low grades", which is simply not true and can be very damaging and misleading.

■ Social expectations around gender: manual trades are seen as "masculine" professions, which means young women generally don't consider careers in these fields. Stereotypical perceptions can include the idea that trades are male jobs because girls are not strong enough or technical enough to do them, or caring is a female job because boys aren't empathetic enough.

■ A lack of role models for young women in trades has an impact too. As the saying goes, "You have to see it to be it". And while popular TV series such as *The Block* or *House Rules* increasingly feature teams including women or all-women teams, the expert spokespeople, on-set trades teams and celebrities associated with "traditional" trades and industries are still overwhelmingly male.

■ Homogeneous workplace cultures in trade industries that thrive on competition and intimidation, discourage difference, and often involve bullying or harassment driven by sexist/racist jokes, foul language or chauvinistic attitudes.

Ultimately, building a diverse workforce (which include women, LGBTQ and non-binary individuals, Indigenous Australians, disabled people and culturally and linguistically diverse people) makes both financial and social sense. As McKinsey & Company's January 2018 report "Delivering through Diversity" concludes, "Many successful companies regard I&D [Inclusivity and Diversity] as a source of competitive advantage. It makes sense that a diverse and inclusive employee base – with a range of approaches and perspectives – would be more competitive in a globalised economy."<sup>12</sup>

A 2019 report commissioned by the SBS and authored by John O'Mahony from Deloitte Access Economics found that improving social inclusion could amount to a \$12.7 billion annual boost to the Australian economy, lifting the GDP growth, improving health and employment outcomes, increasing workplace productivity and reducing the cost of social services. The report estimates that

increasing the share of women in senior leadership positions will boost Australia's GDP by \$5 billion through more creative and innovative workplaces.<sup>13</sup>

Research by the International Monetary Fund concluded that women and men bring "different skills and perspectives to the workplace, including different attitudes to risk and collaboration." The financial performance of firms also improves with more gender-equal corporate boards. The IMF identified some of the key benefits of having more women in your workplace as:

■ A bigger boost to growth

■ Higher productivity

■ Higher male incomes (due to generally higher productivity and wage growth that goes with it)<sup>14</sup>

Considering what our economy has experienced during the pandemic, there is no better opportunity than now to start striving for improved diversity and balance, leading to growth and future resilience.

## ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS FOR EMPLOYERS

As touched on earlier, Gen Z's job loyalty rises as businesses address employee needs, from diversity and inclusion to sustainability, reskilling, and more.

**IT'S IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER THAT GEN Z DON'T ACTIVELY THINK ABOUT INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE – TO THIS GENERATION, IT IS SIMPLY A GIVEN, THE NORM, AND THUS EXPERIENCING THE LACK OF IT, OR THE REINFORCEMENT OF STEREOTYPES, IS AN ANACHRONISM AND COMPLETELY OUT OF STEP WITH HOW THEY ENGAGE WITH THE WORLD. IT CAN CAUSE LASTING DAMAGE TO HOW A BRAND OR INDUSTRY IS PERCEIVED.**

The infamous "Okay, boomer" remark encapsulates their experience of the world in a nutshell: a certain type of thinking, and actions related to a certain type of thinking, is seen with great disdain and will immediately do harm to your business – or to how an entire industry is perceived. It doesn't matter if you're ACTUALLY a "boomer" or not, generationally speaking – they have defined "boomer" thinking as conservative, entitled, judgemental and exclusionary.

A person can be "Okay, boomer" – but so can a business. Or entire industry.

Gen Z is about inclusion and diversity and difference – not as a cause, but simply as core to who they are. They are global and will steer clear of industries they perceive to not be in line with their expectations around what a fair, ethical and fundamentally truthful workplace/ industry should be like. If the messages they are consuming exposes problems such as gender discrimination and stereotyping, wage underpayment scandals in various industries, workplace racism and sexism, low or unequal wages and a lack of growth opportunities, they will make their decisions accordingly. It's in business and industry's best interest to tackle the systemic problems we face and communicate the good news stories as widely as possible to attract a Gen Z workforce happy to become part of the workplaces that need their skills.

Of course, stereotypes and negative press can be insidious, and unfairly impact entire industries, regardless of how the various businesses within them navigate their landscapes. Fortunately, actions speak louder than words: companies can (and must) demonstrate their commitment to a broader set of societal challenges, such as sustainability, climate change, fair work, fair trade, etc. Not only must companies have strong ethics, they must demonstrate they act consistent with their ethics and values, and this action must be front and centre of their brand for prospective Gen Z employees to see.

**For employers to make the most of youth in the workplace, consider this:**

■ Create and implement clear, Gen Z-focused communication and marketing campaigns to reach this cohort.

■ Do your research before sending out any communications: the wrong message will do more harm than good.

■ Showcase yourself authentically in the spaces they live and play.

■ Clarify and promote your business' ethics in everything you do.

■ Actively work to debunk stereotypes and myths regarding your industry – but first do the work to make sure there aren't any reasons for these stereotypes to exist.

**Ask yourself these questions:**

- Which aspects of my business/industry might actively keep young employees from applying for a job here?

- Which parts of my business naturally lend themselves to an ethical or sustainable approach?
- How can I connect my values to my business in practical ways?
- Am I getting loud about my "good news" stories, and communicating my opportunities in a way that reaches all young Australians, via role models they can relate to?

Businesses that want to create a more inclusive, diverse workforce and attract Gen Z and young millennial talent need to start from grassroots company culture and work their way up.

Attracting the right talent means opening your business up for scrutiny, and focusing on aspects such as:

■ Creating a culture that embraces diversity and vulnerability - one good place to start is to put strong programs and policies in place to support the health and wellbeing of workers holistically. A focus on mental health is extremely important for Gen Z and young millennial workers, and if you can show that your company takes it seriously, this will help attract more diverse employees.

■ Bias-free job advertisements created to appeal to diverse applicants are crucial to attracting the right talent and should focus exclusively on the essential skills and abilities needed to do the job.

■ Workplace policies created and enforced to:

- Improve workplace communication, both face-to-face and online
- Stop workplace bullying and harassment
- Stop discrimination based on gender, culture, language, religion, race, disability etc.
- Support flexible working hours or workplace arrangements
- Support family friendly wellbeing: and not just aimed at mothers, but fathers too
- Workplace sustainability goals
- Support clear growth and mentorship programs
- Support fair wages and the erosion of the gender pay gap
- Create a safe, supportive working environment
- Grow a diverse, inclusive workforce and workplace

**Click here to access tools and resources to help you get started.**

## ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS FOR EDUCATORS

Teachers, ask yourself the following questions: are there any careers or industries that tend to usually get the short end of the careers' counselling stick due to the time allocated for career discussions? Would I recommend different educational pathways depending on what I think the "typical" worker in a specific industry would be, or do I only focus on University pathways and high rankings for final HSC scores?

Dr. Donna Bridges states that the CSU team's research has found that boosting the number of women in the manual trades "requires cultural shifts in society, as much as within the industries themselves." Educators can get involved with this by:<sup>15</sup>

- Removing unconscious bias from the career-planning process and lessons.
- Exposing students to all available industries and trades, regardless of gender.
- Communicating and hosting a proper trades-focused carer week at your school.
- Taking part in or identifying and communicating programs that are already helping women to break through, such as mentoring programs for women, buddy systems, networking initiatives with other women in trades and all-female work teams at some businesses.
- Taking part in community education and the earlier engagement of girls to help normalise the role of the "tradie" for girls.

Communicating information about future skills, future job opportunities and career growth opportunities are important at school level. This is where combating harmful stereotypes can really be tackled. Making sure that youth are aware where the jobs of the future might lie and how their skills (regardless of their gender) can translate into these industries might go a long way to attract them to the businesses where they are needed.

[Click here to access tools and resources to help you get started.](#)

## ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS FOR PARENTS

Parents, ask yourself the following question: do I have any internal prejudices against certain industries or careers that might have bubbled out during conversations with my teenager? Or do I want them to achieve or keep a certain "status"? What would it take to open my mind to more diverse opportunities?

When helping your child consider their future career, don't approach it from a "gender" point of view. Rather, emphasise their natural skills and interests, and place value on the all-important "soft skills" all young people need for the future, such as good oral and written communication skills, empathy, creativity, the ability to work independently, the ability to accept responsibility and take ownership, teamwork skills, problem solving, organisational skills etc.

[Click here to access tools and resources to help you get started.](#)



## ADDITIONAL DATA

■ **37.5%** of young women went to university, while only 19.9% of young men went to university after leaving school.

■ **19.5%** of young men got an apprenticeship/traineeship, while only 6% of young women did after leaving school.

■ **22.4%** of young women PLAN to work in the health care, aged and disability sector and 14.77% young men PLAN to work in construction.

■ **23.3%** of young women aspire to work in the government or education business and only 11% of young men do, while 30.4% of young men aspire to work for themselves and only 21.3% of young women do.

■ Working for a non-profit/charity: young women are 4.7% and young men 2%

■ **22.8%** of young women and 17.5% of young men were working in retail pre-COVID.

■ **12.1%** of young men and 0.9% of young women were working in construction pre-COVID.

■ **4%** of young men and 0.7% of young women were working in manufacturing pre-COVID.

■ **4%** of young men and 0.8% of young women were working in transport pre-COVID.

■ What industries ARE you working in:

- 16% young men in construction and 2.4% young women
- health care, 2% young men and 7.5% young women
- education, young women 9% and young men 2%

■ Respondents' biggest worry about starting a career is not liking the career they choose

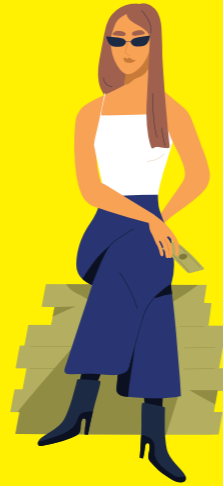
**(YOUNG WOMEN 19%, YOUNG MEN 15.3%).**





# STATEMENT 4

## YOUTH MAY CONSIDER CHANGING THEIR FUTURE PLANS TO OPTIMISE CAREER STABILITY AND FUTURE FINANCIAL SECURITY



**24% OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS SAY COVID-19 HAS ALREADY MADE THEM RECONSIDER THEIR CAREER PLANS, AND 31% SAY THEY MIGHT STILL CONSIDER CHANGING THEIR CAREER**

**PLANS AT SOME POINT IN FUTURE BECAUSE OF COVID-19. THIS EQUATES TO 55% OF YOUTH OPEN TO PIVOTING IF NEEDED FOR STABILITY AND SECURITY.**

### EXPLANATION

Earlier in the report we illustrated that Gen Z and young millennials are more likely to prioritise stability and security above personal fulfilment – and judging by our survey results, it seems that this may include changing their plans to help them better control their future career paths. Being able to pivot when required is a sign of resilience, but good decisions should still be based on research and self-knowledge. This is especially important since there seems to be a real concern among youth about not knowing what career pathways they should choose, and whether they'll end up actually liking their choices.

It is crucial that young Australians have access to the most relevant and up-to-date career-related information, as well as tools that give them an intrinsic understanding of how their natural skills and interests play into their future success.

However, a recurring theme in previous and ongoing Skillsroad research<sup>16</sup> is that Australian youth don't feel that they have access to enough relevant information, especially from a young enough age, and that they're not satisfied with the guidance they receive at school. We know that the information is available out there, but somehow, youth aren't accessing what they need: perhaps because the sheer amount of information and data available is exhausting to interpret and funnel into a clear picture relevant to your unique situation.

A focus on individual goals and dreams informs most available career messaging (in the media, at school, during daily life), and has often emphasised strong divisions between different careers, such as the typical individuals who pursue them and the likely "reward" or outcomes for these individuals. However, this begs the question: are all types

of skills (and careers) seen as equally worthy by society in general, and given the airtime they deserve? Of course not. A practical illustration of this is how certain industries previously looked down upon or considered as somehow "less" have become crucial during the COVID-19 pandemic, and now carry a complex cachet: professional cleaners and cleaning staff, health professionals, aged-care workers, teachers and educators, retail workers in grocery stores, delivery staff (online shopping and food services) being only a few examples. The status quo of how jobs are valued and perceived has started to shift – and youth are aware of this.

Going forward, the focus of career-related messaging and information should be on the importance of discovering your natural skills to inform career choices, and on how specific skill sets can be relevant to various career roles within and in between industries.

### UNDERSTANDING AND DEVELOPING THEIR NATURAL SKILLS SET CAN MAKE TRANSITIONING BETWEEN VASTLY DIFFERENT CAREERS OR INDUSTRIES MORE FLUID AND REWARDING FOR YOUNG PEOPLE, AS WELL AS LEAD TO GREATER HAPPINESS AT WORK AND KNOCK-ON BENEFITS FOR FAMILIES, BUSINESS AND SOCIETY.

Shifting the focus of messaging from "do what you love" to "discover your natural skills and channel them to forge a meaningful career you fall in love with" could play a positive role in how youth perceive the potential dynamism of their skill sets, and their ability to make a positive difference in their chosen role. It can encourage them to not focus on a "dream end goal" they might not be suited for, but rather use their innate abilities to thrive in a space they might not have considered before – and one that will need their skills in the future.

Shifting the prevalent cultural zeitgeist is difficult, despite the boost that the pandemic has given to our ability (and need) to change. Of course being interested in something specific would drive the career choices most young people make: they believe in being individuals, in being free to choose, in shaping their own destinies. Not all of them realise that making skills-based decisions could lead to happier, better and more productive choices in the long run. But creating and providing youth with practical tools to discover their natural skills and then helping them delve into these skill sets to potentially align them with interests and discover the infinite possibilities this merge allows is a good first step to give them faith in their decisions.

Psychometric testing tools such as the Skillsroad Career Quiz is designed to help youth identify their skill sets and discover possible career paths, while the Job Fit Test gives youth who have already chosen a path some insight on whether their abilities really suit their current career choice – and how to go about getting there (or pivoting to something new) if they don't.

### ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS FOR EMPLOYERS

Make the most out of youth in your workplace by:

- Getting on board with SBATS and work-experience programs and school career days – put yourself out there and open your business to young people to help them really experience what work is about.
- Consider becoming a mentor in a school-related program or provide your services as an expert.
- Communicate your good work and good news stories widely, on the platforms where young people congregate.
- If practical, turn your business' website into an open "hub" offering real insight into your day-to-day working, serving as a resource for young people looking into a career. (Bonus: doing so will allow you to create a new position for a communication and web-savvy digital media manager!)

**Not sure how to connect with entry-level talent? We can help. Click here to find out how.**



## ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS FOR EDUCATORS

Students need to be encouraged to look much wider when delving into possible career paths. Communicating information about VET pathways is just as important as talking about university degrees. However, helping them to discover their natural skills and strengths and base their decisions on them should be paramount. It is important to note that encouraging students to “use their skills” when deciding on a pathway doesn’t close any doors for them, and it doesn’t mean that their natural skills can’t be used in an area they’re already passionate about. It just encourages them to open their minds to pathways and roles in industries they might not have considered before. It is not denying the reality of either their “skills” or “passions”, but rather finding a practical way to interlink the two and help them find a pathway that combines both and leads to a successful future.

Use our tools and resources to get inspired.

## ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS FOR PARENTS

It’s challenging to guide your child through “interesting times”, as the Chinese proverb would have it... What’s important to emphasise is that whatever they choose, they should base their decisions on informed research and well-considered personal goals. It might even encourage them to stay the course on their current pathway, once they have a clearer picture of their goals. Knowledge is power: and despite the challenges facing them, our young people can still make the choices that will drive success.

Start a conversation using our tools and resources. Find more here.

“**[WE NEED] SUPPORT PROGRAMS FOR KIDS COMING OUT OF SCHOOL AND FINDING A JOB, WHICH SUPPORTS THE YOUNG ADULT ON THEIR JOURNEY INTO THE WORKFORCE.**”

**MALE, 18, ACT**

“**[WE NEED] EASE OF MIND FOR FUTURE CAREERS AND SKILLS NEEDED. I’M WORRIED ABOUT APPLYING FOR JOBS AND THEN FAILING. MONEY IS ALSO A BIG ISSUE.**”

**FEMALE, 18, NSW**



## ADDITIONAL DATA

### LATER-PANDEMIC SURVEY DATA:

- While **64%** of respondents believe they know which industry would best suit their skills, **80%** are willing to develop new skills in order to work in their dream job.
- Of those who have taken a gap year, **40.9%** biggest worry is not knowing what career to choose/what to do and 14.1% are worried they won’t like the career they choose: over 50% who have done a gap year are worried about getting into a job.

### PRE-PANDEMIC SURVEY DATA:

- **53%** of survey respondents said they are really interested in certain fields and would like to adapt their existing skills to work in these industries.

■ When asked ‘Would you consider changing your plans to work in an industry if you knew that employers found it difficult to recruit staff in that industry?’, of those who said no, 47% said ‘It’s not what they want to do’.

■ Only **36%** of survey respondents said they’ve taken quizzes or personality tests to learn about their skills.

■ **28%** wouldn’t change their career choice if they perceived working in another industry as ‘not what they want to do’.

■ However, **74%** of survey respondents believe that working in a job that suits their skills will make them better at it.

■ When asked ‘What would drive you to pick a career that doesn’t necessarily suit your natural skill set?’, **42%** said “Knowing that there will be jobs in this industry in the future”.

“**A LITTLE MORE ADVICE OR A PERSONALISED CHAT TO SOMEONE ABOUT MY CAREER COULD HELP. SOMEONE TO HELP ME MAKE A BETTER DECISION.**”

**FEMALE, 18, QLD.**

# STATEMENT 5

## EARLIER ACCESS TO RELEVANT WORKPLACE EXPERIENCE AND PRACTICAL CAREER-RELATED INFORMATION AND ADVICE IS CRUCIAL FOR FUTURE HAPPINESS AND SUCCESS

### EXPLANATION

It is evident that the earlier youth start thinking about their career pathways, the more direction they have and the more confident they feel in their decisions. It also makes logical sense that this would be so: being aware of all your options and equipped with the information and insight relevant to your situation gives you more control over your future and makes it more likely that you'll be happy and successful in what you choose.

In contrast to this, the later respondents started thinking about their options, the more worry and stress they seem to experience. It follows that the earlier we start to have positive, relevant conversations about and offer exposure to diverse career and industry pathways, the better our youth will do.

What is concerning, though, is that a recurring theme in our research is that youth don't feel that they're getting what they need early enough, or at all.

We know that it is hard work to be a career coach who has to advise so many students – there simply isn't enough time to really engage in a deep dive with all of them. In the long term, a systemic change to how early career-related advice and resources are offered to students might be an important area to focus on.

There is also a lack of industry and business participation in offering School-based Apprenticeships and Traineeships (SBATs) and work experience opportunities. Businesses need to do more to get out and engage face-to-face with students at career days: not only will this

provide youth with real-world insight and even possible mentorship opportunities; it will also benefit business to identify talent early on and become more familiar with their next generation of employees.

**THERE ISN'T A LACK OF INFORMATION OUT THERE – IT'S JUST THAT YOUTH DON'T SEEM TO BE ACCESSING IT IN ANY MEANINGFUL WAY. WHICH IS WHY A "SOURCE OF TRUTH" SUCH AS SKILLSROAD CAN PROVIDE A VALUABLE SERVICE IN THE FORM OF A SUPERHUB OF CAREER RESOURCES AND PRACTICALLY ACTIONABLE ADVICE.**

**SURVEY RESPONDENTS WHO HAVE THOUGHT ABOUT THEIR CAREER SINCE PRIMARY SCHOOL HAVE THE HIGHEST AWARENESS OF WHAT INDUSTRY THEIR NATURAL SKILLS MATCH UP TO (75.3%), FOLLOWED BY THOSE WHO HAVE THOUGHT ABOUT THEIR CAREER PATHS SINCE YEARS 7-10 (BOTH GROUPS 70%).**

**OVER ALL SURVEY RESPONDENTS, THERE IS A GRADUAL INCREASE IN WORRY ABOUT LIKING THEIR FUTURE CAREERS THAT CORRESPONDS WITH THEM NOT THINKING ABOUT THEIR CAREER PATHWAYS EARLY ENOUGH IN SCHOOL.**

### BRIDGING THE DISCONNECT

Business Australia's (formerly NSW Business Chamber) 2019 Workforce Skills Survey 2019 found that 69.8% of businesses reported having employed a person aged 24 or under in the last 12 months. However, they also highlighted certain challenges they face when it comes to entry-level workers.<sup>17</sup>

Half of respondents (50.9%) felt that young people they had employed were either not at all or only somewhat prepared for the workplace mainly due to attitude and professionalism, not having the relevant technical skills or due to a lack of 'soft' skills such as communication and teamwork.

Over half (51.4%) of respondents felt that the education system was not equipping young people with the skills, knowledge and capabilities they need when entering the workforce.

Many felt that poor preparation for the workforce could be addressed by providing young people with more work experience (67.7% of respondents), more development of soft skills (65%) and more training in employability / professionalism (64.2%) to help young people understand what employers expect in the workplace.

#### Careers advice in schools needs improvement

Only 11.7% of respondents agreed that sufficient career advice is available in schools. Many respondents raised concerns about careers advice in schools not promoting trades well enough and university often being promoted as the preferred pathway post-school.

Over 60% of businesses (over 750 businesses) reported they would be interested in supporting more school students into work by mentoring or providing work experience.

We know that youth crave more practical experience, but it appears that there is a disconnect somewhere between young people wanting more exposure to work, businesses being willing to provide it, and the connection actually happening.

While there may be many reasons for this disconnection (more urgent priorities, a focus on HSC, ATAR, NAPLAN and school rankings, the finite hours in a day), there are ways that may help to address this disconnect:

- Provide industry-based careers advice for students and parents from Year 9 in all schools,
- Increase work experience programs in schools and make it available earlier in schooling,
- Increase career education allowance (i.e. number of careers advisors) for public high schools,
- Build on the Regional Industry Engagement program and introduce more industry liaison roles into schools,
- Increase the focus on development of soft skills in schools, especially communication and teamwork,
- Provide more training for school students on employability to help students understand what is required of them in the workplace.

## ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS FOR EMPLOYERS

Getting more proactive about your involvement with work experience programs, SBATs or career days at school will go a long way towards providing youth with a taste of real-world work: with the added benefit of introducing your industry or business as a preferred place to work for a new generation of talent. Research has proven that partnership activities provide rich real-world learning opportunities, which can spark students' curiosity and introduce them to a range of new and emerging professions.<sup>18</sup>

**To make the most of youth in your workplace, do this:**

- Consider which areas of your business might lend itself to practical work experience placement programs aimed at secondary school students.
- Identify roles that would suit an SBAT program.
- Get involved with career and outreach days or programs at schools in your local community: industry/school partnerships can be an effective way of improving access to practical career information and advice.
- Consider how your business' website translates into a source of information for interested youth as well. If they're going to research their future career, would they end up on your site and consider what you have to offer? If no, how can you improve this?
- Develop effective ways of communicating with young people – get your internal HR, marketing and hiring department on board with this.
- Relook the policies and programs you have in place to support Gen Z with SBATs, online courses, pipeline training opportunities etc.

**For more information about setting up an SBAT opportunity click here.**

## ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS FOR EDUCATORS

Piquing their career curiosity earlier may be as simple as changing the tools and resources used in classrooms to guide career advice and education. Interesting tutorials and video resources that can help students to "immerse" themselves in a range of different industries and workplaces they may not have considered before may open their minds to think differently. Skillsroad's 360 Virtual Workplace is an example of an immersive experience providing valuable career-related advice for students.

Reach out to and leverage the willingness of industry and business in your school's area who are willing to take part in SBATs, work experience programs or even as participants in career days or weeks. Use your network to identify regular speakers from diverse fields of work to take part in career guidance classes or sessions. School/Industry partnerships often breathe fresh life into career advice and open doors for young people going forward.

It might even be worthwhile to consider making it compulsory take on a work experience week during year 9, to give these students a chance to "test run" their choices before cementing their options when choosing their subjects for HSC in year 10. The more exposure students get, the better.

**Click here to access classroom tools and resources to help you get started.**

## ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS FOR PARENTS

Encouraging a sense of curiosity in your children from a young age is a good way to get them to discover more of the world for themselves. There are different ways to do this:

- Teach them how to research – and why to do it.
- Encourage them to get involved in working from a young age, even if they just run a cupcake stall at school, or say yes to opportunities with family friends.
- Encourage them to get in touch with family and friends who follow different career paths to help them discover more about what's out there.
- Help them to discover their natural skills and the possibilities related to that by referring them to resource hubs such as Skillsroad.

**Skillsroad's resources will help you to support youth better in their journey to a career: find out more here.**



## ADDITIONAL DATA

### LATER-PANDEMIC SURVEY DATA:

- Of respondents who finished Year 12, 38.5% went to University and 8.05% did an apprenticeship/traineeship.
- Of respondents who finished Year 11, 23.7% did an apprenticeship/traineeship.
- Of respondents who finished Year 10, 24.5% did an apprenticeship/traineeship.
- Of respondents who finished Year 9, 11.21% did an apprenticeship/traineeship.
- Those respondents who started thinking about their career pathways earlier (from primary school to high school years 7-8) had a higher chance of attending university (47% for respondents who've been thinking about their pathways since primary school and 41% for respondents who've been thinking about their pathways since years 7-8).
- Of those respondents who only started thinking about their career pathways in years 11, 12.4% indicated it wasn't early enough to start thinking about it.
- Respondents who said "they don't know" what their career pathways should be:
  - 78.77% said they hadn't started thinking about it early enough.
  - Are the most worried about not choosing a career they'll like/do (41%) and not liking what they choose (2.81%).
  - Struggle the most to think far ahead when it comes to a business they aspire to work in (34.67%).
  - Are the biggest cohort to NOT be doing any online courses or continuing their studies at the moment (53%).
  - Are the most neutral cohort in response to the question about having a sense of direction in their life (34% answered neither agree or disagree).
- Those respondents who have thought about their career since primary school have the highest awareness of what industry their natural skills match up to (**75.3%**), followed by those who have thought about their career paths since years 7-10 (both groups **70%**).

### RESPONDENTS' BIGGEST WORRIES ABOUT STARTING A CAREER



### PRE-PANDEMIC SURVEY DATA:

- 48%** of respondents said they want "Career discussion starting earlier in school".
- 68%** of respondents said that they want more information about the "jobs of the future".

## YOUR NEXT STEP MATTERS

Australian youth need our support. The full impact of COVID-19 will be unpacked over many years, but early indications point to Gen Z dealing with great financial insecurity, PTSD-levels of anxiety and depression, and interrupted/fragmented educational trajectories (or at least a changing status quo regarding "traditional" forms of learning). Their focus on mental health and escaping inner turmoil will increase, and they're more likely to build a home-centric life. They are under an immense amount of pressure, feeling isolated and are unsure about what their futures may hold.

Going forward, a positive and empowering focus on practical mental health and wellbeing support is crucial and should underpin all ways of working with Gen Z – in workplaces, educational settings and homes.

### THERE SHOULD BE A CONSCIOUS FOCUS ON IMPROVING MENTAL HEALTH MESSAGING IN SCHOOLS, AT HOME AND IN THE MEDIA.

It's not enough to simply have resources available: make sure that your message is actively pushed to all young people, be it in the form of focused career lesson plans, improving your business's mental health policies and procedures, or spending time with your teen working through trustworthy advice and having productive conversations about their thoughts and dreams.

Youth should also be encouraged to change how they approach thinking and making decisions about their skills, educational pathways and future careers. This means

a concerted effort from employers, educators and parents to provide access to trustworthy, relevant career-related advice and information. Turn your business's website into an informative hub for would-be young employees, spend an extra 15 minutes on neglected skills advice, open your own mind to all the opportunities before encouraging your teen.

### EMPHASISE THE VALUE OF ALL SKILLS, THE POTENTIAL FOR EVOLUTION IN ALL SKILLS, AND PRACTICALLY DEMONSTRATE HOW CERTAIN SKILL SETS CAN BE RELEVANT ACROSS MANY DIFFERENT INDUSTRIES.

The 2008 recession, Climate Crisis and COVID-19 pandemic has deeply impacted Gen Z and millennials, causing a strong focus on business ethics and severe anxiety that have moved them to value job stability and security, strive for owning a home and to deep-dive into the ethics of the brands and businesses they engage with. This creates an opportunity for industry to align themselves with the core of what Gen Z need: the opportunity to build a stable, safe life for themselves and their loved ones by following a career path that aligns with their ethics, and makes them feel good about their impact on the world.

However, this challenges all industries looking to engage with their future workforce: put ethics front and centre, and make sure to communicate clearly and truthfully. Don't just give them access to practical resources that

inform them, but also focus on building a personal connection to help them discover the workings of your world. Actively combat stereotypes and stereotypical treatment in your industry and think about the impact you are making on the world. Empower them to make well thought-through decisions that will set them up for success and wellbeing, not just create more cogs in the wheel of the bottom line.

Ultimately, taking care of our younger generations means taking care of the future of our world: in business, culture, society and everyday family life. It's in our best interests to help them.



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