



Employment Consultations with Young People

Young people's voices that informed the State and
Federal youth employment reports

2022



Acknowledgment of Country

Youth Action acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia. We understand that sovereignty was never ceded and recognise their continuing connection to lands, waters, and cultures.

Our office is located upon the land of the Gadigal people. We recognise their traditional and ongoing Custodianship, and pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.



About Youth Action

Youth Action is the peak organisation representing young people and the services that support them in NSW. We work towards a society where all NSW young people are supported, engaged, valued, and have their rights realised. We represent over 150 Member organisations and regularly engage with young people and youth workers from all over the state, as we have for over 30 years.

We give a particular focus to young people who are regional, First Nations, LGBTIQ+, with disability, from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, including migrants and refugees, and doing it tough. We use a rights-based lens to focus on programs, policy and advocacy that achieve meaningful outcomes, embed strengths-based approaches, and are informed by data and evidence. We are an ally to the self-determination of First Nations communities, are led by the expertise of young people and the Sector, and work to be a trust-worthy partner and collaborator.

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Introduction

Young people, Youth Action Member organisations, and the Youth Sector have been clear about the importance of youth employment. This was a consistent theme throughout the ongoing consultations we held with young people from diverse cultures, backgrounds, and experiences during the pandemic.

Young people told us that the availability of secure and meaningful employment opportunities in a range of industries is crucial in ensuring long-term positive outcomes for themselves and their peers. Many young people are already engaged in education, employment programs and other services to assist them in achieving their goals. We also heard of the challenges that face young people when securing or maintaining employment, which has been made more difficult by the ongoing impacts of COVID-19 upon the job market.

Youth Action would like to thank all the young people involved in these consultations, and the services who support them, for sharing their lived experiences and ideas for change. Your voices inform our work and have shaped the recommendations in the Bearing the Brunt reports, commissioned by Youth Action and written by The Australia Institute.

It is our hope that this work contributes to improving the employment outcomes of young people here in NSW and throughout the rest of the country.

Background

This document summarises the themes which emerged from Youth Action's COVID-19 and employment consultations with young people throughout 2021 and prioritises quotes capturing the lived experiences of participants.

Youth Action heard from 243 young people across several consultations which captured a cross-section of young people, including young people from regional areas, First Nations, LGBTIQ+, with disability, from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, including migrants and refugees, and those doing-it-tough.

The following list contains all consultations to-date and their respective abbreviations used throughout this summary:

- Global Skills: Employment Services Liverpool (Global Skills #1), youth employment program South West Sydney
- Global Skills: Employment Services Mount Druitt (Global Skills #2), youth employment program, Western Sydney
- Tamworth Regional Council's Youth Council (Tamworth), regional NSW young people
- Fairfield City Council's Youth Advisory Committee (Fairfield) South West Sydney
- Youth Action's Health Literacy Advisory Committee (HLAC) state-wide
- Youth Action Open Invitation Consultation (Open) state-wide
- Youth Action First Nations Young People Consultation (First Nations)
- Blacktown Emerging Leaders & Advocates (BELA) newly arrived refugee and migrant young people, Western Sydney

Preparing for employment

Education

Young people said there needs to be increased assistance with resume writing, job application and interview skills, as well as opportunities to learn about the diversity of employment opportunities available.

Those connected to youth services, employment programs, or attending school or university said they were more likely to receive support through these organisations. However, young people said that if you are not connected to these supports, especially during transition periods such as leaving school or university, changing jobs, or being unemployed, it is hard to know how to do these things. Many expressed significant concern about falling behind without developing these skills. They felt this is an important area that needs to be addressed as they recognised without this knowledge young people cannot begin a career journey.

"I came to Australia, and I wanted to find a job. I had never applied for any jobs before, so I went to the store near my home, and they said, OK bring in your resume. I went home and I wrote in reasonable handwriting, then I went to the shop, and I gave it to the shop owner, and he said, I will call you back. He never called me back. Now I realize that the reason was because there was not much for me to write, I don't have experience" - BELA.

"In my experience careers advisors do not tell you how to apply for a job until you're older and you already have a job or have needed a job" - Tamworth.

“With that first interview, I did not know how to answer a lot of the questions, for example, when someone asks how much money you want to make, I didn’t know how to answer that” - Fairfield.

Formal qualifications

Young people acknowledged that having formal qualifications through school, TAFE, or university was an important factor in increasing their likelihood of securing work as well as assisting them in developing skills for employment. They were clear that entry into these courses and qualifications need to be accessible to young people from a diverse range of backgrounds, especially those in less resourced areas such as in regional NSW or in socio-economic disadvantaged communities. Pathways through school or youth and employment programs were identified as being most successful as young people are already connected to these organisations, making the transition easier. Young people reported finding it more difficult to negotiate pathways to qualifications when they had to manage without support.

“I think qualifications are really important because if you want to be in a particular field, you need to be certified or have the credentials for it. In my school we offer certain courses for example, barista, kitchen hand and those are just to get our certificates and our qualifications, to be able to work in those careers and I think that’s’ really helpful” - Tamworth.

“Lots of education and ways to get into employment, like we currently have the TAFE, which is quite popular for a variety of certificates. It covers a really broad range, and we’re supposed to be getting a university campus” - Tamworth.

“Education is such a powerful tool, it's kind of like your armour as you go through the world. Since going to university, I've learned so much more about the workforce, our government, all of these things that now I would see are integral into the way that I view the world and I want everyone to be able to have that opportunity if they choose that” - First Nations.

“There's lots of TAFEs around that to a lot of my friends, are accessible, it's manageable to their workload, they don't have to commute two, two and a half hours to a university. TAFE used to provide some really great courses that gave you the qualifications, that meant you didn't have to go to university, and obviously we've just cut so many of them and that has just had devastating effects” - First Nations.

Young people living with a disability

Young people expressed concern about the additional barriers faced by people with disability both in securing and maintaining employment. These young people spoke about difficulties knowing how to find suitable roles that they could undertake with their disability as well as finding employers who had the capacity to support them once in employment. Young people with disability said they required extra employment support from services who understood the unique challenges for young people with disability, including ongoing advocacy with employers to help them better understand how to support an employee with disability.

“I'm pretty concerned about the people with disabilities, because they might not know how to write a resume, and to just build up the courage to go and give their resume to a workplace and ask for employment. I don't really see much supporting that. The workplace itself matters a lot, because someone

with anxiety and autism, like me, wouldn't really cope in a fast-food restaurant or a fast retail place because it would just be too overwhelming. But I've noticed that's where most of the jobs for young people are" - Open.

"It would be great to have more entry level jobs, for young people that aren't physical labor jobs. So, for example, I have chronic fatigue syndrome and I find it hard to get a job. I'm at university, but I'd really like to have a casual or part-time job, using skills that I have, but that aren't physical labor jobs or something where I have to be on my feet such as retail or hospitality. So, I don't know how that would work but like more accessibility, with basic skills, something that you don't need to have a graduate degree for" - HLAC.

"The job agency was able to help my brother, who has a disability, with finding different jobs, creating a resume, and getting a bit of experience. They were very helpful in getting him interviews, keeping his resume updated and finding jobs that would employ him" - Open.

"I guess the real impact of COVID is that it just made it that much harder as a disabled youth to get a job because not only am I a young person, I'm one that's in a wheelchair, so then I have all these other requirements" - Tamworth.

Youth specific employment programs

Young people frequently reported positive experiences with the assistance they received from youth specific employment programs. Young people find these programs useful for developing skills and applying for jobs and spoke about how much they appreciated the time taken to understand their specific needs and interests. The commonality across the programs which they spoke

positively about was their specialist training in working with young people. They understood the complexity of life experiences of young people with whom they worked with and were able to tailor the support to respond to young people's individual circumstances. This was particularly important to young people who were tackling multiple challenges such as mental health issues, disengagement from education, trauma histories, long term unemployment, or involvement with law or justice systems.

"With Ladder Step Up, they've been really helpful to me and others in writing resumes and then going out and helping us choose places that were interesting to hand out the resume to. They also teach us how to look for jobs online, how to apply for TAFE and they teach us very basic life skills" - Open.

"What works well for me in employment was the support system that I had from uni. UNSW was really open to support anyone that needed help with employment, especially with the certain degrees they were in, so I found that when I went to them, they were really helpful with finding me volunteering positions and a lot of different organisations that I could reach out to, to find employment within social work" - Fairfield.

I'm in Liverpool, and for a lot of young people there are a lot of job agencies around us, I think that is really good. My job provider understands what I want to be doing in terms of a job, which makes it easier to have discussions with her about what I do want to apply for and what I don't want to apply for, so I think that's a really good thing to have as a young person" - Global Skills #1.

“Walanga Muru has been really great at sending out lots of different job opportunities and having specialised kind of courses or workshops on being able to do your resume or knowing how to apply for grad positions” - First Nations.

“Companies like Career Trackers and movements like that are really important, because it's obviously that pipeline to massive companies that, often our indigenous graduates will get overlooked when they're recruiting for their graduate program” - First Nations.

“What worked best for me every time was communicating with them what you need to do, they always help a lot. Even though I hear all the time that other people say, this job providers not good, they did heaps for me” - Global Skills #2.

“My job agent was helpful with things I need for work, like my birth certificate and getting a reimbursement” - Global Skills #2.

Young people spoke less positively about generalist employment services. Several said they needed more support than what they were currently receiving and the difficulties they experienced.

“Job providers helping with applying for work or them applying for it for you instead of you having to apply for all the jobs yourself. Extra help would be useful for a lot of job seekers” - Global Skills #2.

“My job agent has helped me a lot, but my sister was at a different job provider and she didn't get any help whatsoever” - Global Skills #2.

Career advisors

The important role played by career advisors in both school and tertiary institutions was highlighted throughout the consultations. Many young people discussed their appreciation for how school career advisors would go 'above and beyond' in providing guidance and support. They said this made a significant difference to both their access to career information as well as building their confidence in job seeking and employment or education decisions. Young people who did not have the support of a trusted adult or mentor in this role spoke less positively about their confidence and employment-seeking capacity.

"Our careers advisors at school, they usually inform us if there's a job opening, and I think that brings lots of information to us" - Tamworth.

"The support I had from my school, we had a careers office that helped us with making resumes and choosing a career to get employed, and they really clarified and made it easy for you to get employed" - Fairfield.

"Career advisors wouldn't just give us one choice so we had to curb our options to fit into it, they would give us a lot of options. You could choose something you didn't even know you liked. They make it easy for you, do your resume, help you out and then get you on your way" - Fairfield.

"Careers advisor, also resources are really useful, like websites that help decide, make decisions on what field you can work in. They have quizzes and things like that, decided based on your interests" - Fairfield.

"I think careers market was what helped me the most. This was an opportunity set up by my careers advisor, where we got to see different

industries and what we wanted to work in or were interested in. Another thing that helped us a lot was Jobseeker, through Jobseeker we were able to build our resumes, put down our accomplishments and stuff like that. So that was really good” - Fairfield.

“Having places like Walanga Muru and those career advisors and all of that is really important because it's that bridging person, between education and employment. We know we don't graduate school and go into a factory job and have that job for 35 years anymore. We don't have that stability, so it's not as guaranteed” - First Nations.

Support during transitions such as after leaving school or university, changing jobs, or periods of unemployment

In contrast to the positive support young people received through their connections to learning institutions, a number of them described the lack of support once they left education. They talked about the vulnerability they felt during these periods of transition and the impact this had on their confidence about finding employment or deciding upon a career.

“After school there's not a lot of support out there, all young people don't know about support that they can access to help them gain employment so having a career advisor / job, skills person to work together closely will build on success stories where young people are supported throughout and after school” - Fairfield.

“Just letting people know that there's resources and stuff out there for them because I know a lot of people that I know personally don't know that there's

career advisors and stuff like that around that can support them and help them through” - Fairfield.

“In other countries, it's generally every month to every three months, they rotate you to a new place, so you're getting a wide range of experience in a variety of different fields, building up those skills, and they always have the option of hiring you or sending you to someone else” - Global Skills #2.

Young people not connected to support programs during these transitions said they were not provided with information about where they could get support and consequently many struggled with mixed success to navigate the system themselves.

“I find that transition from people who didn't go to university and are just leaving year 12 or year 10 straight into the workforce is quite a difficult jump and one that it's really difficult to manage” - First Nations.

Securing employment

Deciding what to do

Young people in the consultations expressed feeling overwhelmed at times by the expectation that they should know what to do. They felt that there are many careers or professions that exist that they might like, however they did not know how to find out about them. Several spoke about a desire to be able to try different kinds of jobs to get a better sense about what would suit them. They thought this was especially important when young people are first starting out.

"Young people need to know about more types of work, not just search online. Because some work looks very interesting, but many people don't know about it - Global Skills #1.

"I feel like there should be more jobs out there where you participate in multiple things. Instead of just one job entirely... there are a lot of jobs out there where the payment looks awesome but the jobs are just boring. For me, I am a very shy person, if I go to a job and people are really boring and they don't want to start conversation, I am basically working on my own" - Global Skills #1.

"You can go to TAFE and try bricklaying, roofing, tiling, or you know whatever else construction is. But there's not a lot of admin or retail opportunities to try out" - Global Skills #2.

"I've noticed that when the job agency forwards me jobs, they're all construction, I don't know if that's just because I'm male? I've specifically

said, I would not like to do construction because I am not physically suited for it, I am quite weak” - Global Skills #2.

They worried about the pressure on young people from parents/family or schools to make the right choice the first time and that changing jobs or courses should not be seen as a failure but rather as a learning experience.

“I chose what I am currently studying because of multiple pressures, not what I was actually passionate about or wanted to do. A lot of young people are pressured by family to do stuff that they don't want to do, they have all this responsibility that's like built up to try and support you're their family. I think if parents were more supportive about what their kids wanted to do it would be much better” - Global Skills #1.

Work experience and internships

Having access to forms of work experience including placements and internships was identified by every consultation group as something crucial to improving employment outcomes for young people. Many spoke about the prior employment experience requirement on entry level jobs which is difficult for first-time jobseekers. They said having access to work experience helped young people meet this requirement.

A number of young people said they felt having access to work experience in school was beneficial, though the duration was not sufficient. They felt that work experience programs could be better utilised by offering short, sample opportunities in different jobs and industries to help young people decide what they wanted to do.

“You see a lot of people who once they are out of school, they don’t have any prior experience and school only offered a one-time work experience and from that they have got to decide if that is what they want to do” - Fairfield.

“Work experience is only once a year I think so if you want to explore different opportunities and find out what you really like then I think it is quite hard. You don’t know what you like and what you want to do until you get into the correct field” Fairfield.

Young people expressed concern about the nature of work experience and internships often being unpaid and without clear pathways into paid employment. This was particularly hard for young people who needed to financially support themselves as they were often required to work and study on top of an internship. They felt that unpaid internships favour young people in more advantaged situations than those with less resources.

“In terms of internships, it’s just like you’re supposed to do this labor for free and there’s also no expectation to get a job afterwards. There should almost be like an interim period where it’s like well you intern for 6 weeks and then we’ll let you know if we’re going to employ you” - HLAC.

In addition, young people felt more could be done to encourage entry-level roles for young people within large business or government agencies that could build the foundations for their career journey.

“I think that it’s a little bit silly that we don’t have opportunities into bigger businesses that require you to have a university degree join, as there’s definitely roles within larger companies where you don’t necessarily need to have a degree to work there, but there’s no bridging courses. I think if you

have made the decision not to go to university, you slot yourself in particular industries, that may not actually make you very happy, but you just feel like you're constrained to those things" - First Nations.

Discrimination

Some young people reported negative experiences during job application and interview processes. Discrimination experiences were reported for multiple reasons, including due to culturally or linguistically diversity, age, or physical appearance. Sexual harassment was also reported. For First Nations young people, individual workplace cultures differed in their level of cultural safety.

"There is a huge language barrier there... our accent is a big issue in the workplace, some people they don't even understand what we are saying" - BELA.

"I think it's hard to find a job because like because of the language and the knowledge that we don't have in comparison to a person that is born here" - BELA.

"I recently had a job interview that one of the job agents found. I went to the job interview, and it was absolutely terrible, the guy asked me the questions that were inappropriate including if I was single. I had to report it back to my job agent You don't want to be sending young women and men to a place that won't even be in their best interest if you're going to ask them questions like that" - Global Skills #1.

"When people see your physical appearance, they like to judge right away, be like 'this guy's not ready for the job' before even trying you out. They will make up some sort of excuse and be like 'oh, maybe we will give you a call'

and then never call you back. There is a lot that I'm not really appreciated for, it is because I am a bigger fella" - Global Skills #1.

"You hear the rhetoric all the time of how Indigenous people are all constantly surveilled when they go into some places. Woolworths is a stable employer. It's great first entry level job and you know you can go places within the organisation, but like how does that work for a First Nations person? Going into the same environment in which they are constantly surveilled?" - First Nations.

"You need to have that positive educational experience because for so many people, especially Indigenous people, are painted with the brush as soon as they get into these institutions, and they're told that they're good at sports or good at art, but they are never supported to try out all these different things at school. Like for so many of us, they're just subject to racism and discrimination" - First Nations.

Interestingly, multiple young people mentioned how hiring and rostering decisions preferenced younger people as they could be paid at a lower rate.

"I've noticed employers are more likely to hire young people for certain roles just because they pay them less" - BELA.

"At Maccas that's a thing. They'll put you on a part time when you're older because it's cheaper for them. They need an incentive to keep all the people who are 17-18" - Tamworth.

"Incentive to hire younger people would be useful, whether that's subsidies for employers to give jobs to young people, not just like 13-14 year olds, who are cheap" - Tamworth.

Early employment experiences

Young people told us about the benefit of early employment experiences, whether it was a casual job while at school, their first job after school, volunteering, or another opportunity. They could see the positive impact these experiences have for young people's employment prospects. They believe that more focus needed to be directed towards initiatives that support young people looking for earlier employment.

"Cafes and places like Coles want young people. I don't know about other people, but I've always seen that small places want young people. And it's all about not being fussy, a job is a job" - Tamworth.

"If you were to get a job when you were like 18 or 19, and you've never had a job before, people like if the employers would look at your resume and wonder why you've had no jobs or anything like that before, so I think that's why we put pressure on ourselves to get jobs from a young age" - Tamworth.

"I think service providers should have a 6-month program or a 3-month program where young people get experience in whatever field that they want to work in. Maybe service providers can work with employers to do traineeships for young people" - BELA.

"I find that it can be hard and difficult to look for a job as a lot of jobs require experience, but we can't gain experience until we've got a job. Especially in these times it's really hard to gain that experience because a lot of places aren't allowing students if it's for training purposes" - Open.

"For someone that is still in school I'd say don't have lower expectations but let them have a go and to give them a chance at working up their skills and

gaining their experience, or being able to provide them with somewhere where they can gain that experience” - Open.

“In terms of employment like if you want to try some work experience at a place or volunteer and you don't like it, and then you quit, there shouldn't be any repercussions to go to another place and try some more experience or volunteer or whatever there or apply for jobs” - Open.

“Early employment within your teens, because of how so many companies look for people with experience and being able to have so many people work at that age and gain experience, it puts everyone on an even playing field” - Global Skills #1.

“I find that transition from people who didn't go to university and are just leaving, you know, year 12 or year 10 straight into the workforce is quite a difficult jump and one that it's really difficult to manage” - First Nations.

“More jobs, I love music, but I have absolutely no experience in it” - Global Skills #1.

Feedback on unsuccessful applications

Young people said the process of applying for jobs was frequently disheartening. They felt it would be helpful to be provided feedback or reasons for unsuccessful job applications and interviews to help them learn, especially when they were first starting out.

“Not enough job interviews. No one is calling me for a job interview. They just don't call me” - Global Skills #1.

"I think maybe more communication between the job provider and young people. They can introduce themselves to each other, not just ask questions to get the answer" - Global Skills #1.

Experience requirements

Experience requirements frequently acted as a barrier for young people looking to enter the workforce, especially when looking for their first job. Some said they would have benefited from a support organisation to help them learn how to translate their life experiences, such as volunteering or involvement in youth programs, into valid work experience. While others said more work needs to be done to manage industry expectations about the amount of experience required for an entry level job for a young person. Lastly as mentioned earlier, there is a need for a greater amount and range of work experience opportunities to help young people meet these requirements.

"If you've had a job when you're 14 and you're going to apply for when you 17 again, you had the experience compared to someone who hasn't done that before. That puts you at a disadvantage, I guess" - Tamworth.

"I was looking for the job and people didn't hire me because at the time I didn't have any kind of experience and I didn't have any kind of certificate to show them that I'm eligible. It's difficult for me to get a job every day in Australia" - BELA.

"I found the hardest thing was even starting out in a casual position like I really wanted to get into retail coming out of high school and the feedback that I got back from all the interviews was that I haven't been experienced

enough and that was really hard on me because I don't know how to get that experience when I can't even find a job" - Fairfield.

"People don't have enough previous experience. If you have to work in the job industry you might not have enough experience" - Global Skills #1.

"I definitely think that it's really common to feel like you've got impostor syndrome when you first enter the workforce, especially when it's in like a professional environment coming from very structured university environment where you're used to receiving really specific feedback and clear instructions. And then when you transition into professional environment there's the expectation that you just know the ins and outs of what's expected of you, but there's not really a lot of support for that transition" - First Nations.

"I think some organisations discount the life experience of young people who are coming in, even the education of young people. It can make for a really difficult work environment where you feel like you're trying to have to do a lot more to prove yourself, a lot more anxiety about the stability of the job, wondering if you're doing good enough" - First Nations.

"The market is now over-saturated with skilled individuals with 10 years more experience than you, you've got nothing to offer. You can't even look at an entry level job without needing experience these days, which is pathetic, it's an entry level job" - Global Skills #2.

First Nations young people

First Nations young people discussed the unique experiences and considerations they face when looking for employment, especially moving

away from community and needing to assess the cultural safety of a potential employer. This is in addition to experiences discussed in the section on discrimination.

“Obviously, we know that youth, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous and those from regional areas are often forced out of their communities to seek out educational and employment opportunities as there's a lack of services. It's good to sometimes leave your hometown and broaden your horizons, and see what's out there, but at the same time, from an Indigenous perspective, that's kind of another form of recolonisation, you're ripping these people away from country, their culture, their community” - First Nations.

“People should feel culturally safe within their work organisations. We see this massive diversity and inclusion push from big companies and as an Indigenous person, you either feel like it's very much the intention of the company, because it's part of their culture or that it's definitely a 'tick of a box'. You can tell that through the language that they use, the effort they'll put in to learn your mob, or to do an Acknowledgement of Country and things like that” - First Nations.

Other barriers to employment

Young people reported a variety of other barriers to finding employment, which were unique to their personal skills and experience, geographic location, and supports.

"I have a bunch of friends gained employment through family friends business connections, whereas myself for example, my family doesn't really interact with our neighbors, we don't really have any family friends. So, I don't really have things like references" - Global Skills #2.

"Written applications, like how you go for Coles and all those other ones, they have long written applications... you don't even know if they're actually reading it or anything because they could be getting hundreds and thousands of applications, so I don't feel that is working as well" - Global Skills #2.

"My local public transport's useless and without a car, green slip, rego... it is hard to get to some jobs" - Global Skills #2.

"When I was 18, I was applying for eighty jobs a week. I was getting on average one interview a month. It's not for lack of trying. That's why I'm moving the Melbourne because I've got a friend who can help me get work" - Global Skills #2.

Job search options

Young people agree that there needs to be more specialised support from services with expertise in working with young people to help young job

seekers. They felt there was often an expectation by job providers or employers that young people would know what to do.

Young people with more job-seeking experience said they appreciate having the choice to search and apply for jobs online or in person and therefore found employment websites and online applications beneficial.

“One thing that is a positive is how easy and readily available is just to seek for the jobs online, how you've got all these different websites where you can find hundreds of thousands of jobs” - BELA.

“I found it was a lot easier for me actually calling up and going into places instead of like just applying online and stuff like that's helped me a lot” - Global Skills #1.

“I found it was a lot easier for me actually calling up and going into places instead of like just applying online” - Global Skills #2.

However, those with limited job seeking experience, those who felt less confident due to their literacy, language, or communications skills, or those who did not have someone to support them said they struggled with these platforms. Having access to technology and connectivity is also an issue for young people with less resources. They were more likely to need to be linked to a support service to use computers and WiFi.

“Application forms ask for experience and there's different types of questions like when you're available and how much money you're expecting, how would we know that?” - Global Skills #2.

Ongoing employment

Flexible working hours

It was clear that young people have diverse needs in relation to work arrangements. For young people, especially those still at school or studying, flexible working hours are important for juggling both study and employment. This group was more likely to seek part-time or casual employment which is precarious in nature. Many explained how they experienced financial instability due to circumstances outside their control, such as the pandemic, business restructures, downturns, or increased study loads.

"It is difficult to find openings. I was looking on Seek Careers the other day and I looked through entire site's casual jobs. I found two that I would be able to do, and both required full availability for the next seven days" - Tamworth.

"I think it's also about reminding businesses that young people have other things they need to do, and they need to gain an empathetic understanding of what young people have to go through, before they unload all these expectations on them" - Tamworth.

"I guess recognising that the purpose of casual work is flexibility and that for employers being more stringent and less flexible [it] is actually really challenging when you're trying to navigate in the workplace. So, say for example, I worked somewhere where I was casual and for university, I would need to take time off to do exams, but under my workplace even if I go

through the proper process and ask like a month in advance, they will say, you have to cover it yourself" - HLAC.

"They put a lot of pressure on younger like younger people to do a lot of hours that they maybe can't do" - Tamworth.

"They're a bit unreasonable with how much time they want you and like it's as if you can't have anything else after school, you can't have study. It's like you have to commit yourself [to] just you job which isn't feasible for a lot of people" - BELA.

"When you want to focus on studying and then you want to focus on work as well, it's going to be hard to do both, I only have Sundays free" - BELA.

"They were really supportive in giving me like afternoon work instead of like during the day work or expecting me to get there like 5-10 minutes after the bell. The same with my current job. I've been getting quite a bit of support from other workers and my boss and everything [who] didn't have like high expectations of me doing [work] during the day work because I was still at school" - Open.

"I think there's a lot more flexible roles available that suit young people needs, so it's not the traditional 9 to 5. It's yeah, you know, consulting work where they're asked to be lived experience advisors on a research project, for example. Which is like, you know, it could be 2 hours a week, could be 10 hours a week or could be like 3 hours a month" - First Nations.

"I think a really big issue as well as like underemployment, particularly for uni students, and so you know who have got that commitment to study. Yeah, just not having enough work, enough work to go to live off to be able

to save and do all the things that they kind of want to do while they're trying to get themselves and education to get ahead" - First Nations.

Workplace

Another theme across all consultations was the need for young people and employers to understand their rights in the workplace. Young people said they felt there should be more education about their rights at work and how they can better advocate for themselves. Many young people reported poor working conditions and other situations highlighting their lack of understanding about their rights or knowledge about where to seek assistance if they had an issue. In addition, young people were interested in their entitlements around pay and superannuation. It was also clear from listening to young people that there needs to be more support to ensure they know how to uphold their rights.

"I had a friend that lost ten kilos due to stress, because the workplace asked her to come in at lunchtime and during her free periods. She didn't know her workers' rights" - Tamworth.

"Not just teaching young people but ensuring that workplaces are upholding their rights. Young people who have migrated to Australia with no experience are trying to get a job through the correct avenues, but because of all the barriers, it's not possible... What ends up happening is that their only opportunity for employment is through people in their community like family, friends and relatives. Often these people are not employing or paying them properly" - BELA.

“For international students or people in vulnerable positions, they used to pay them cash, like \$10.00, \$12.00, an hour. These people in don't even have an option to sue the business, or to do anything about it because they think that they're going to lose their job” - BELA.

“I think when people either leave jobs or start new, the paperwork side of things, particularly superannuation, people don't seem to get it right and end up with multiple accounts... then they get a bit confused with how to consolidate it” - Fairfield.

“I think that the legal mumbo jumbo of all the papers can be confusing” - Fairfield.

“I think that there's more of a conversation about your rights... a lot more young people are aware of the nature of precarious work, and they're a lot more vocal about saying, 'hey, that's actually not sitting well with me and I might look to my union or talk to my friends about it'” - First Nations.

Impact upon mental health

Young people spoke about the pressure of combining school, study and employment and the impact upon mental health and wellbeing. They said there needs to be more information about where they can seek support to learn to better balance these pressures. They also expressed a strong desire for employers to have a greater understanding about mental health, mentally healthy workplaces, and how to support young people who are new to the workplace to manage their mental wellbeing.

“I was self-employed before the pandemic doing tutoring. I was able to do over zoom and do that, but I had to quit for my own mental health reasons.

Like I was just getting a bit too much with both the pandemic and school” - Tamworth.

“The amount of pressure that's put on us kids to do well... we can't afford to allow mental health to get in the way because in this country town it's not really a big deal to people and our workplaces don't get it. Our schools don't really get it and... it's a lot for me to go to work every day” - Tamworth.

“You're expected to work hard, and you're expected to go home every single day and stay up until 9pm and get those good grades. If you don't, then you're not going to go anywhere in life. That's just what people think. Not all people, I know. A lot of like our current generation believe that if we don't go to university or if we don't get a trade, then we're going to be nothing” - Tamworth.

“It's kind of unconscious pressure that you put on yourself to want to go out and get a job, I got job like 2 weeks after I turned 14 when all the kids aren't getting jobs until around 16-17. And it's just because it's always just been an unconscious pressure that if I don't do well and I don't make something of myself at a young age like my parents did, then I'll be nothing” - Tamworth.

Impact of COVID-19

COVID-19 is shifting goals

A key area for young people was the precarity of the type of roles in which they are commonly employed. For some young people, COVID-19 is shifting their career goals as they consider what will be 'essential' or 'in-demand' in the future.

"I was starting to like rethink my whole degree... if I wasted my time or not. The issue of essential workers came into place and then you look at yourself and think 'how important is my work, if something like a pandemic happened would I still have a job?'" - BELA.

"It certainly changed what I look at for part time work before university... it's very uncertain with the gap years and things like that, everyone I know was written off the idea of a gap year. They either want to go straight into University or just get a job around town" - Tamworth.

"COVID has, in two ways, either restricted what I can do but also opened up what I can do. So, with my sporting and my coaching it's closed it off because I can't go and see people, however it's opened it up a lot of online and group advocacy roles. I've been able to apply for things across the country" - HLAC.

"You have questions of the career you are going to choose, if that is going to be a sustainable income if things like a pandemic hit you. It's definitely made you think twice about what you want to do" - Fairfield.

"I'm studying a bachelor of planning so there'll always be a need for people to plan roads and so on, there will always be a job there. But the economic

situation we're in, people losing jobs or being on reduced hours, just sort of puts the question in the back of your head 'will there actually be something?'
- Fairfield.

"It kind of makes me not want to even look for work at the moment. I want to do aged care, I wanted to do that since before COVID and I'm doing a course at the moment that requires work placement, which is good but at the moment, you have to get a vaccination to go into health care, aged care and all that stuff" - Global Skills #2.

"I'm not wanting to get work in McDonald's again or something like that, I will do it just for the money, but I don't want to do that job, it's kind of what COVID left me to get because most jobs are either closed or have less employees" - Global Skills #2.

"I've seen what industries are like really important, and it's made me like look at employment as more of a necessity" - Global Skills #2.

"It's harder to get into the jobs that were already hard to get into" - Global Skills #2.

"I have been trying to think of more jobs where I can work from home and all that, so I can always, constantly work. Because even if I am sick, I can still be at home while working and your home it's just a more comfortable environment" - Global Skills #1.

"People will start to search for jobs online rather than in person. Sometimes people would go to stores they are interested in and hand in resumes personally on paper, but these days because of the pandemic everyone is searching for jobs online more than in person" - Global Skills #1.

“COVID has kind of opened up all these doors that weren't already open. People were actually able to rely more on the internet and like the older people in the workplace seem a lot more receptive to the idea of running it through the internet because of COVID and because they'd sort of been forced to do this now” - HLAC.

“I think there's been a really big shift towards the importance of stability of employment and employment that's going to provide you with enough money so you have savings and something to fall back on because the world is so uncertain at the moment and so many things are changing” - First Nations.

Impact upon current employment and finances

Young people have experienced a diverse range of impacts upon their current employment and financial situations due to COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions. Many described being employed in roles deemed as essential throughout the pandemic. Some of the impacts resulted from the tasks they were required to perform in their roles to meet COVID-19 demands, while for others it related to COVID-19 outbreaks in their businesses or local areas. Others spoke about either losing their job or having their work change significantly as a result of the lockdowns.

“I got abused the other day because I asked someone to put a mask on. It's just made us feel quite scared and anxious to want to get jobs due to people being so rude, and our managers they want us to work so much because there's such a high demand for all the products at the moment” - Tamworth.

"For me COVID has really affected my work. ... I used to work in Chemist Warehouse, someone tested positive for COVID-19 so I had to go in like in isolation for 2 weeks. That was around July and after that we haven't been called for work since. They told me to apply for COVID pandemic relief payment. I did that and then they rejected my payment, and I didn't understand. I called and no one was trying to help me, so during that isolation, no one paid me" - BELA.

"At the very end of June. It was, I think on 26th of June, COVID strikes in Greater Sydney. So ... I lost [my] job, [the] store got shut down. I didn't get payment up until [August] from then and I had I had left on a fair bit of savings, so I survived through that up until last week. My Aunty... said ... you had a job before and you are working like a fair [number] of hours, so you can apply for the COVID disaster payment. ... I had to call ... and ... talk to the ... people through them and then I ... had to claim the payment through there, so I think it helped me ... I got a fair bit of help from the government and ... I'm happy about it" - BELA.

"I think security and stability is massive in in the context of COVID. The majority of young people are casual and have been hit so hard through COVID. In my situation I used to work at a cafe, and I also interned two days a week at a company, and I lost my cafe job, but I was able to pick up more days in my internship which was really lucky" - First Nations.

"I think about friends from my hometown who are all hospo (hospitality) based and they've either been working much less. I think that it really emphasises what precarious work is like when a pandemic hits. What stability do you have? You don't" - First Nations.

"I prefer working with other people, I have a really good team where I work now and I miss them a lot. I don't think I could work from home; I like the interaction of helping someone with selling a product, and talking to see how much I can assist them with what they need" - Global Skills #1.

"With the protest that happened the other day, so many frontline workers just still have to go to work. When I saw the protest, I was a little bit infuriated because I still want to go back to work. I know that once the lockdown is lifted, I'll be going back to the job but it still makes me know though that community services is what I actually want to do" - Global Skills #1.

Impact upon job seeking

For young people who did not have a job, or who lost their job during the pandemic, finding a job has been more difficult. This experience was particularly heightened for some young people, such as those with disability or trying to balance study or other commitments.

"I guess the real impact COVID has had is that it just made it that much harder as a disabled youth to get a job because not only am I young person, I'm one that's in a wheelchair... I think the main issue came down to my education, so when we all went into lock down the very first time, I really struggled with at home learning... I often get scared, am I going to after all this be qualified enough to get into the Uni I want to get into and get into the scholarships I need to do that?" - Tamworth.

"With COVID 19 going on there are a lot less job opportunities for us young people to get out into because with a lot of us being in school, we can't get

part time or full-time work and we have to stay casual until we do have more time to do more hours. I am on Centrelink, but even then, I find it hard because I've got my own dog that I look after, and I have car bills and my phone bills that I've got to pay" – Open.

"I've learned that I want to get into like IT, hardware, anything like that, but if I look in my local area where I'm at the moment it's really hard because of COVID. Employers have already employed enough people and I've got to look further and further to the point where it's not feasible to get there" - Global Skills #2.