

# The Future of Education

DISCUSSION BRIEF 04



**Caloundra City  
Private School**

# Discussion Brief

## Number 04

### The importance of early engagement in work and future job clusters

We begin this discussion brief with powerful words from the forward to *Reaching Yes: Addressing the youth employment and skilling challenge* produced in 2022 through a collaboration by PwC, UNICEF, and Generation Unlimited:

Today, the world has 1.3bn young people who are trying to start out, find their way and make a life—just as we did once.

But the harsh reality is that millions of these young people will find it hard to make a life for themselves because they will struggle to find work. While the youth population has exploded by 30% in the last 20 years or so, the number in the labour force has actually decreased by approximately 12%. The COVID-19 pandemic has made it even tougher for young people to find a job.

When a young person wants to work but lacks the opportunity to do so, that is a tragedy both for the individual and for society. And one of the reasons that youth in every region struggle to find work is a mismatch between the skills they can offer and the skills employers need. <sup>(i)</sup>

We have considered how to equip our youth with the agility they will need to thrive in a VUCA environment. We also understand that many graduates who enter the workforce in the coming decade and attempt to prosper through the middle of the 21st Century will need to either create their own jobs (be entrepreneurs) or be part of innovations within organisations (intrapreneurs).

Discussion Brief 3 emphasised the need for young people to develop a set of transferable skills while they are at school. These skills are designed to position them as lifelong learners, equip them to thrive in a challenging world of work, and encourage them to see the Fourth Industrial Revolution as a renaissance with abundant opportunities awaiting well equipped individuals and teams. But this is not enough. Young people also need to gain traction in the world of work while at school.

The Foundation for Young Australians (FYA) emphasised the importance of these qualities if young people are to break through the barriers to gaining full-time work. FYA, like several other organisations mentioned in these briefs, highlighted the importance of developing entrepreneurial skills and gaining relevant full-time employment, particularly in future-focused clusters. Their 2018 report concluded (We have put the third requirement in bold, not because it is more important than student well-being, but because it is more relevant to the topic of this brief):

To ensure young Australians are prepared and equipped with the skills and capabilities required to successfully navigate their futures there is an urgent need to:

- Equip young people with the career management skills they need to navigate the new work reality
- Encourage young people to choose pathways that will equip them with enterprise skills that are portable to many jobs in their future which are key to successful transitions
- Consider new models for work integrated learning to ensure young people can gain the critical relevant work experience they need alongside their education
- Ensure our systems support well-being for young people entering this transition period in their lives<sup>(ii)</sup>

The skills and capabilities we build today will determine whether Australia's young people are ready to take on the challenges of the future for decades to come.

The University of Washington noted earlier this year that (with respect to the USA)

There is a myth that if you have a college degree, you have a job. The fact is that approximately 53% of college graduates are unemployed or working in a job that doesn't require a bachelor's degree. It takes the average college graduate three to six months to secure employment after graduation. A student benefits from having a career-seeking strategy and previous work experiences. Otherwise, her resume might be lost in a stack of hundreds for a specific job.<sup>(iii)</sup>

In Australia, FYA's 2018 New Work Reality Report noted:

Struggling financially more than their parents did, this 'crisis' period of the mid-twenties is characterised by insecurities, disappointments,

loneliness and depression. The stark reality is that today's generation of young people is the first to be worse off than their parents on a number of key social and economic measures.

This report explores the transition period from fulltime education to full-time work and reveals that by the age of 25, only half of young Australians have been able to secure more than 35 hours of work per week which classifies them to be full-time employed. It also shows that on the journey to reach full-time work, an estimated 21% work full-time hours in casual employment, and 18% do so through multiple jobs.<sup>(iv)</sup>

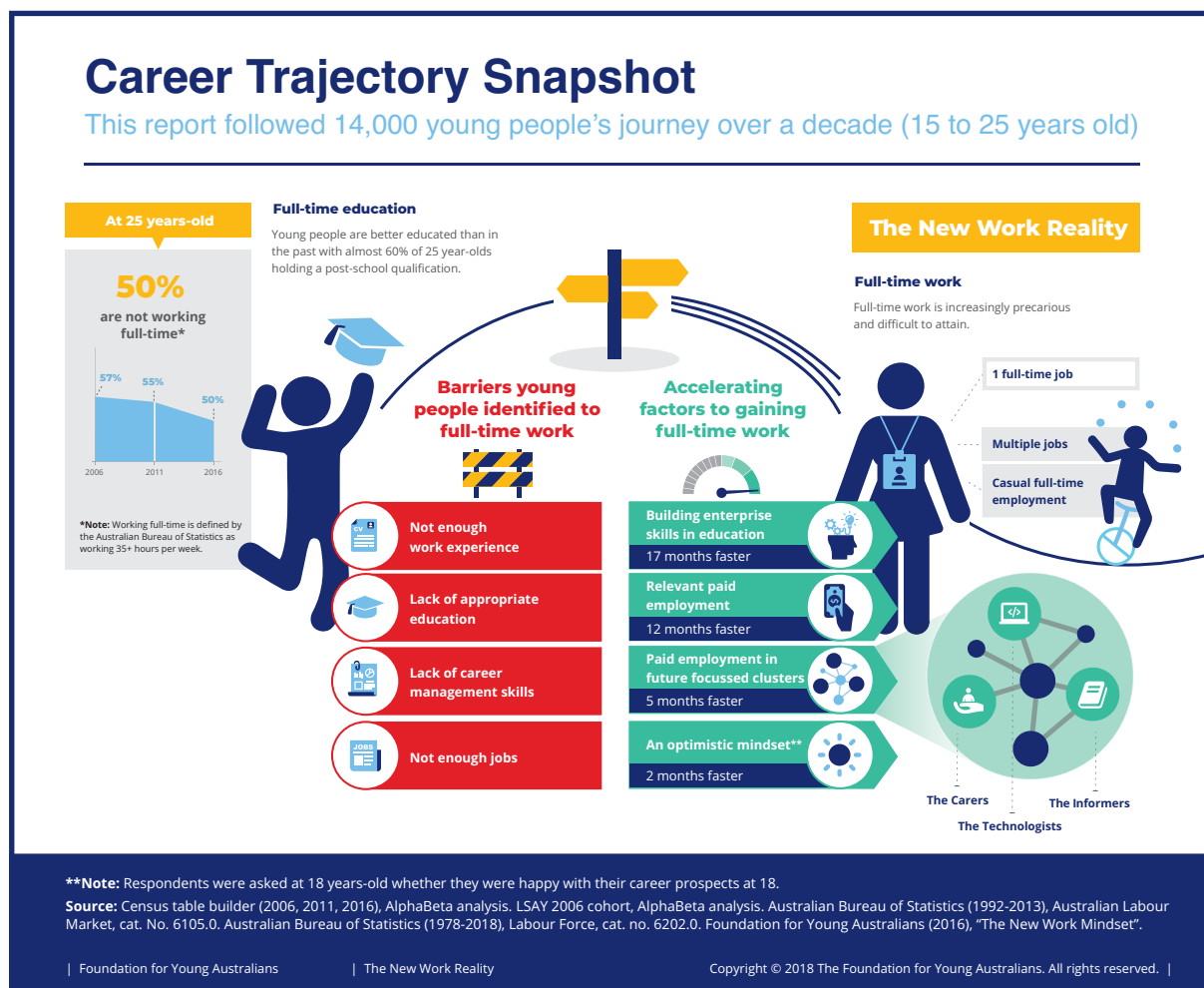
In the same report, FYA identified the factors that act as a barrier to obtaining full-time work, as well as those that can assist the transition. These are illustrated in Figure 1 and their classification of job clusters is presented in Figure 2. Informers, Carers<sup>(1)</sup> and Technologists are identified as three clusters with strong work prospects. Designers were also identified as a relatively strong prospect cluster. We define 'design' to include planning, conceptualising, and communicating innovations. Organisations like The World Economic Forum's list of trending skills included analytical thinking and innovation, originality and initiative, critical thinking and analysis, and complex problem solving and ideation, which are all associated with the design process.

Young Australians must overcome several barriers if they are to secure full-time employment (which were endorsed in the MyWays reports we will see later). Not having enough work experience was identified as a barrier to full-time work, while four factors were shown to accelerate the transition to full-time work. These included building enterprise skills (accelerated the transition by 17 months), having relevant paid employment (12 months), paid employment in future focused clusters (5 months), and having an optimistic mindset (an area where we can all play a part) accelerated the transition by 2 months.

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<sup>1</sup> In its 2020 Report, Jobs of Tomorrow, the World Economic Forum surmised that 40% of all new jobs in the next three years would be in the care sector.

Figure 1: The New Work Reality: A Snapshot<sup>(v)</sup>



## Gaining Traction in the World of Work

There was a time when the very mention of 'work' or 'industry' in the same sentence as 'schools' was considered grubby, and we suspect many schools still deny they have a responsibility to prepare students for the world of work. Our short answer to that is; 'Tell that to one of your graduates who cannot find a job!' Young people are aware of how difficult it is to enter the workforce. Data collected for McCrindle's 2021 Report identified Preparing for Unknown careers as one of the top 5 challenges for today's students, with 62% identifying it as an issue of concern.<sup>(vi)</sup>

There is more to this issue than providing labour for industries. Our chief concern should be the wellbeing implications of dooming young people to be unemployed, underemployed, or employed in 'dead end' jobs. The 2020 review of senior schooling in Australia is one of many to recognise this important function of schools:

FYA identified 7 job clusters in Australia, each with similar skills sets, tasks, and work environments, as a means of simplifying what young people may see as a bewildering choice.

**Figure 2: FYA’s classification of work clusters**



All students will be given the opportunity to participate in meaningful career education and work exploration activities. This will allow them to acquire the skills to be work-ready. It will broaden their understanding of the employment opportunities available to them. They will be provided with assistance to navigate options and make well-informed decisions.<sup>(vii)</sup>

Next Generation Learning produced the MyWays series of reports that provided well researched, practical insights into the issue in the USA.<sup>(viii)</sup> The report’s authors highlighted the consequences of inaction on wellbeing.

A report by the McKinsey Global Institute<sup>ix</sup> also emphasized the hardship that long-term joblessness inflicts on workers:



### MyWays Website Link

Here is a link to a MyWays website that illustrates what they are doing to promote employment.

Weak job creation and jobless recoveries have negative effects on individual workers, their families, communities, the overall quality of the labor force—and, inevitably, on society. An extended period of unemployment measurably lowers health outcomes and lifetime earnings; a worker who returns to work after long-term unemployment will earn 20 percent less over the next 15 to 20 years than a worker who was continuously employed.

The benefits of preparing young people for work has been highlighted by several organisations. For example, the OECD's 2021 Education Working Paper stated:

...the results of this paper find further evidence that secondary school students who explore, experience and think about their futures in work frequently encounter lower levels of unemployment, receive higher wages and are happier in their careers as adults.<sup>x</sup>

The OECD also reported 2018 PISA results showed that in most countries' 'too few students are showing signs of meeting the indicators and cannot be considered to be 'career ready''. The report went on to recommend that secondary students should gain first-hand experience of the world of work.<sup>xi</sup>

Young people face several obstacles if they attempt to enter the workforce without a work history. The problem is not peculiar to Australia, as the following observation by US based educational psychologist, Lauren Resnick illustrates<sup>xiii</sup> (our emphasis in bold):

Most companies are afraid of young people, viewing them as unreliable workers. They would rather hire more mature individuals, those in their upper twenties and, when possible, those who come with some prior history of work. **But there exists in this country no systematic way for most young people to gain the experience that would make them attractive to employers.** So they drift from one short-term minimum-wage job to another, with frequent periods of unemployment in between.

The employment crisis among under-30s is a by-product of a large structural shift that is altering historical patterns of education, employment, and income — a shift, as many say, from brawn to brains.

In Figure 3, MyWays<sup>xiii</sup> illustrates the different outcomes for students, including those who are work/learn ready when they finish school in the USA (remember the canary in the coal mine).

**Figure 3: The importance of work readiness**

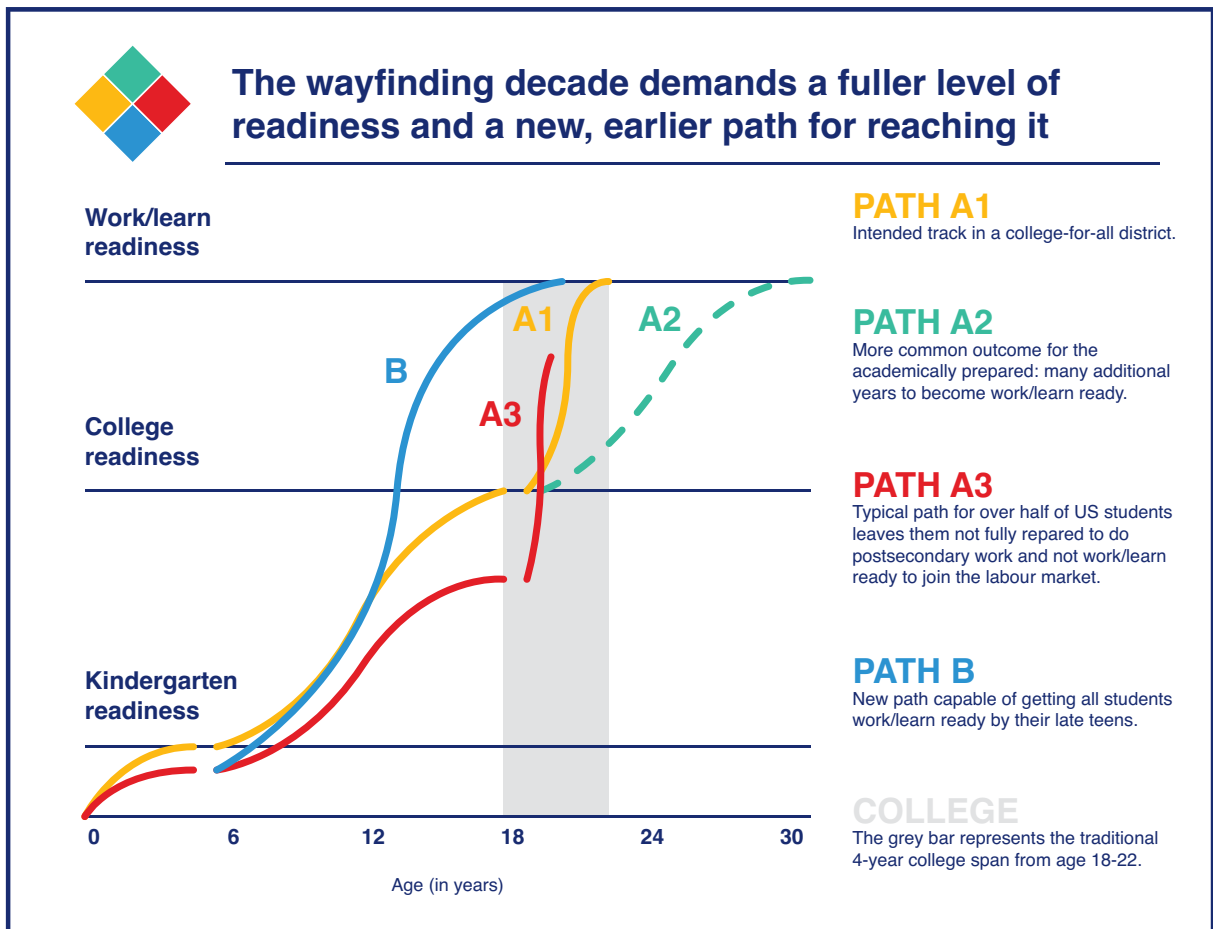


Figure 3 illustrates three possible pathways for students. The ‘A’ track represents the current approach, with school graduates expecting to be work ready by the time they turn 18 (the A1 track), but they commonly find it takes many additional years for this to be achieved (A2). Apparently over half US school graduates leave school without the academic or work readiness skills they will need, and never achieve work readiness (A3). Path B is recommended as an alternative approach that promotes work/learn readiness by the late teens. This path commences in the lower primary years (don’t worry – it is not suggesting young children are sent out to work, but are provided with career readiness learning, including exploring jobs). This approach runs counter to the traditional ‘either/or’ approach; either a young person is continuing to tertiary study, or they will join the workforce. We should prepare them for both by the time they finish school.

The US focused MyWays report went on to state...

As a nation, we need to migrate, quickly, to a new track — something like the B track in the diagram — that can get all students work/learn ready by their late teens. A shift to broader, deeper competencies like those

in the MyWays Student Success Framework is part of the solution, but we also need to better understand work/learn readiness today (as opposed to what it looked like 10, 20, or 30 years ago), reduce adolescent isolation, and provide more authentic, real-world experiences. To help educators with this understanding, the MyWays team developed what we call the 5-5-5 Realities.<sup>xiv</sup>

The 5-5-5 realities identified in the MyWays reports are illustrated in Figure 4, which identifies 5 roadblocks to bootstrapping a career, 5 decisions young people need to make when navigating the transition to work, and 5 essentials for building social capital. They indicated the areas where educators should focus to enhance each graduate’s work readiness.

These views were shared by The National Youth Commission Australia’s 2020 Inquiry into Youth Employment and Transitions that stated:

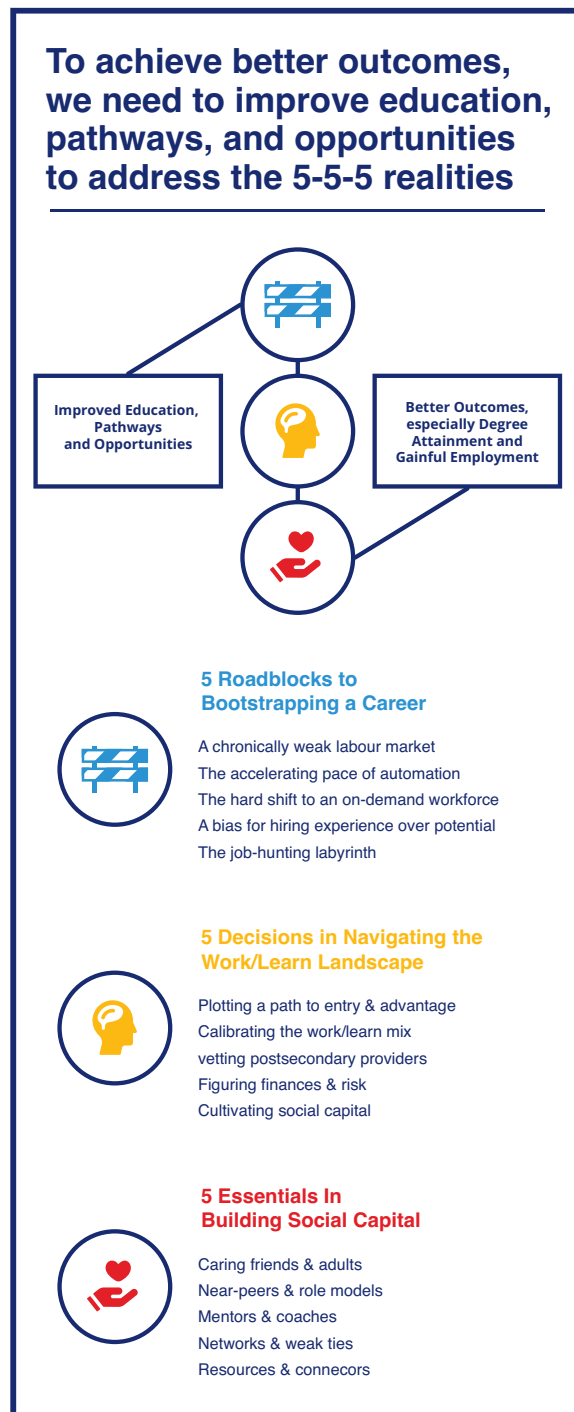
Beyond the basic needs for love and social connection, family, and friends, the Inquiry found that young people need:

- Education and training that is meaningful to them and prepares them for life in the 21st century
- Informed choices about employment opportunities that come from exposure to the world of work and better understanding of the future of work (and)
- Work experience to get a start in working life<sup>xvi</sup>

In the same year, the Report into Senior Secondary Schooling in Australia recommended:

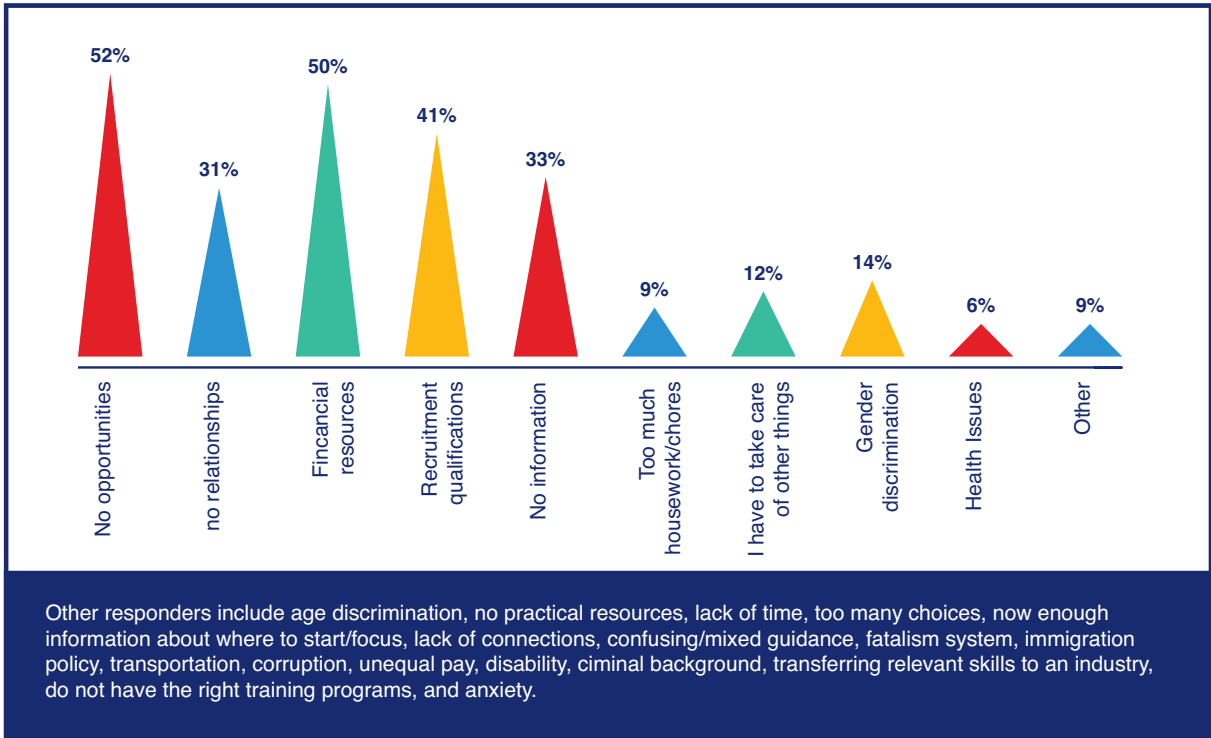
All students – including those seeking university entry – should be supported to undertake career education and work exploration at school, through workplace learning, work skills courses, and/or undertaking applied subjects such as design and technology. And...

**Figure 4: The 5-5-5 Realities in the MyWays Reports<sup>xv</sup>**





**Figure 5: Youth report barriers and challenges to getting the skills needed for the job they want<sup>xix</sup>**



Education authorities need to facilitate and encourage partnerships between schools and employers at the local level in order to help students to make choices and gain experience in the diverse career pathways that different industries can offer.

in the USA. The most frequently identified barrier (No opportunities) and the 3rd item on their list (Recruitment qualifications) may be a function of the roadblocks to bootstrapping a career explained earlier, while ‘No relationships’ highlights the need to help them build social capital.

In Discussion Brief 1, we contrasted the experience of previous generations with that of today’s school and university graduates. The social contract by which young people jumped through academic hoops and were rewarded with secure employment and a predictable career path no longer applies.

The school’s role in equipping students with a range of cognitive and human competencies/skills, as presented in the MyWays reports, is illustrated in Figure 6.<sup>xx</sup>

Several employer/business groups have identified a similar set of challenges. Figure 5, for example, was extracted from the 2018 report by Deloitte and the Global Business Coalition for Education.

Many of the barriers identified by Deloitte and the Global Business Coalition for Education, which surveyed students in several poorer countries as well as the USA and UK, were like those identified in the MyWays reports that were based on surveys

**Figure 6: MyWays Competencies**

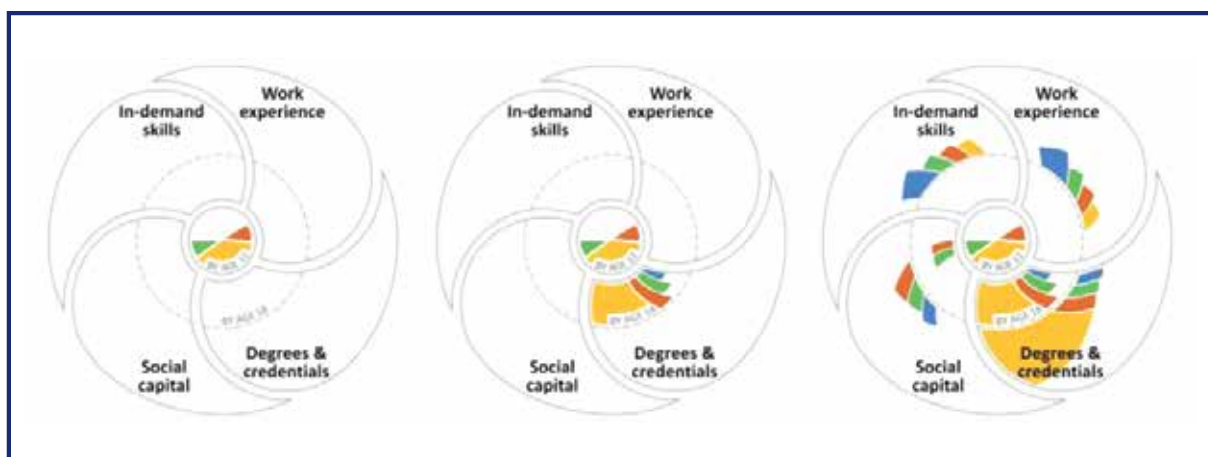


Figure 6 identifies the MyWays competencies incorporating many of the transferable skills discussed earlier in the previous brief. In addition to core subjects, the list includes Interdisciplinary and Global Knowledge, and Career Related Technical Skills. The inclusion of a Positive Mindset, Learning Strategies, Social Skills and Responsibilities, Self-Direction and Perseverance (related to resilience), Critical Thinking and Problem Solving, Communication and Collaboration, and Information, Media and Technology Skills parallel the list of skills already presented.

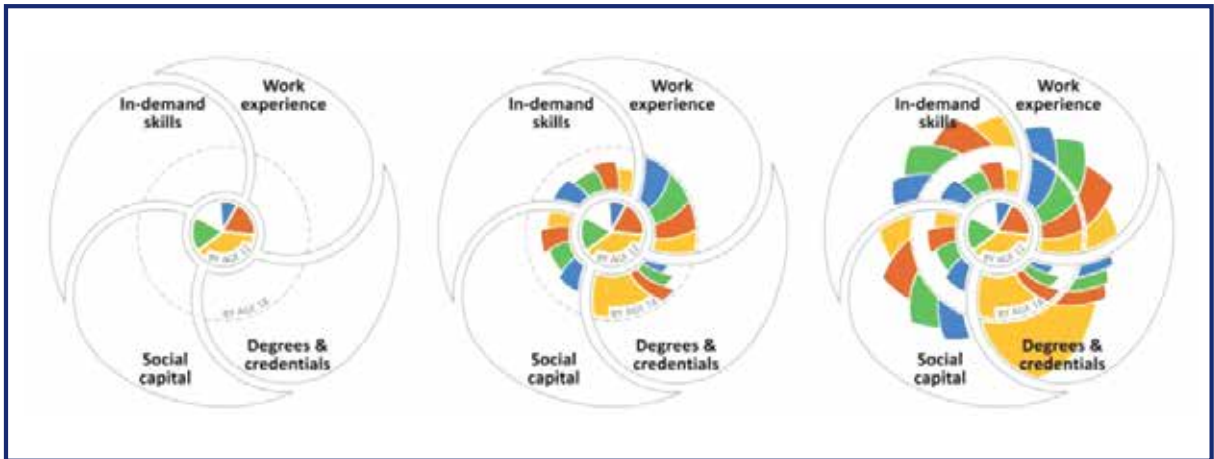
MyWays argued that the ideal learning profile for high school graduates should look like the Opportunity Engine in Figure 7.<sup>xxi</sup> It illustrates the four components of a graduate’s ‘kit bag’ when they leave school and tertiary study for work-based learning: In-demand skills, social capital, degrees and credentials, and work experience.

Figure 7 compares a traditional student with an ‘Opportunity student’ at ages 12 and 18. The Opportunity student obtains the same degrees or credentials, but they also develop in-demand skills, social capital, and work experience from an earlier age. Their success requires productive habits, Creative Know How, and Wayfinding Abilities (navigating the job labyrinth), as well as Content Knowledge that has been the focus of traditional schools. The Opportunity student is much better equipped for success in the world of work.

**Figure 7 (Pt. 1): The Opportunity Engine (Example of a “traditional” student)**



**Figure 7 (Pt. 2): The Opportunity Engine (Example of an “opportunity” student)**



**Figure 8: Positioning high school graduates for success**

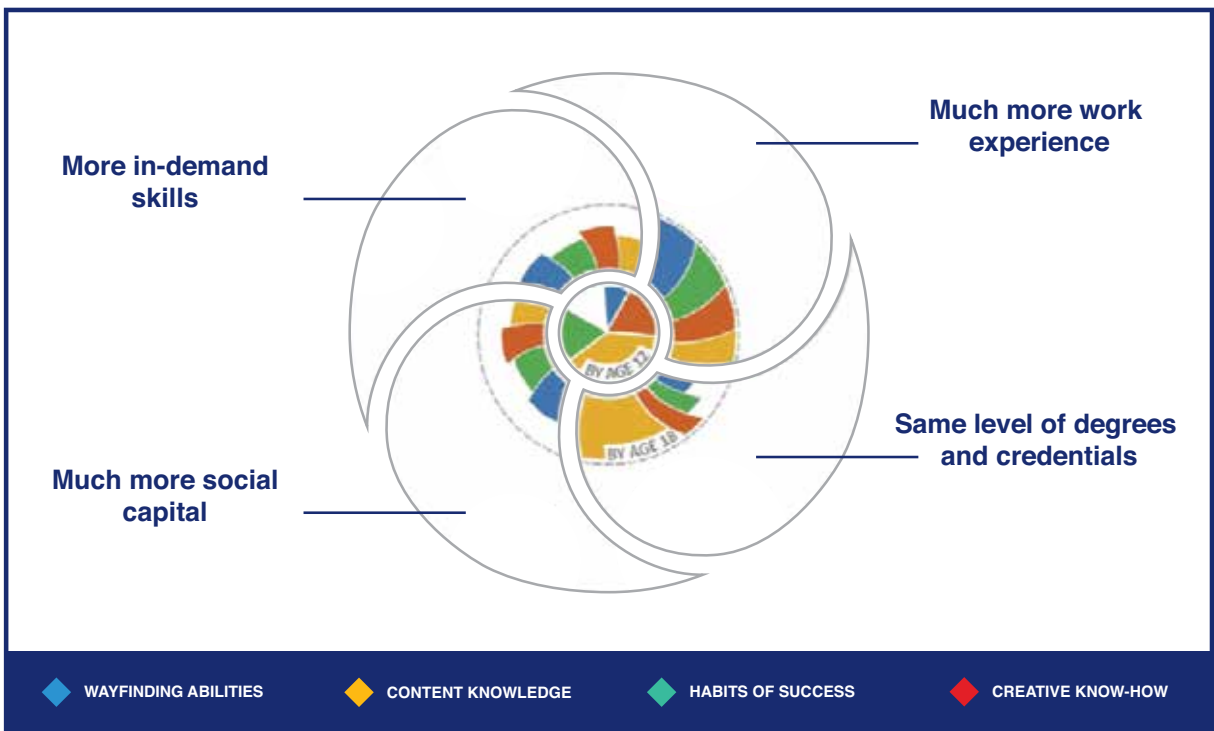


Figure 8<sup>xxii</sup> illustrates the four parts on MyWays Opportunity Engine – in-demand skills, work experience, social capital and degrees and credentials. We must stop thinking of students either entering the workforce or continuing to study beyond school. To be successful, young people will need to embrace both, equipped with an expanding toolkit of in-demand skills, access to a functional social network, and work experience to provide traction in the world of work.

If we accept the need to graduate students who are work/learn ready, we should incorporate opportunities for them to obtain authentic work experience while still at school. This approach was also supported by the OECD as a way of reducing the number of youths who are Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET):

High-quality orientation programmes (including internships and job shadowing) informing school-aged children about further education and the labour market can reduce NEET rates. Creating stronger connections between schools and the labour market could be especially important in the wake of the pandemic, not only to reduce the number of school leavers who will become NEET, but also to ensure that youngsters understand changing workplace requirements.<sup>xxiii</sup>

The Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth was conducted over 25 years. With respect to school to work transition, it reported:

[School] programs with workplace learning components yielded higher rates of full-time employment, being in a job that the participant would like as a career, and higher income ... in the first year out from school.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Most traditional schools provide some guidance in navigating the job-hunting labyrinth, but I suspect very few school-based careers advisers have any recent industry experience or the networks to provide students with important insights (a view supported by Gonski's 2018 review into Australian schooling.). Navigating the first three roadblocks identified in the MyWays reports requires students to be proficient in many of the transferable skills described earlier, and to get a work history as early as possible. As I stated previously, many traditional schools pay little or no attention to these issues, mainly because they have an inflexible organisational architecture.

Schools can assist bootstrapping by encouraging (not merely allowing) students to experience meaningful engagement with work while at school as well as giving high-quality careers advice. School communities can help students build social capital by providing coaching in a range of skills (more than accessing the Old Scholar network) but developing such skills cannot be left for the week between final assessment and graduation. We should ensure each student has meaningful work experiences that go well beyond the usual one or two weeks 'taste test' offered by many schools. The range of experiences should include part-time work, school-based apprenticeships, traineeships, internships, and tertiary 'study for a semester' programs, as well as micro credentialing in work related skills through their expanded learning network. A credible and safe mentoring program, where students learn many of the work skills identified by the Business Council of Australia 'on the job' will be an essential ingredient.<sup>(2)</sup>

Unfortunately, the current schooling model, tied as it is to timetables and teacher availability, actively discourages students from engaging in all but a few hours of part-time work after school. Most schools have a relatively small percentage of senior students in school-based apprenticeships and traineeships (which involve vocational training that often occurs off campus at TAFE) as well as students occasionally taking university courses, but the program at school continues while these students are absent, leaving them to catch-up when they return.<sup>(3)</sup> The inflexible nature of traditional schooling discourages students from gaining the work and/or tertiary experience they need.

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2 The Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth reported in 2020 that 'Occupational uncertainty at age 15 increased the likelihood of occupational uncertainty at age 22 by 45%.'

3 Students on vocational programs are often seen as taking a non-academic pathway, so they only need to catch-up enough to pass. This attitude needs to change.

We will finish this brief with a reference to some of the latest observations about how COVID-19 changed the nature of work, in many cases permanently. George Westerman wrote an article for MIT Sloan Management Review in late October 2021.<sup>xxv</sup> He argued there will be more remote work, less direct supervision and more autonomy, more focus on productivity (outputs) as opposed to inputs (like time on task), all of which require a relationship based on trust and accountability.

To benefit from this increased flexibility, school graduates must be equipped with the skills to work remotely, including skills in digital communication and collaboration, problem solving, project delivery, and self-regulation. This is another endorsement for transferable skills, but it also poses the question; if we are going to prepare graduates for such an environment, why not have them operate in such an environment in their final years at school?



### Extension Activity

Here's a link to a 16-minute TED Talk that summarises many of the issues we have discussed.



### Extension Activity

For people keen to read a report, here's a link to FYA's New Work Smarts report. It analysed over 20 billion hours of work completed by 12 million Australian workers each year to predict the skills and capabilities that will matter most in 2030.

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