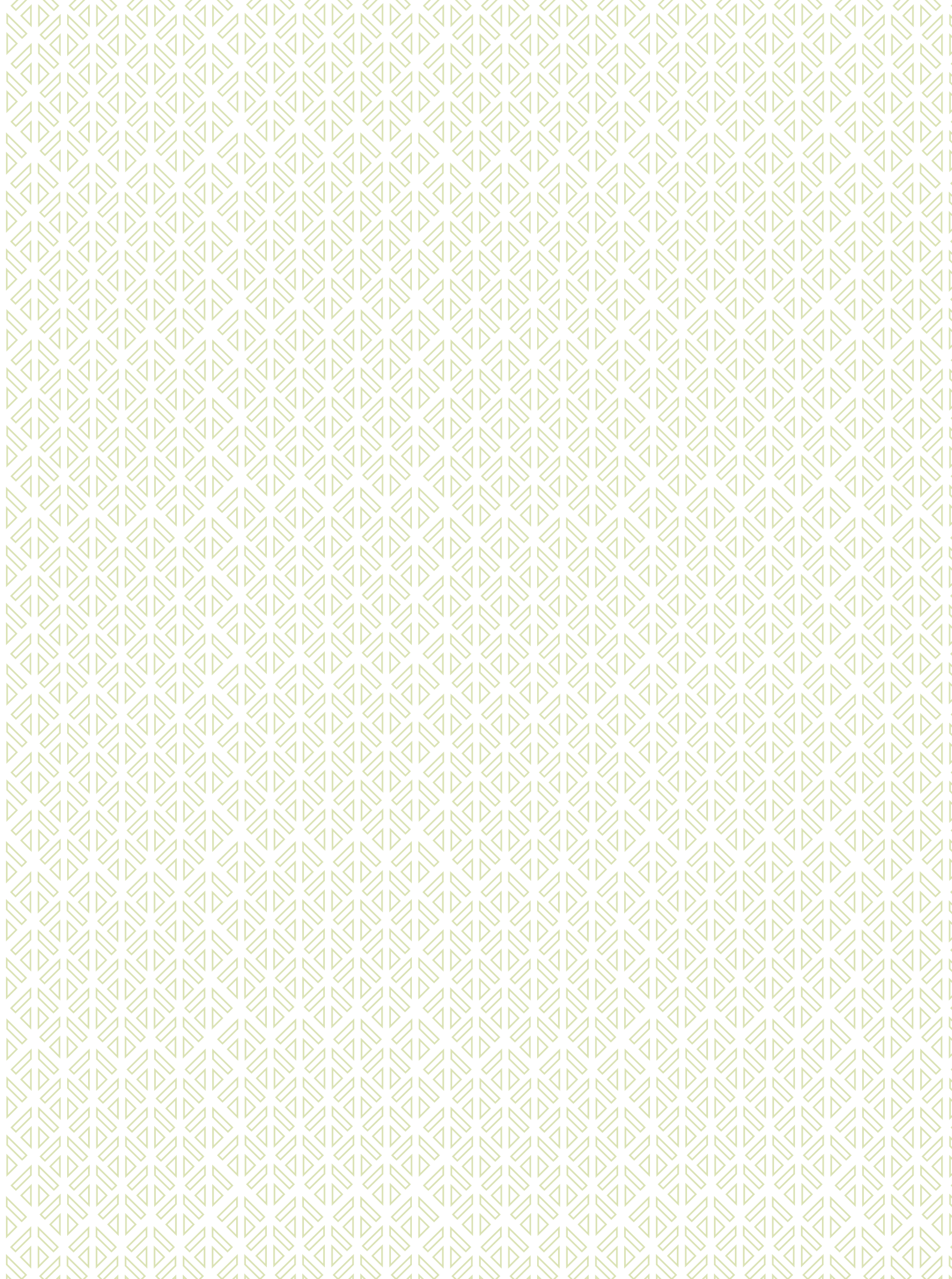




Mobilising WA's Future:

Young people in VET





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**AS THE FUTURE OF WA,
YOUNG PEOPLE SHOULD
BE AT THE FRONT AND
CENTRE OF SKILLS
DEVELOPMENT POLICY.**



Chair's message

On behalf of the State Training Board of WA (the Board), I am pleased to present the Board's report *Mobilising WA's Future: Young people in VET*. As the future of WA, young people should be at the front and centre of skills development policy.

As someone who started their career journey as a mechanical apprentice, I have a firsthand understanding of the unique role the vocational education and training (VET) system plays in preparing young people for the world of work. My apprenticeship was the critical first step in a career path that led me from the workshop floor and into the boardroom.

Despite VET's formidable impact on people's careers and industries' successes, it is still seen as a second rate option among some young people, their parents and schools. This needs to change.

By tackling this challenge head on, this report explores ways to boost the stature of the sector among young people and their communities, enhance opportunities for engagement in career development activities that place equal emphasis on the wide range of post-school options, and drive a high quality VET experience.

This report is the culmination of extensive consultation with young people across a range of industries. To identify the issues important to them, we spoke directly with young people to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences of the VET system.

Mobilising WA's Future: Young people in VET builds on themes identified in the Board's *State Training Plan 2022-23*. The plan outlines the Board's priorities for the VET sector, and

includes a focus on young people as future drivers of the State's economic prosperity. Specifically, Priority 3 of the plan encourages government to prioritise funding that supports young people to bridge the gap between education and employment.

Young people are often hit the hardest by economic shocks and subsequent labour market downturns. The COVID-19 pandemic was no exception. At the start of the pandemic, the hours worked by young people across Australia plunged by 24.9% compared to 13.6% for the rest of the workforce¹. While the hours worked by young people have now recovered, this has not been to the same extent as other age groups.

State and Federal Governments have worked to ease this burden through the introduction of significantly reduced course fees for apprenticeships and traineeships, employer subsidies, and skill sets to increase the agility and responsiveness of VET to industry and worker needs. However, issues still remain. This report looks at systemic challenges to youth engagement in VET, based on the issues identified by young people.

On behalf of the Board, I thank all the young people who participated in our roundtable discussions, their training providers and employers, as well as Industry Training Councils for their input and support throughout this project. I am confident that *Mobilising WA's Future: Young people in VET* will provide the State Government with practical guidance on policy and program development to enhance young people's experience and engagement in VET.



Mr Jim Walker
Chair, State Training Board



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Moving from school into the world of work is a pivotal moment in a young person's life. For most people, the first step on this journey is identifying what types of jobs they may want and how to get there.

Executive summary

Practically, young people have three options once they complete their compulsory schooling – undertake university studies, engage in VET or enter employment. It is clear that undertaking a post-school education of any kind enhances their prospects.

There is strong demand for skills gained through a VET pathway in WA. In 2021, the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) found that 57% of WA employers used the VET system to meet their training needs². In addition, 40% of WA employers had jobs that required vocational qualifications and more than a quarter employed apprentices and trainees³.

Despite employers placing a high value on VET pathways, and young people's experience within the sector being overwhelmingly positive, the VET system is still perceived by many as a second rate post-school pathway.

To ensure WA businesses are able to access a strong and suitably skilled pipeline of workers it is essential that young people see VET as an attractive and viable option. Without this, the WA community, and the economy, misses out.

The State Training Board, as the State Government's chief industry advisor to the Minister for Training; Water; Youth on the skills and workforce needs of WA industry, is uniquely positioned to investigate this challenge.

Young people make up almost 50% of participants in WA's VET sector⁴, however young people's voices often play second fiddle to other stakeholders when it comes to matters of VET sector reform.

This report bucks the trend by putting the voices of young people where they should be: front and centre in the conversation.

To understand the root causes of the challenge, the Board conducted a series of facilitated roundtable discussions with 78 young people aged 18–24 who were undertaking, or had recently completed, a VET qualification.

Over the course of seven roundtable discussions, the Board sought to gain a deep understanding of young people's views and experiences of the VET sector and explore

opportunities to better engage young people in VET. It is noted that these discussions focused on training in the Perth metropolitan area and did not explicitly consider the experiences of regional or diverse cohorts.

While this report draws from the experiences of metropolitan youth, the Board anticipates that findings will apply broadly to the perceptions and status of VET across the State. The Board nonetheless recognises the specific needs of diverse cohorts and regional areas in WA and encourages consideration of these in the development and implementation of actions that may stem from this report.

Three distinct themes emerged from these discussions which relate to:

1. Engagement and exposure to VET;
2. Changing the perception of VET; and
3. VET delivery and support.

Ten key findings have been identified within these themes, along with 10 recommendations to improve young people's engagement in the VET sector.

This report unpacks each of these themes, drawing on the insights of the roundtable participants to identify priority areas for government focus.

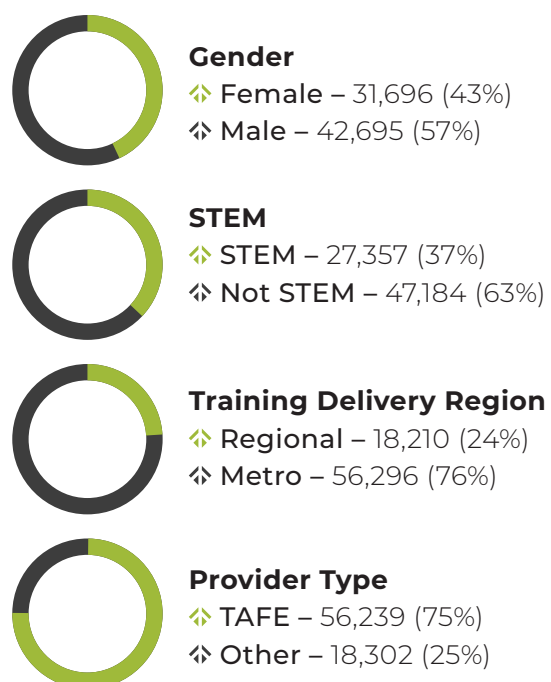


Figure 1: 2021 VET enrolment characteristics for young people aged 15–24 years in WA⁵

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Engagement and exposure to VET

Findings

1.1. To enable young people to make informed decisions about their post-school study and career options, they need to be actively engaged in career education through impartial, tailored advice and direct exposure to VET.

1.2. Parents and career practitioners have a fundamental influence on young people's decision-making about their future education, training and employment. It is important that these cohorts are the focus of targeted programs to ensure they are well-informed on what VET is, how to navigate the VET system, and on the training pathways and career opportunities that VET provides.

Recommendations

1.1. Build on the wide range of local programs already in place to establish a clear career development policy framework that ensures all schools prioritise career education and development within their school curriculum.

1.2. Investigate opportunities to increase young people's exposure to and awareness of VET throughout their time at high school, starting from Year 7. This should include career development support tailored to students' individual needs.

1.3. Ensure that career development programs and advice also focus on raising awareness of VET and VET pathways among parents.

1.4. Facilitate opportunities for training providers and employers to build relationships with schools and better engage with young people and their career practitioners to improve exposure to VET pathways and career options.

2. Changing the perception of VET

Findings

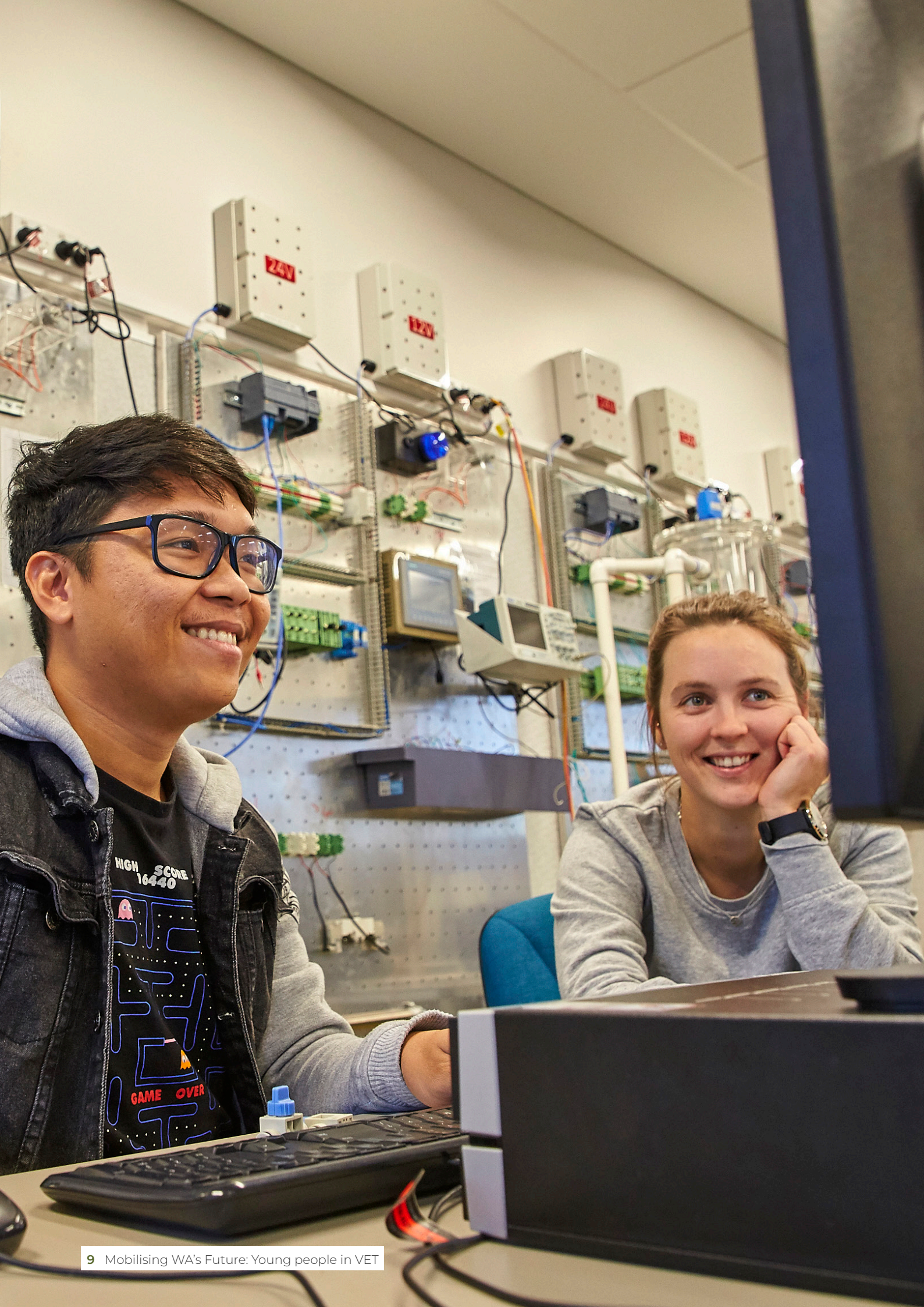
2.1. VET is frequently seen as an inferior learning pathway, particularly among parents and teachers, and this is one of the major barriers to young people choosing a VET qualification.

2.2. Parents have the greatest influence on their child's education and career choices. Their lack of understanding of the VET sector and poor perception of VET impact the expectations they hold for their children's post-school study and career options.

2.3. Young people rely on social media for news and information. An effective and highly targeted social media presence is vital to improve awareness of VET opportunities in the community.

2.4. Despite recent campaigns and considerable government effort at all levels, there is still more work needed to reduce the stigma in our community associated with choosing VET over university.





FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS (CONTINUED)



Recommendations

- 2.1. The education sector should support and enable schools to prioritise a pathway-neutral approach to career advice that is aimed at opening doors to the world of work. This will ensure young people are exposed to all post-school study options that will help them get to where they want to go, not just university.
- 2.2. Government and industry work collaboratively to identify and promote the VET sector and VET champions from a wide range of industry sectors to highlight where VET can take you, including pathways to further study at university.

3. VET delivery and support




Findings

- 3.1. The quality of training delivery, as well as support to navigate the complexities of the VET system, have a major impact on young people's VET experience.
- 3.2. Young people need greater support to help them secure the work placements that are required as part of their training.
- 3.3. Lecturer currency, access to sufficient resources and tools, and training in the most up-to-date technologies were key factors in ensuring a positive VET experience for young people.
- 3.4. Many young people do not feel that their achievements in VET are adequately recognised by their schools, training providers and communities.



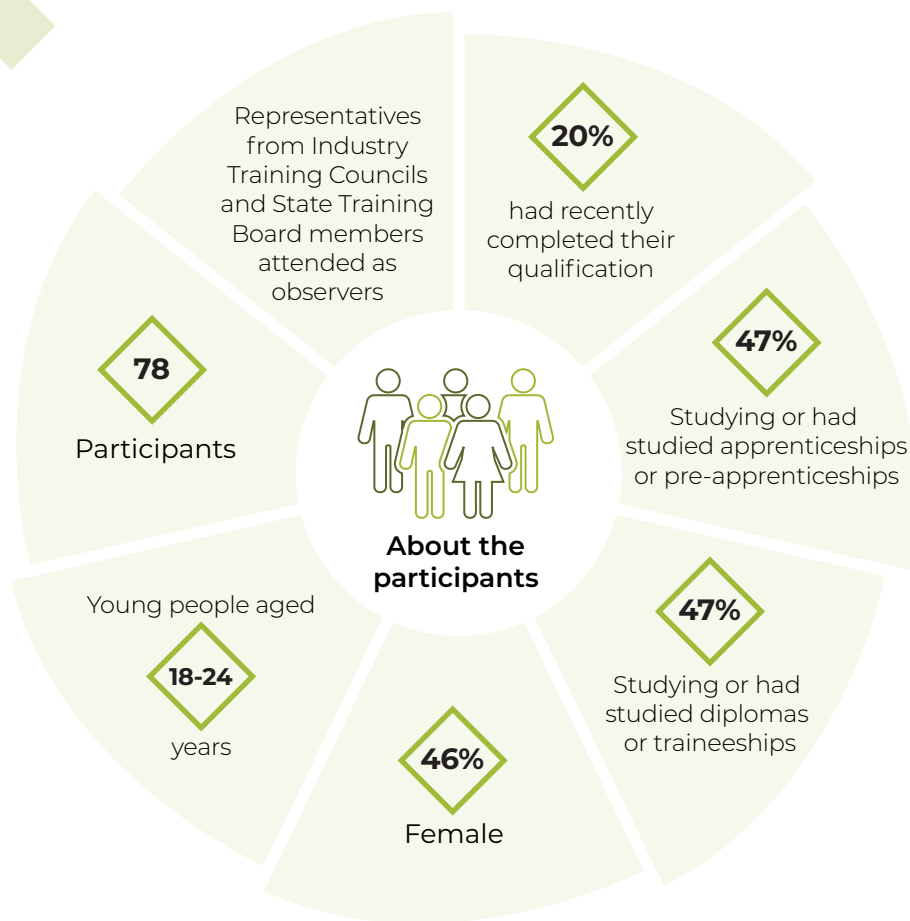
Recommendations

- 3.1. Investigate opportunities to improve assistance for young people to cut through the complexity of the VET system with clear, accessible information on training and career pathways within industry.
- 3.2. Investigate opportunities to increase the participation of students and employers in work-based learning programs (such as pre-apprenticeships) and improving support to secure work placements.
- 3.3. Investigate and deploy measures to enhance consistency of training and better incentivise training quality across all providers, including ways to recognise high quality lecturers.
- 3.4. Develop systems and incentives that better recognise high achieving VET students both at school and within the VET system itself.



INDUSTRY ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS






The Board's series of industry roundtable discussions provided a forum for 78 young people to share their opinions and experiences of the VET sector.



7 Industry specific discussions

-  Social Assistance and Allied Health
-  Tourism and Hospitality
-  Mining and Resources
-  Construction
-  Automotive and Manufacturing
-  Defence
-  Other industries

5 Focus questions were used to guide the discussions

-  What issues helped or hindered your entry in VET?
-  How might we encourage more young people to participate in VET?
-  To what extent has the reality of VET exceeded your expectations?
-  To what extent has the reality of VET not met your expectations?
-  What could be done to increase the retention of students and increase the quality of the VET experience?

1. Engagement and exposure to VET



“Kids at school were pushed into doing ATAR without any information about the opportunities in VET.”

– Roundtable participant

Engaging young people through access to quality information and direct exposure to different training and career pathways will help them to truly understand and evaluate their post-school options.

Exposure is critical

Through its consultations, the Board identified that a lack of exposure to VET had a major impact on young people engaging with the sector. A number of participants described having little exposure to VET during their time at high school or immediately after. They spoke about attending university open days, school visits by university representatives and on-campus experiences. These participants commented that a similar level of engagement with VET would have helped them to make more informed decisions about their post-school study and career pathways.

Having an opportunity to hear directly from industry professionals, training providers, apprentices and current VET students about their experiences would provide meaningful exposure to the sector. Similarly, opportunities to get involved by trying a skill or experiencing a workplace first hand are invaluable.

Many fantastic opportunities already exist for young people to gain exposure to VET, including:

- » VET Delivered to Secondary Students (VETDSS) programs, including pre-apprenticeships and pre-traineeships;
- » ‘Try-A-Trade’ programs;
- » school facilitated work experience;
- » Year 9 Career Taster Program;
- » the SkillsWest Careers and Employment Expo;
- » interactive industry exhibits such as the Construction Futures Centre; and
- » Job Ready programs and entry level skill sets.

Our discussions showed that when young people were exposed to these opportunities and experiences they were pivotal in shaping their post-school decisions.



Unfortunately, too many of the young people we spoke to said they had not received these opportunities. Their experiences revealed that information and exposure to VET frequently depended on whether their parents or school career practitioners thought VET was a suitable pathway. Students felt this restricted their opportunity to determine their own futures as they did not have the information they needed to make truly informed decisions about their study and career options.

Prioritising career education in schools

For the young people we spoke to, it was clear that good quality career education at high school was a major contributor to positive outcomes for students wanting to pursue a VET pathway.

It is critical that young people have access to well informed vocational guidance and careers practitioners who provide impartial, tailored advice on both university and VET pathways. Our discussions found that the gap between the best and worst school experience, in relation to this support, was

significant. This gap existed across both public and private schools. Many WA schools have well-established, comprehensive career guidance programs. However, with the ever expanding list of priorities that schools must cater to, it is not guaranteed every school will prioritise career development.

It is vital that all WA schools deliver robust career guidance programs to ensure they are providing students with access to information on a full range of career options, including VET. For this reason, the Board recommends that career education should be embedded into the school system, through a robust policy framework to ensure consistency across schools so that no students are disadvantaged. This must be complemented by practical, locally relevant support measures.

Within this framework, it is important that schools are empowered and resourced to develop programs that meet their local needs. Many schools already achieve this, and these efforts have been further supported by the State Government's election commitment

to fund 70 dedicated career practitioners in WA schools. Importantly, this program is focused on embedding these practitioners as the resident career experts within the school. These career practitioners will also be given the space to engage closely with local industry to understand workforce needs and the needs of students within their school.

A well-educated population is the foundation for the sustained success of our community. High school education provides our young people with the tools they need to be successful, productive and engaged members of society.

Young people cannot make effective choices in this regard if they do not understand the foundations of the world of work and the range of career options available to them, including VET pathways. Embedding career

education into the WA secondary education curriculum would ensure all young people are well equipped to make these decisions.

You don't know what you don't know

There is inherent complexity in the VET sector, with its multiple delivery options and the need in many cases to coordinate employers, training providers and, in some instances, schools. Navigating this complexity can be a daunting prospect and is a key barrier to young people's meaningful engagement with VET.

Roundtable participants first encountered these complexities when considering their future options at high school and turned to their career practitioners for advice. They emphasised the importance of practitioners having the knowledge and resources to ensure they are confident in providing



Engaging students early is key

It is important to create opportunities for students to gain exposure to VET from an early age.

In 2022, the Western Australian Government launched a new and innovative \$22 million Year 9 Career Taster Program (CTP) in high schools across the State. The CTP aims to support Year 9 students to start their career exploration journey. Once fully rolled out, the four year program will provide practical industry experience and early access to the world of work to around half of all Year 9 students in WA.

The Board supports this exciting initiative, which will lay the foundations for career exploration for young people. Its goals align with the findings of our youth roundtable discussions; indeed many of our participants would have greatly benefited from such a program.

Through the CTP, schools can develop both university and VET pathway experiences tailored to their students' requirements using a combination of curriculum and interactive industry-based 'taster' activities. An online Career Taster Portal (the Portal) provides a platform to connect schools with industry-based taster experiences. The Portal also contains a range of resources, including the *Course in Early Career Discovery* and support materials for employers and parents.

The program is assisting industry and employers to forge stronger links with schools to expose students to the world of work from an early age.

The Board would like to see this valuable program incorporated as a permanent fixture in career education across WA schools.



Making the most of existing services

The VET system can be complex and difficult to navigate. For those who are unsure where to start, career planning advice is available through the State Government's Jobs and Skills Centres. The centres are a valuable resource, providing expert advice on industry areas and occupations, job searching and job matching, training and study options, and how to choose the right course to suit personal, work or career goals. Their services are free, and accessible to all members of the community.

Jobs and Skills Centres also offer tailored career workshops for students from Years 9 to 12 to provide them with information on their study options whilst still at school, training choices in VET or university, and how to navigate starting a career journey.

Feedback from our roundtable discussions suggests that young people may not be aware of the services offered by the centres and have not encountered them through their schools. This presents an opportunity for schools and Jobs and Skills Centres to strengthen their engagement and expand the reach of their existing career development programs, support and resources. This will have a significant positive impact on young people's career exploration experiences.

accurate and meaningful VET pathway advice to their students. While educators have a first-hand understanding of the university system, many may not have personally experienced the VET system. Knowledge and understanding can be improved by schools, Jobs and Skills Centres, training providers and local employers working collaboratively to inform students of their VET options.

Some participants had commenced a university qualification prior to undertaking VET but found this was not the right fit for them. They described leaving university with a significant HELP debt¹ and no job before changing direction and commencing an apprenticeship or traineeship. They expressed frustration they had not had a better understanding of the VET system earlier, in particular the vast array of career options available, the lower cost of training and the benefits of on-the-job learning.

To prevent experiences like this, it is important that school students (and their parents) begin learning about VET options and career pathways from the start of their time at high school, well before they are required to make decisions on Year 11 and 12

learning pathways. This will enable students to make more informed decisions about their subject selections in senior years.

The Board is excited by a number of recent State Government initiatives to improve engagement with VET among school students. These include:

- » expansion of the VETDSS program with funding for an additional 4,000 annual training places from 2024 for school students targeting industry relevant training, pre-apprenticeship and STEM courses;
- » the launch of the Year 9 Career Taster Program in 2022 to provide students with access to more than 100 industry-led experiences to introduce them to VET career opportunities; and
- » the establishment of 70 dedicated career practitioner positions across public high schools to provide a central point of knowledge for all things career development within their school communities.

Greater exposure to the many and varied VET pathways will help students to make educated choices about their post-school study options.

¹A range of HELP loans are available to eligible university students to assist with paying course and amenities fees. Students start repaying their HELP debt through the Australian tax system once they earn above the compulsory repayment threshold, which is \$47,014 in 2021-22. **Source:** studyassist.gov.au

ENGAGEMENT AND EXPOSURE TO VET

FINDINGS

- 1.1. To enable young people to make informed decisions about their post-school study and career options, they need to be actively engaged in career education through impartial, tailored advice and direct exposure to VET.
- 1.2. Parents and career practitioners have a fundamental influence on young people's decision-making about their future education, training and employment. It is important that these cohorts are the focus of targeted programs to ensure they are well-informed on what VET is, how to navigate the VET system, and on the training pathways and career opportunities that VET provides.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1. Build on the wide range of local programs already in place to establish a clear career development policy framework that ensures all schools prioritise career education and development within their school curriculum.
- 1.2. Investigate opportunities to increase young people's exposure to and awareness of VET throughout their time at high school, starting from Year 7. This should include career development support tailored to students' individual needs.
- 1.3. Ensure that career development programs and advice also focus on raising awareness of VET and VET pathways among parents.
- 1.4. Facilitate opportunities for training providers and employers to build relationships with schools and better engage with young people and their career practitioners to improve exposure to VET pathways and career options.

2. Changing the perception of VET



“Often young people are stigmatised for doing VET because it is less traditionally academic. But the opportunities and practical experiences are one of a kind.”

– Roundtable participant

Vocational education and training is a fundamental component of Australia’s tertiary education system and is critical to the prosperity of the Western Australian community. Despite this, the benefits of a VET qualification are often undervalued within the community.

A 2017 study by the Skilling Australia Foundation identified three key misconceptions around VET:

- ✘ VET graduates have a lower earnings potential compared to university graduates;
- ✘ VET graduates have fewer employment opportunities; and
- ✘ Australia’s changing workforce needs mean VET skills are no longer relevant⁶.

These perceptions of VET persist, despite significant work by State and Commonwealth governments to raise community awareness of VET as a positive and equal pathway leading to a vast array of well-paying, in-demand careers. The Board’s roundtable discussions showed that campaigns aimed at turning around these misconceptions are not getting through to the community as much as is needed.

Breaking the stigma

Throughout our conversations, young people repeatedly identified poor public perception as a major barrier to choosing VET. The stigma surrounding their choice to undertake a VET qualification left many participants feeling inferior to their peers who chose a university pathway.

Studies show that parents and other family members have the greatest influence on young people’s career choices⁷. While students often turn to educators for information on study and career options, it is parents who have the greatest influence



on their final choices. Where parents have little or a misconceived understanding of the VET system, they are unlikely to support their children choosing a VET pathway. This is consistent with the experiences of the young people we spoke to.

When considering their post-school options, some roundtable participants found that their parents and schools viewed VET as a second rate option, taken by academically 'low performers'. Some participants reported that they were not advised of their VET pathway options and were counselled away from pursuing a VET pathway because they were academically high achievers.

Combating this stigma requires a cultural shift in how VET is perceived by the community, including parents and teachers. Promotional activities need to challenge the prevailing narrative and break down the negative stigma attached to VET by showcasing its strong educational and career outcomes using a variety of platforms.

Understanding VET outcomes

There is a community perception that to get a well-paying job you need to go to university. However, this is not necessarily the case. Depending on the student and their chosen industry, young people may realise better career outcomes through a VET pathway.

NCVER's *VET student outcomes 2021* report found that the median annual income for students who completed a Certificate IV level qualification and were employed full-time after training was \$70,000. VET pathways in resources and infrastructure had the highest median graduate income at \$78,000, followed by business services pathways at \$66,800.⁸

By comparison, in 2021 the median annual income for university undergraduates employed full-time was \$65,000⁹. However, there is a significantly broader variation in salary depending on study areas.

Many participants said that they had a poor understanding of the benefits offered by VET



Tertiary Education in Australia

Vocational Education and Training (VET)

- » Designed to prepare students for work by equipping them with practical skills and knowledge that is aligned with the specific needs of industry and business.
- » Skill Sets and qualifications at Certificates I, II, III, IV, Diploma and Advanced Diploma levels.
- » Include apprenticeships and traineeships.
- » Courses usually range from six months to four years in duration.
- » Competency based assessment.

University (higher education)

- » Designed to prepare graduates for professional careers through a focus on theory-based learning.
- » Qualifications at Advanced Diploma, Undergraduate and Postgraduate levels.
- » Includes bachelor and master degrees.
- » Courses generally range from three to five years.
- » Graded assessment.

until they had experienced the VET system first hand. These benefits included:

- » the ability to both work, and build skills and experience in your chosen career whilst training;
- » generally lower costs compared to a university qualification; and
- » earnings and career prospects that are comparable or better than university pathways for many graduates.

To ensure that young people, their parents and teachers are able to fully appreciate these benefits schools must ensure that there is adequate time, attention and resources devoted to support career exploration activities.

School pathways are not a zero sum game

A major challenge facing the perception of VET is that VET and Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) pathways² are often presented as binary options. This presentation is unhelpful as this can imply to students that choosing a particular pathway will define their future opportunities. This is simply not the case.

A young person choosing a VET or ATAR pathway at school does not commit them to

that pathway for the rest of their life. The reality is that very few young people know exactly what career path and corresponding study they might like to take after leaving school.

In addition, some students claimed they were prevented from pursuing both due to a range of practical issues such as resource availability and timetabling challenges. While seeking additional resources to accommodate different subject combinations may be a challenge, schools should be supported to provide a wide range of opportunities to their students. This starts by ensuring that schools and parents of young people recognise that the world of work has fundamentally changed and prioritising support for high school pathways that supports this.

The Foundation for Young Australians predicts that young people today could have around 17 jobs over five careers across their lifetime¹⁰. Given how different young people's careers are likely to be, reinforcement of the traditional linear approach to the world of work is unhelpful.

Despite these challenges, participants found that their VET experience had tremendous benefits and led to positive employment outcomes.

²An ATAR rank is in most cases the primary requirement for university entry.

Leading by example

Harnessing these positive experiences and sharing them with young people and their communities will help to redefine VET's image.

This can be achieved through a greater focus on programs that showcase young people's VET achievements and highlight those that have used their VET qualifications to forge successful careers.

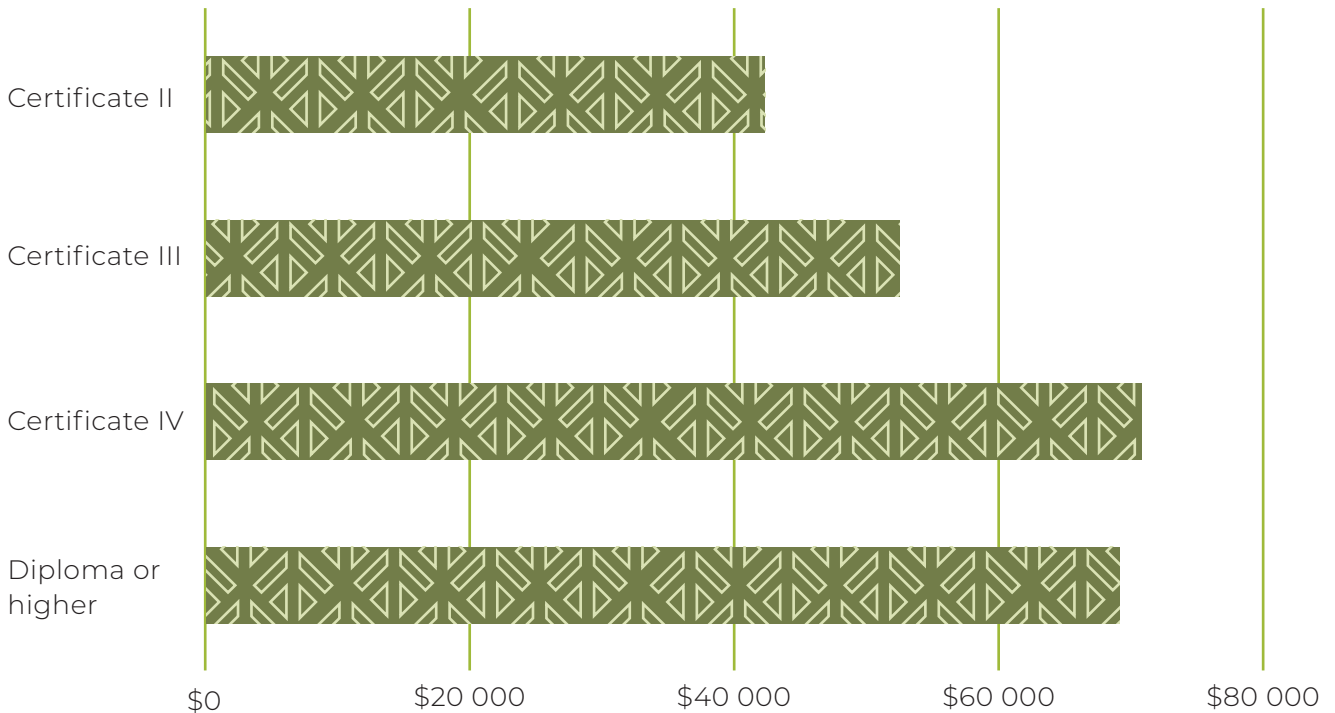
These programs need to target young people, career practitioners and most importantly parents, who have the greatest impact on young people's career choices.

A greater social media presence is another important tool to dispel myths and raise the image of VET. While this is not an uncommon issue, the fact it continues to be raised indicates that we need to do better.

The young people we spoke to commented that their social media feeds, including YouTube and Instagram were "saturated" with university advertisements, but saw very few promotional materials for the VET sector. There is a clear opportunity to deploy targeted social media campaigns to leverage some of the great work already being done, such as the Year 9 Career Taster Program.

Social media platforms provide a unique opportunity to deliver authentic content in a highly targeted manner. Used in conjunction with a strategic approach to career development and engagement in schools, effective use of social media is essential to exposing young people to the full range of opportunities available through VET and redefining its image within the community.

Figure 2: Median income after training



Source: NCVER 2021, *Australian vocational education and training statistics: VET student outcomes 2021: qualification completers' median income after training*.

CHANGING THE PERCEPTION OF VET



FINDINGS

2.1. VET is frequently seen as an inferior learning pathway, particularly among parents and teachers, and this is one of the major barriers to young people choosing a VET qualification.

2.2. Parents have the greatest influence on their child's education and career choices. Their lack of understanding of the VET sector and poor perception of VET impact the expectations they hold for their children's post-school study and career options.

2.3. Young people rely on social media for news and information. An effective and highly targeted social media presence is vital to improve awareness of VET opportunities in the community.

2.4. Despite recent campaigns and considerable government effort at all levels, there is still more work needed to reduce the stigma in our community associated with choosing VET over university.



RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. The education sector should support and enable schools to prioritise a pathway-neutral approach to career advice that is aimed at opening doors to the world of work. This will ensure young people are exposed to all post-school study options that will help them get to where they want to go, not just university.

2.2. Government and industry work collaboratively to identify and promote the VET sector and VET champions from a wide range of industry sectors to highlight where VET can take you, including pathways to further study at university.

3. VET delivery and support



“My TAFE lecturers were amazing. They worked really hard to make sure we all got the best training possible.”
– Roundtable participant

For young people who take up an apprenticeship, traineeship or an institutional VET pathway, it is important they are given every opportunity to succeed in their chosen field.

The majority of young people we spoke to described very positive VET experiences. They felt well supported by lecturers and, for those who had completed their qualification, well equipped to commence work in their industry.

This is consistent with the outcomes of the Department of Training and Workforce Development’s *Student Satisfaction Survey*. VET has consistently had a high rate of student satisfaction, with 87.3 per cent of TAFE students satisfied with their training in 2021¹¹.

Young people found that provider websites were helpful and easy to use, and appreciated the straight forward application process for VET courses. These were important factors in enabling students to take up VET.

However, our roundtable participants discussed a number of factors which had impacted their desire or ability to complete their qualification. Chief among these was the difficulty of navigating the complexities of the VET system. Participants described feeling overwhelmed when investigating training and career pathways, VET Student Loans and other student support options.

Students also described needing more assistance to find work placements as part of their course. Work placements play a critical role in helping young people bridge the gap between study and work. Research shows that undertaking a work placement will reduce the time it takes a young person to find work by five months¹². By equipping students with experience as well as job specific skills¹³, placements improve employability, and students get to explore possible career options first hand.

Considering opportunities to increase the participation of students and employers in work-based learning programs and improving



support for students to secure placements, will be essential in enhancing a young person's VET experience.

Focus on quality delivery

Participant discussions indicated a significant gap between the best and worst VET experiences. Many spoke positively about the high quality of lecturers, training delivery and industry exposure. Good lecturing staff had a profound impact on a student's personal and professional development.

At the other end of the spectrum, participants described poor quality teaching, outdated equipment and insufficient tools to cater for class sizes. This is a particular risk in the current economic climate. In 2021, more than 150,000 course enrolments were reported in WA, the highest ever recorded¹⁴. This unprecedented demand is placing significant pressure on training providers, which are facing higher costs of delivery and increased competition for qualified trainers.

This will also present challenges over the longer term. With advances in technology expected to dramatically increase the rate of change in the workplace, training providers must ensure that they are able to rapidly adapt to changing workplace practices.

The State Government has committed substantial funds in the 2022-23 State Budget to improve TAFE delivery. This includes \$216 million to upgrade TAFE facilities and equipment to deliver state-of-the-art facilities providing high-quality, industry-relevant training across the State.

VET quality is also being considered as part of the National Skills Reform agenda. These reforms aim to improve the quality of training delivery and support excellence in training provision.

These initiatives will help to address challenges experienced by students relating to the quality of training and facilities.

Young people felt strongly about the importance of ensuring only students who were truly competent received their

qualification. Consideration of ways to improve consistency in teaching quality would assist to address concerns around the variability of delivery quality experienced by our roundtable participants. This process of continuous improvement will ensure that the reputation of the sector is safeguarded, further enhancing community perception.

Recognising student achievement

Almost all industry roundtable sessions included discussion of the VET sector's competency based system. VET students are not graded but are instead assessed as competent against the skills required for their qualification.

High performing students found this pass/fail system to be demotivating and spoke

enthusiastically about the need for a system that recognises high performers for their efforts. They expressed a sense of frustration that students who barely demonstrated the required skills received the same assessment of 'competent' as students who demonstrated outstanding performance.

Moving away from this pass/fail approach would represent a seismic shift in the VET system which has been underpinned by this framework for decades. However, there are many ways to recognise students' achievements among their peers, within the school system and within the broader community. Ensuring appropriate incentives for student performance will be vital in enhancing the sector's perception with both users and industry.



Student experiences at TAFE

Each year the Department of Training and Workforce Development undertakes a Student Satisfaction Survey to measure the quality of services provided by WA's five TAFEs. In 2021, students were very positive about their TAFE experience.

Percentage of students satisfied with aspects of their TAFE experience:

- » **87.3%** satisfied with their training
- » **85.5%** satisfied with how likely their training will lead to a job
- » **84.9%** satisfied with the information and support provided
- » **87.7%** satisfied with quality of trainers or instructors
- » **83.5%** satisfied with the facilities available at their training provider
- » **75.5%** satisfied with the cost of their course

VET DELIVERY AND SUPPORT

FINDINGS

- 3.1. The quality of training delivery, as well as support to navigate the complexities of the VET system, have a major impact on young people's VET experience.
- 3.2. Young people need greater support to help them secure the work placements that are required as part of their training.
- 3.3. Lecturer currency, access to sufficient resources and tools, and training in the most up-to-date technologies were key factors in ensuring a positive VET experience for young people.
- 3.4. Many young people do not feel that their achievements in VET are adequately recognised by their schools, training providers and communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1. Investigate opportunities to improve assistance for young people to cut through the complexity of the VET system with clear, accessible information on training and career pathways within industry.
- 3.2. Investigate opportunities to increase the participation of students and employers in work-based learning programs (such as pre-apprenticeships) and improving support to secure work placements.
- 3.3. Investigate and deploy measures to enhance consistency of training and better incentivise training quality across all providers, including ways to recognise high quality lecturers.
- 3.4. Develop systems and incentives that better recognise high achieving VET students both at school and within the VET system itself.





Conclusion

As key users of the VET system, the voice of young people must be front and centre of any discussion around the future of VET in WA.

By speaking directly with young people, and giving them the opportunity to share their experiences and views of the VET sector, we can gain a unique understanding of what is working well in the system and where changes need to be made.

Through this work, the Board has identified important areas where government, industry and training providers can work together to enhance the experience and reduce barriers for young people choosing VET pathways.

These include opportunities to combat the ongoing stigma associated with VET to ensure it is seen as a valuable pathway by students seeking to pursue vocational careers and by their parents, schools and communities.

There needs to be a focus on actively engaging young people from an early age in career development activities.

This should be done by developing a clear policy framework to help schools find the space and resources to deliver high quality career development programs that provide young people with the tools to make good career choices. Ensuring impartial exposure to all post-school pathways will be vital to achieving this.

In addition, the VET sector is known for its complexity. For young people, it can be particularly difficult to navigate. Measures to assist young people and their parents to understand and navigate the VET system, as well as the identification of more effective ways to recognise high achieving students in a competency based system will enhance the VET experience.

The measures outlined in this report will enable young people to better engage with the VET system. This will not only grow WA's skills base in a time of high workforce need, but will ultimately create a more productive and engaged society in Western Australia.

End notes

¹ Source: ABS, 6291.0.55.001 – Labour Force, Australia, Detailed, April 2020.

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³ Ibid.

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⁷ Oymak, C. & Hudson, L. (2018), *High school students' views on who influences their thinking about education and careers*, National Centre for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, Washington D.C., United States.

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¹¹ EY Sweeney (2022), *2021 Student Satisfaction Survey – WA Public Training Providers Report*, Ernst & Young, Australia.

¹² Foundation for Young Australians & AlphaBeta (2018), *The new work reality*, Foundation for Young Australians, Melbourne, Australia.

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¹⁴ Source: Department of Training and Workforce Development, VET enrolment data collection, 2021.





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