



Legislative Assembly
Economy and Infrastructure Committee

Inquiry into student pathways to in-demand industries

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About the Committee

Functions

The Committee is established under the Legislative Assembly Standing Orders and can examine any matters or issues connected with these departments and their related agencies:

- Department of Education
- Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions
- Department of Transport and Planning
- Department of Treasury and Finance.

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Contents

Preliminaries

Committee membership	ii
About the Committee	iii
Terms of reference	ix
Chair's foreword	xi
Executive summary	xiii
Findings and recommendations	xv
Acronyms and terms	xxvii
Figures	xxix
Tables	xxx
Case Studies	xxxi

1	Introduction	1
1.1	Victoria's workforce needs are changing	2
1.1.1	What industries are in demand?	2
1.1.2	Regional Victoria faces unique labour market challenges	9
1.1.3	More workers will require a post-secondary qualification	9
1.2	Student pathways in a changing economy	11
1.2.1	Inconsistent career education delivery	11
1.2.2	Disadvantaged and underrepresented cohorts	13
1.3	Research on workforce and future skills needs	13
1.3.1	Inquiry into building a skilled and adaptable workforce	14
1.3.2	Inquiry into the perceptions and status of vocational education and training	14
1.3.3	White paper on jobs and opportunities	14
1.3.4	Inquiry into career advice activities in Victorian schools	15
1.3.5	Inquiry into school to work transition	15
1.4	Scope of the Inquiry	16
1.4.1	Other initiatives during this Inquiry	16
1.5	Inquiry process	17
1.5.1	The Committee actively consulted young people in this Inquiry	18
1.6	Report outline	20

2	Improving career education for all students	23
2.1	Career education in schools is delivered in a variety of ways	24
2.1.1	Career action plans	24
2.1.2	My Career Insights	24
2.1.3	Work-based learning	25
2.1.4	Career counselling	25
2.2	Access to high-quality career education is uneven across Victoria	27
2.2.1	Supporting schools to deliver consistent and meaningful career education	29
2.2.2	Schools have too few career practitioners to provide adequate career guidance	30
2.2.3	Career education is not sufficiently embedded in the Victorian curriculum	33
2.2.4	Supporting students requires a whole-of-school approach	36
2.3	Negative perceptions of vocational education and training discourages some students from pursuing vocational pathways	38
2.3.1	Stigma towards vocational pathways persists despite senior secondary reforms	38
2.4	Parents play a significant role in influencing the career decisions of their children	43
2.4.1	Parents and families hold influence over their children's career pathways	43
2.4.2	Parents require better education about the economy and value of vocational pathways	44
2.5	Age-appropriate career education should be introduced earlier	48
2.6	Conclusion	50
3	Reforming student pathways to align with in-demand industries	53
3.1	Secondary school pathways reform offers a step in the right direction	53
3.1.1	Recent reforms have strengthened school-based vocational education and training	53
3.1.2	Barriers limit student participation in school-based vocational education and training	55
3.2	TAFEs and independent Registered Training Organisations are central to the provision of vocational education and training	59
3.2.1	The challenges in delivering vocational education and training pathways in Victoria	59
3.2.2	Registered Training Organisations play an important role in delivering VET	64

3.3	Many in-demand jobs require students to complete apprenticeships and traineeships	66
3.3.1	Apprenticeship and traineeship participation and completion rates are declining	66
3.3.2	There are opportunities to improve access to school-based apprenticeships and traineeships	68
3.3.3	Workplace conditions contribute to low apprenticeship and traineeship completion rates	70
3.3.4	Employers need support to provide real workplace experience to students	72
3.3.5	Providing apprenticeships and traineeships can present challenges for employers	73
3.4	Higher education is a key pathway to some in-demand industries	75
3.4.1	Higher education is becoming more aligned with workforce needs	75
3.4.2	Pathways between vocational and higher education remain fragmented	78
3.4.3	Dual-sector universities demonstrate the potential for integrated pathways	79
3.4.4	Costs of higher education limit participation	82
3.4.5	Unpaid placements can cause significant financial burdens	82
3.5	Meeting the state's workforce needs requires greater collaboration between industry and education providers	86
3.5.1	Many schools struggle to provide work-based learning opportunities	87
3.5.2	Partnerships with industry can help provide work experience placements	89
3.5.3	Tech Schools and the Vocational Taster Experiences program are also valuable opportunities for students	92
3.6	Lifelong learning will become increasingly important in a rapidly changing economy	95
3.6.1	Career services exist to support lifelong learning	95
3.6.2	Microcredentials and flexible learning models provide valuable opportunities for lifelong learning	97
3.6.3	There are multiple possible reforms to support lifelong learning	98
3.7	Conclusion	100
4	Tailoring support for job seekers from disadvantaged groups	103
4.1	Regional students face geographic, financial and access barriers to pathways into in-demand industries	104
4.1.1	Transport barriers limit access to education and training	105

4.1.2	Limited awareness, training opportunities and placements in regional Victoria	108
4.1.3	Financial barriers associated with relocation	110
4.2	Girls and women face discrimination in male-dominated industries	111
4.2.1	Girls and women remain significantly underrepresented in male-dominated industries	111
4.2.2	There are a range of initiatives to encourage women to enter male-dominated industries	113
4.2.3	Male-dominated workplaces need to be made safer and more inclusive for women	115
4.3	Culturally and linguistically diverse students face unique challenges and opportunities in accessing pathways to in-demand industries	117
4.3.1	Additional English support can help some students into careers in in-demand industries	117
4.3.2	Visas and employment qualifications can limit access to education, training and employment pathways to in-demand industries	118
4.3.3	Family expectations influence culturally and linguistically diverse students' pathway decisions	121
4.4	First Nations students face barriers to accessing pathways into in-demand industries	122
4.4.1	Early disengagement reduces access to career pathways	123
4.4.2	Cultural safety influences participation and retention in some in-demand industries	124
4.4.3	Strengthening culturally safe and supportive pathways for Indigenous students	126
4.5	People with disability have difficulties accessing education, training and employment pathways	129
4.5.1	There is more to disability than just physical access	130
4.5.2	Stakeholders call for clearer information, tailored supports and better coordination for students with disability	132
4.6	Conclusion	134
 Appendix		
A	About the Inquiry	135

Terms of reference

Inquiry into student pathways to in-demand industries

On 20 May 2025, the Legislative Assembly agreed to the following motion:

That this House refers the matter of how students can be better supported with advice and pathways for jobs in in-demand industries, including through TAFE and other vocational routes, to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee for consideration and report no later than 30 September 2026.

Chair's foreword

I am pleased to present this report on the Inquiry into student pathways to in-demand industries.

As the Victorian economy grows, our state is experiencing increased demand for skilled workers across established sectors such as healthcare, construction, and education. At the same time, newer, rapidly growing sectors including the clean economy and digital technologies are also placing new demands on the workforce. Victoria's economy is changing and Victoria's workforce will need to change with it.

However, the pathways into these in-demand industries are not sufficiently accessible for all students, and existing pathways are not always aligned with the changing needs of the labour market. Throughout the Inquiry, it became clear that more action is needed to strengthen these pathways. Moreover, as most of Victoria's future workforce will need a qualification in either vocational education and training (VET) or higher education, we need to guarantee easier access to the training required to secure employment in both established and emerging in-demand industries.

During this Inquiry, the Committee collected evidence in Melbourne and travelled to regional Victoria to receive input from both metropolitan and regional stakeholders. The Committee heard from a diverse range of stakeholders and experts in the training, education, and industry sectors. Stakeholders provided their insights into the accessibility and relevancy of current pathways into in-demand industries and made suggestions on how pathways and career guidance could be improved.

The Committee proudly engaged with ten Youth Associates to guarantee that the voices of young people were heard during this Inquiry. These Youth Associates provided invaluable perspectives that have informed many of the recommendations included in this report.

Among many critical issues identified during this Inquiry, the quality and consistency of career education delivery across all Victorian government secondary schools represented a crucial problem due to staffing and resource constraints. Aside from career guidance through school, evidence suggests that parents, who for many reasons have a limited understanding of the evolving labour market, should receive more support to help their children in navigating the job market and making their future career choices.

Other prominent issues identified by the Committee included accessing VET courses, where students can often face barriers such as scheduling, costs, and limited subject availability. Additional barriers exist for certain cohorts, such as regional students, First Nations students, female students, students with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and students with disability. All these barriers prevent students from engaging with the training and education needed to pursue careers in in-demand industries.

The Committee has made a number of recommendations aimed at strengthening existing student pathways, including expanding career education programs, improving partnerships between schools and relevant organisations, providing tailored supports to parents, students, and job seekers to ease access to pathways to a variety of in-demand industries.

On behalf of the Committee, I thank the organisations and individuals who made submissions and attended public hearings to provide their views and expertise. We greatly appreciate the time, effort and knowledge contributed by all participants.

I extend my thanks to the Deputy Chair, Kim O'Keeffe MP, and my fellow Committee Members who worked on this Inquiry—Roma Britnell MP, Anthony Cianflone MP, John Mullahy MP, Nicole Werner MP, and Dylan Wight MP.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the staff of the Parliament, including the members of the Committee's Secretariat and many others, who provided essential support throughout this process.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Alison Marchant". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Alison" and the last name "Marchant" clearly distinguishable.

Alison Marchant MP
Chair

Executive summary

Victoria's economy is experiencing significant structural change, resulting in growing demand for workers across sectors such as healthcare and social assistance, construction, education and training, and professional, scientific and technical services. The Victorian Skills Authority predicts that 87% of new workers over the next decade will require a vocational education and training (VET) or higher education qualification. It also notes that many occupations in in-demand industries will require a VET qualification. Due to this demand, improved guidance for students and accessible pathways into the relevant VET qualifications are required to support young people to transition into these industries.

Through this Inquiry, the Committee investigates how best to support students to pursue careers in in-demand industries in Victoria. The Committee consulted a wide range of stakeholders, including Local Learning and Employment Networks, TAFE institutes, employers, unions, and not-for-profit organisations. The Committee particularly valued the perspectives provided by ten Youth Associates. The Youth Associates were selected to interview their peers, report on their findings, and present them at a roundtable hearing. The Committee heard that, despite recent Victorian Government initiatives to support students to access in-demand industries, more action is needed.

In this report, the Committee reviews the current career education landscape in Victorian schools. It examines the ways in which career education is delivered, including through career action planning and work-based learning. The Committee found that the shortage of qualified career practitioners in Victorian schools does not allow for thorough and adequate career guidance for students. In addition, students' decisions are heavily influenced by their parents, who do not always fully understand the changing labour market and the career opportunities offered by VET.

This report also analyses the current VET structure alongside recent reforms aimed at strengthening the system. The main barriers identified by the Committee that limit students' participation in school-based VET include uneven VET access, timetabling constraints, course inflexibility, and cost. While initiatives like Free TAFE improves access to VET, completion rates remain a challenge for VET courses, apprenticeships, and traineeships.

While higher education, especially in dual-sector universities, presents opportunities for strengthening pathways between school and employment, its costs can be prohibitive. Moreover, despite existing career services to support lifelong learning such as Skills and Jobs Centres, the Committee believes these services can be improved.

Finally, this report discusses the experience of job seekers belonging to disadvantaged cohorts including regional students, First Nations students, students with disability, female students, and students with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds.

It notes that while there are various Government initiatives already in place, they are not yet sufficient to address the challenges faced by these groups.

In this report, the Committee includes recommendations to strengthen career education, to reform student pathways to improve the current VET system and ensure its responsiveness to a changing economy, and to support disadvantaged cohorts when entering in-demand industries through the implementation of tailored and wraparound supports.

Findings and recommendations

1 Introduction

FINDING 1: Victoria faces growing demand for workers in major employing industries such as health care and social assistance, construction, education, and transport, alongside new and emerging industries including advanced manufacturing, digital technologies and the clean economy.

9

FINDING 2: Most new workers entering Victoria's labour market over the next decade will require a post-secondary qualification, including a vocational education and training (VET) qualification, to meet demand in key growth industries.

11

2 Improving career education for all students

FINDING 3: Despite the Department of Education requiring every government secondary school to deliver a planned program of career education activities, the quality and consistency of delivery vary across schools and regions due to staffing and resource constraints.

29

FINDING 4: Many schools do not have a sufficient number of qualified career practitioners, leading to uneven and inequitable access to meaningful career education.

33

RECOMMENDATION 1: That the Victorian Government ensure that every government school has at least one qualified full-time equivalent career practitioner per 450 students.

33

FINDING 5: While the Victorian Career Education Framework provides teachers with resources to integrate career education, the Victorian Curriculum F-10 does not require career education as a learning area or capability, contributing to inconsistent student access and outcomes.

36

RECOMMENDATION 2: That the Victorian Government embed developmentally appropriate career education within the Victorian Curriculum F-10, underpinned by the Australian Blueprint for Career Development.

36

FINDING 6: Effective career education relies on a whole-of-school approach involving career practitioners, subject teachers and school leadership. However, many schools lack the resources and skills needed to implement this approach.

37

RECOMMENDATION 3: That the Victorian Government develop and deliver planned professional development for teachers to support a whole-of-school approach to career education. The professional development should enable teachers to:

- find, understand and communicate accurate, up-to-date labour market information
- embed career education within their lesson plans
- confidently explain student pathways, including vocational education and training (VET) options.

37

FINDING 7: Senior secondary pathway reforms have improved perceptions of vocational education and training (VET), but stigma and misconceptions among students, families and some school staff continue to discourage some students pursuing vocational pathways that lead to in-demand industries.

42

RECOMMENDATION 4: That the Victorian Government provide mandatory professional development for principals, subject teachers and career practitioners on vocational education and training (VET) pathways addressing local labour market needs and common misconceptions about vocational careers.

43

RECOMMENDATION 5: That the Victorian Government develop a strategy for addressing negative perceptions of vocational education and training (VET) among students, parents and the broader community. The strategy should be informed by expert advice.

43

RECOMMENDATION 6: That the Victorian Government review in 2027–28 the promotional campaigns used to promote the value of vocational education, including the Free TAFE Makes it REAL campaign, to understand the impact of these campaigns on enrolment and completion rates.

43

FINDING 8: Parents and families are key influencers in students' pathway choices, but many do not have accurate, up-to-date information about vocational education, training pathways and the needs of the labour market.

48

RECOMMENDATION 7: That the Victorian Government collaborate with the Victorian Parents Council and/or Parents Victoria to increase and improve the education of parents as it relates to the value of vocational education and pathways to in-demand industries.

48

RECOMMENDATION 8: That the Victorian Government invest in an online 'live-update' portal for schools and parents to access current data on in-demand industries and job vacancies.

48

FINDING 9: Career education delivered in primary school can build aspiration, broaden awareness of future possibilities and support long-term engagement with in-demand industries.

50

RECOMMENDATION 9: That the Victorian Government introduce career education for government primary school students, focused on exploration and aspiration-building rather than decision-making or work readiness and to actively counter gendered career stereotypes.

50

3 Reforming student pathways to align with in-demand industries

FINDING 10: Senior secondary pathways reforms introduced in 2023, including the introduction of the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) Vocational Major and the Victorian Pathways Certificate, have increased the uptake of vocational education and training (VET) in Victorian Government schools.

55

FINDING 11: Despite the existing vocational education and training (VET) clusters, access to VET in government schools remains uneven across Victoria.

57

FINDING 12: Structural and coordination barriers, including timetable constraints, limited subject availability, indirect costs and inconsistent coordination across education providers, continue to limit school students' participation in vocational education and training (VET).

58

RECOMMENDATION 10: That the Victorian Government strengthen vocational education and training (VET) coordination between schools, Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) and industry by devising a better conduit between the sectors. This may include the role of Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs), not-for-profit organisations and Group Training Organisations (GTOs).

58

RECOMMENDATION 11: That the Victorian Government, through the Department of Education, work with schools and Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) to improve flexibility in the delivery of vocational education and training (VET) to school students, including:

- enabling block timetable models
- supporting schools to release more time for VET participation
- introducing more flexible entry points and opportunities to change courses.

59

RECOMMENDATION 12: That the Victorian Government consider reducing indirect costs associated with school-based vocational education and training (VET) by subsidising course-related expenses.

59

FINDING 13: Free TAFE has improved access to vocational education and training (VET). However, Free TAFE alone is insufficient to address structural barriers to participation and workforce shortages.

62

RECOMMENDATION 13: That the Victorian Government develop a reporting mechanism to monitor retention and completion rate of Free TAFE courses in Victoria and to inform the impact of the program on in-demand industries and to fully understand the movement of students across TAFE.

62

FINDING 14: Technical and Further Education (TAFE) courses play a central role in vocational education and training (VET) pathways aligned to workforce needs, but funding pressures and capacity constraints limit their effectiveness, including completion rates.

64

RECOMMENDATION 14: That the Victorian Government review the funding model for vocational education and training (VET), to reflect the full cost of delivering high-quality training for courses and provide more opportunities for industry-based training in in-demand sectors.

64

FINDING 15: Independent Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) (including for-profit, not-for-profit, and industry-based RTOs) play an important role in delivering flexible and industry-aligned vocational education and training (VET), including to under-represented student cohorts.

65

RECOMMENDATION 15: That the Victorian Government develop collaborative strategies with Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) to address shortages in in-demand industries.

66

FINDING 16: Commencement and completion rates for apprentices and traineeships have declined in Victoria since 2023.

68

RECOMMENDATION 16: That the Victorian Government develop new strategies to incentivise and support apprentices and trainees to successfully complete their training, especially in in-demand industries.

68

FINDING 17: School-based apprenticeship and traineeship programs have the potential to strengthen pathways into employment. However, current approaches—including Head Start—are not delivering consistent or system-wide outcomes.

70

RECOMMENDATION 17: That the Victorian Government review and strengthen school-based apprenticeship and traineeship programs, consider expanding the role of group training organisations (GTOs), and ensure programs are adequately resourced to meet student demand.

70

FINDING 18: Low wages and poor work conditions impact the uptake and completion of apprenticeships.

71

RECOMMENDATION 18: That the Victorian Government, in three years, review apprenticeship and traineeship commencement and completion rates before and after July 2026, to understand the impact of the new minimum wage legislation on apprenticeship and traineeship participation and completion.

71

RECOMMENDATION 19: That the Victorian Government work with the Australian Government to reduce financial barriers to apprenticeships and traineeships, including by reviewing apprentice wage settings and incentives, and expanding financial support for apprentices in in-demand industries.

72

FINDING 19: Structured workplace learning is valuable, but many students are unable to access placements because a limited number of employers participate. **74**

FINDING 20: Some employers, including small businesses, struggle to provide apprenticeships and traineeships due to complexities of the paperwork, increasing costs, lack of time, limited resources and compliance capacities. **75**

RECOMMENDATION 20: That the Victorian Government address the barriers of workplace learning placements by exploring ways to reduce compliance, adding resources and incentives such as financial assistance. **75**

RECOMMENDATION 21: That the Victorian Government consider ways to support businesses in in-demand industries that provide apprenticeships and traineeships, including administrative guidance and targeted incentives. **75**

FINDING 21: The higher education sector is increasingly working together with industries to design curriculums to meet industry demands. However, some structural and regulatory constraints could be removed to allow flexibility and responsiveness to the workforce needs of the Victorian economy. **77**

FINDING 22: Pathways between vocational education and training (VET) and higher education are fragmented and difficult to navigate, with inconsistent credit recognition and limited coordination between tertiary education providers, reducing the effectiveness of pathways to in-demand industries. **81**

RECOMMENDATION 22: That the Victorian Government advocate to the Australian Government and work with Victorian tertiary education providers to implement a coordinated approach to tertiary harmonisation, including:

- reforms to improve credit transfer
- developing integrated vocational education and training (VET)-higher education pathways
- strengthening system-wide data on student transitions and outcomes.

81

FINDING 23: Financial barriers, notably unpaid placements, can limit participation and impact course selection in higher education to in-demand industries. **86**

RECOMMENDATION 23: That the Victorian Government advocate to the Australian Government and work with higher education providers to reduce financial barriers by:

- increasing scholarships and financial assistance for students in in-demand industries
- supporting measures to offset placement-related costs such as transport, accommodation, and materials.

86

FINDING 24: The School to Work program and the work-based learning application have made it easier for schools—supported by Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs)—to organise work-based learning. However, the administrative burden, limited placement availability, and insufficient access to qualified career practitioners means not all students can participate.

89

RECOMMENDATION 24: That the Victorian Government conduct a review of the new School to Work program in the next three years to assess the effectiveness of the program compared to the previous model.

89

FINDING 25: Partnerships between industry and schools are fragmented, limiting students' access to high quality work experience placements, particularly in in-demand industries and for smaller and regional schools.

92

FINDING 26: Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) play a role in engaging industry and co-ordinating work-based learning, including work experience.

92

RECOMMENDATION 25: That the Victorian Government support Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) or place-based organisations to meet the requirement for all year 9 and 10 students to complete a work experience placement. Priority should be given to partnerships with in-demand industries to facilitate work experience within these industries.

92

FINDING 27: The Victorian Government's Tech Schools and Vocational Taster Experiences program provide school students valuable work-based learning opportunities. However, as the Vocational Taster Experiences program is still in its pilot phase, not all students have access to its benefits.

94

RECOMMENDATION 26: That the Victorian Government evaluate the Vocational Taster Experience pilot on completion and, if positive, expand access to all year 9 and 10 government school students.

94

RECOMMENDATION 27: That the Victorian Government review Tech School programs and their links to industry to ensure they expose students to jobs in in-demand industries and teach them the skills needed to pursue these careers. **94**

RECOMMENDATION 28: That the Victorian Government review Tech Schools placements and engagements in regional Victoria, to ensure all students have access regardless of where they live. **95**

FINDING 28: Victorians benefit from ongoing career education throughout their lives, particularly through Skills and Jobs Centres and Learn Locals which support upskilling, reskilling, and transitioning into in-demand industries. **97**

RECOMMENDATION 29: That the Victorian Government increase promotion and visibility of Skills and Jobs Centres and Learn Locals to ensure Victorians are aware of the career, training and employment support available to them. **97**

FINDING 29: Microcredentials and flexible learning models provide an opportunity to improve the responsiveness of the education system to the demands of the economy. **98**

RECOMMENDATION 30: That the Victorian Government work with education providers to support the development of short courses aligned with in-demand industries. As part of this, recognition of microcredentials should be improved across vocational education and training (VET) and higher education. **98**

FINDING 30: Victoria's education and training system is not yet fully equipped to support lifelong learning and re-entry pathways. This limits opportunities for workers to upskill and reskill in response to changing workforce demand. **100**

RECOMMENDATION 31: That the Victorian Government develop a coordinated lifelong learning strategy that supports flexible entry and exit points across education pathways. **100**

RECOMMENDATION 32: That the Victorian Government strengthen recognition of prior learning (RPL) and industry experience and improve the tracking of skills and qualifications across an individual's working life, including through enhancements to the Unique Student Identifier. **100**

RECOMMENDATION 33: The Victorian Government streamline the regulative burden and paperwork required for businesses to take on work experience, School to Work or other workplace assignments.

100

RECOMMENDATION 34: That the Victorian Government support businesses to become employer-ready by providing training and guidance to employers hosting work-based learning opportunities or student placements. This training should include comprehensive information on compliance requirements, documentation, and the legal responsibilities of businesses participating in these programs.

100

4 Tailoring support for job seekers from disadvantaged groups

FINDING 31: In many parts of regional Victoria, public transport is a critical barrier to young people's participation in education, training and employment, particularly for those working in industries that require non-standard working hours.

107

RECOMMENDATION 35: That the Victorian Government review the VET Transport Program to ensure it is meeting the transport needs of students and supporting equitable access to education and training opportunities across Victoria.

107

FINDING 32: Reliable digital infrastructure and online learning can help regional students access education and training where local options are limited, but cannot replace in-person training, practical learning and placement.

108

RECOMMENDATION 36: That the Victorian Government work with vocational and educational training providers to assess what course components can be completed online and what must be in person, in order to review accessibility issues for regional students.

108

FINDING 33: Students in regional Victoria face barriers accessing pathways to in-demand industries due to limited local course offerings, fewer training and placement opportunities and lower exposure to pathway options and industry connections.

109

FINDING 34: Limited local education and training options force regional students to relocate, creating additional costs that may restrict participation in education and training opportunities.

111

RECOMMENDATION 37: That the Victorian Government work with industries, TAFEs and regional organisations to improve access to pathways into in-demand industries for regional students, including aiding students who need to relocate. **111**

FINDING 35: Women are underrepresented in traditionally male-dominated industries because girls are discouraged from pursuing careers in these industries and they have limited exposure to these careers. Other factors include the lack of visible female role models and concerns about gender discrimination and workplace culture. **113**

FINDING 36: Coordinated support across education, training and employment pathways remains crucial to improve participation and retention of women in male-dominated industries. Other targeted initiatives such as trade tasters, mentoring, female role models and flexible learning can also improve participation. **115**

FINDING 37: Unsafe and exclusionary workplace cultures, including harassment, discrimination and workplace violence, are barriers to attracting and retaining women in male-dominated industries. **116**

RECOMMENDATION 38: That the Victorian Government review the work undertaken by Victorian Trades Hall Council, Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Working Women's Centre Victoria for the Safe Workplaces for Women initiative. **117**

FINDING 38: New migrants to Australia who speak English as a Second Language can experience barriers in accessing pathways to work, including in in-demand industries, due to employers' concerns around inadequate English levels. **118**

FINDING 39: Visa conditions can restrict access to education, training and employment pathways in in-demand industries for some culturally and linguistically diverse students, including international students and asylum seekers. **119**

FINDING 40: Skilled migrants do not always have clarity about whether their overseas qualifications will be recognised. Complex, costly and time-consuming qualification recognition processes can delay or prevent entry into some in-demand industries. **120**

RECOMMENDATION 39: That the Victorian Government collaborate with the Australian Government and all the relevant authorities to streamline the recognition of qualifications for skilled migrants in in-demand industries facing workforce shortages. **121**

FINDING 41: Family and community expectations can influence the education and career choices of some culturally and linguistically diverse students, including their participation in pathways to some in-demand industries.

122

FINDING 42: Some First Nations students disengage from education before career education is typically introduced, limiting awareness of and access to pathways into in-demand industries. Regional First Nations students can face additional barriers, including reduced exposure to career opportunities and culturally safe role models.

124

FINDING 43: Experiences of racism and inadequate cultural safety can discourage First Nations people from entering and remaining in some industries, contributing to ongoing underrepresentation.

126

FINDING 44: Cultural safety is a critical element of ensuring the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and employees and stakeholders encourage organisations to provide cultural safety training to their staff.

127

RECOMMENDATION 40: That the Victorian Government, in order to support cultural safety in in-demand industries, publish guidance on First Nations cultural safety training including information on the purpose and benefits of cultural safety training, key topics covered by training programs and a directory of accredited or recognised training providers. Cultural safety guidance should also be considered for CALD cohorts.

127

FINDING 45: First Nations students benefit in training and employment pathways when provided with wraparound supports and especially when the supports are designed with First Nations organisations or students.

128

FINDING 46: Aboriginal Community Controlled Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) provide culturally safe education and training pathways and achieve strong outcomes for First Nations students, including higher completion rates and direct pathways into in-demand industries.

129

RECOMMENDATION 41: That the Victorian Government advocate to the Australian Government to re-classify not-for-profit Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) such as Aboriginal Community Controlled RTOs, to enable eligible providers to access public training funding.

129

FINDING 47: Students with disability have fewer opportunities to access work-based learning and placements, limiting their ability to gain practical experience and transition into employment.

130

FINDING 48: Students with disability face systemic barriers to participating in education and training pathways and transitioning to employment, due to inconsistent adjustments, complex support processes and limited access to tailored pathway information and transition support.

132

FINDING 49: Students with disability experience challenges transitioning into TAFE, including difficulties accessing and navigating disability supports, inconsistent information about available assistance and fragmented connections between education, support services and employment pathways.

133

RECOMMENDATION 42: That the Victorian Government strengthen career pathway planning and transition support for students with disability by providing clear pathway information, tailored wraparound support and improved transitions into further education, training and employment, with a particular focus on in-demand industries.

133

RECOMMENDATION 43: That the Victorian Government invest in local organisations to give wraparound support for students undertaking work in placement, apprenticeship and training to provide a central point and contact for students needing extra support in the community.

134

Acronyms and terms

ACCE	Australian Centre for Career Excellence
ACC-RTOS	Aboriginal Community Controlled Registered Training Organisations
ACU	Australian Catholic University
AEU	Australian Education Union
AIAE	Australian International Academy of Education
AMWU	Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union
ANMF	Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation
ASRC	Asylum Seeker Resource Centre
CALD	Culturally and linguistically diverse
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CFO	Chief Financial Officer
CICA	Career Industry Council of Australia
DMTC	Defence Materials Technology Centre
GTO	Group Training Organisation
LLENs	Local Learning and Employment Networks
MCA	Minerals Council of Australia
NCVER	National Centre for Vocational Education Research
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
NDS	National Disability Services
PIEFA	Primary Industries Education Foundation Australia
RPL	Recognition of prior learning
RTOS	Registered Training Organisations
SARAH	South Asian Research and Advocacy Hub
SBATs	School-based apprenticeships and traineeships
STEM	Science, technology, engineering and mathematics
STEMM	Science, technology, engineering, mathematics and medicine
SWL	Structured workplace learning
TAFE	Technical and further education
TAP	Timboon Agricultural Project
VACCHO	Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
VAGO	Victorian Auditor-General's Office

VCAA	Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority
VCAL	Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning
VCE	Victorian Certificate of Education
VET	Vocational education and training
VETDSS	Vocational education and training delivered to secondary schools
VicLLENs	Victorian Local Learning and Employment Networks
VicSRC	Victorian Student Representative Council
VPC	Victorian Pathways Certificate
VM	Vocational Major
VSA	Victorian Skills Authority
VTA	Victorian TAFE Association
WHISE	Women's Health in the South East
YACVic	Youth Affairs Council Victoria

Figures

1 Introduction

Figure 1.1	New workers expected in Victoria by industry, 2025 to 2035	3
Figure 1.2	New workers expected in occupations across all industries, 2025 to 2035	3

Tables

1 Introduction

Table 1.1	Number of new workers expected in Victoria between 2025 and 2035 by occupation	10
-----------	--	----

2 Improving career education for all students

Table 2.1	Overview of career education activities in a government schools	26
Table 2.2	What students need to learn according to the Career Education Framework	34
Table 2.3	Learning areas and career management competencies in the Australian Blueprint for Career Development	35

Case Studies

2 Improving career education for all students

Case Study 2.1	Example of a secondary student's career education journey	27
----------------	---	----

3 Reforming student pathways to align with in-demand industries

Case Study 3.1	'[W]ork experience is supposed to be where you want to work in the future, but how are students supposed to do that if no company wants to take them?'	72
Case Study 3.2	'[T]here's a point where ... the money dries up'	84

Chapter 1

Introduction

Victoria's economy is undergoing significant and rapid change. A growing and ageing population is increasing demand for workers in healthcare, construction and other essential sectors. At the same time, climate change and fast-moving technological advances are reshaping industries and transforming the types of jobs that will be available in the years ahead. As a result, students and workers will need to navigate an increasingly complex world of work.

Between 2025 and 2028, around 373,000 new workers are expected to enter the Victorian workforce, filling newly created positions and replacing retiring workers.¹ Over the next decade, this number is projected to increase to 1.4 million.² The industries forecast to experience the greatest growth—accounting for around 42% of all new workers—are health care and social assistance, and construction.³ These industries will require new aged care workers, disability carers, registered nurses, carpenters, joiners, construction managers and plumbers, among others.⁴

As Victoria's economy and labour market change, the skills and qualifications needed to participate in the workforce are continuing to evolve. Over the next decade most new workers will need a post-secondary qualification, with almost half needing a vocational education and training (VET) qualification.⁵ Moreover, new and emerging industries will require workers to have stronger digital and technical skills.⁶ To ensure Victoria can meet its workforce demands and avoid skills shortages, workers, students, parents, care givers will need clear pathways and career guidance.

On 20 May 2025, the Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee received Terms of reference to conduct an inquiry into how students can be better supported into jobs in in-demand industries, particularly through improved guidance and student pathways including vocational education and training.

During the Inquiry, the Committee received evidence from a range of stakeholders including students, teachers, career practitioners, principals, schools, Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs), Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutes, independent and not-for-profit Registered Training Organisations

1 Victorian Skills Authority, *Employment projections dashboard 2025–2035*, 12 January 2026, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/employment-projections-dashboard>> accessed 19 January 2026.

2 Ibid.

3 Victorian Skills Authority, *Employment projections dashboard 2025–2035*, 12 January 2026, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/employment-projections-dashboard>> accessed 19 January 2026; Victorian Skills Authority, *Snapshot of the Victorian labour market 2025*, 13 January 2026, p. 13.

4 Ibid.

5 Victorian Skills Authority, *Snapshot of the Victorian labour market 2025*, Victorian Government, 12 January 2026, p. 4.

6 Ibid.

(RTOs), universities, academics, unions, workers, employers, industry bodies and not-for-profit organisations including organisations representing disadvantaged and underrepresented student and worker cohorts.

In a first for Victorian parliamentary inquiries, the Committee established a group of young people to be directly involved in this Inquiry. The Youth Associates were selected to interview their peers, report back their findings and present this evidence at a Youth Associates hearing. We discuss this unique contribution further below.

The Committee heard that, despite recent Victorian Government initiatives supporting students into in-demand industries, including senior secondary pathways reform and the Free TAFE program, more action is needed. Career advice and student pathways must be more effectively aligned with the needs of both students and the labour market. Disadvantaged and underrepresented groups require additional support to overcome barriers to participating in in-demand industries. This report provides findings and makes recommendations designed to strengthen career education, reform student pathways, and support disadvantaged cohorts, with a view to securing Victoria's workforce and meeting the labour needs of its most in-demand industries.

1.1 Victoria's workforce needs are changing

The rapid transformation of the job market and the evolving needs of the Victorian economy are forcing the workforce to adapt to industry demands. This section provides an overview of the industries experiencing growing demand in Victoria.

1.1.1 What industries are in demand?

There is no single definition of an 'in-demand industry'. The Victorian Government's submission to the Inquiry identifies in-demand industries as industries 'that employ large numbers of people'.⁷ According to the latest data from Jobs and Skills Australia, the top five employing industries in Victoria are:

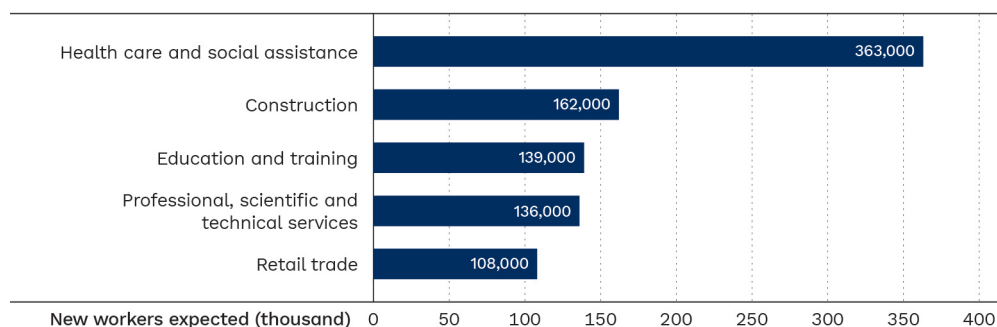
- health care and social assistance (16.3%)
- professional, scientific and technical services (10.4%)
- education and training (9.4%)
- retail trade (9.4%)
- construction (9%).⁸

⁷ Victorian Government, *Submission 136*, p. 9.

⁸ Jobs and Skills Australia, *Jobs and Skills Atlas*, 16 January 2026, <<https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/jobs-and-skills-atlas>> accessed 19 January 2026.

The Victorian Skills Authority's employment projections anticipate that these industries will receive the highest number of new workers in the next decade.⁹ This expected growth is shown in Figure 1.1.

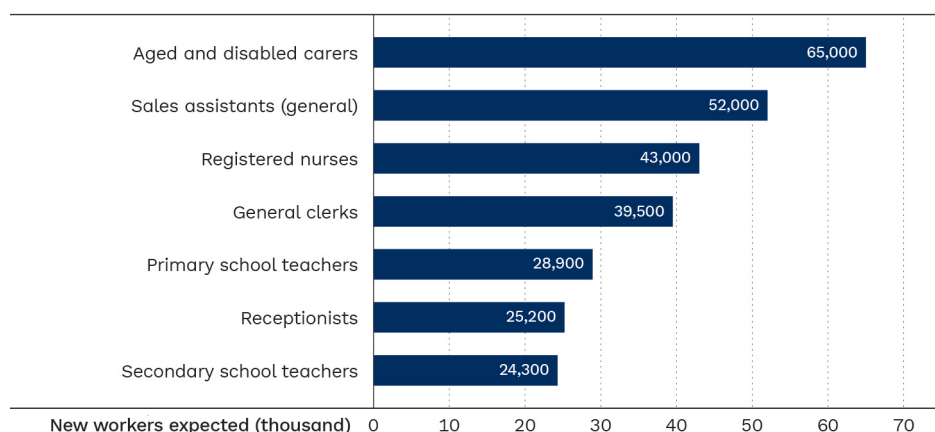
Figure 1.1 New workers expected in Victoria by industry, 2025 to 2035



Victorian Skills Authority, *Employment projections dashboard 2025–2035*, 12 January 2026, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/employment-projections-dashboard>> accessed 18 July 2026.

Jobs expected to have the highest growth in workers over this period include aged and disabled carers, sales assistants, nurses, and teachers as demonstrated in Figure 1.2.¹⁰

Figure 1.2 New workers expected in occupations across all industries, 2025 to 2035



Victorian Skills Authority, *Employment projections dashboard 2025–2035*, 12 January 2026, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/employment-projections-dashboard>> accessed 19 July 2026.

⁹ Victorian Skills Authority, *Employment projections dashboard 2025–2035*, 12 January 2026, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/employment-projections-dashboard>> accessed 18 July 2026.

¹⁰ Ibid.

As well as industries that employ a large number of people, the Victorian Government identifies industries that are ‘new and emerging’ as in-demand.¹¹ This includes priority sectors outlined in the Government’s *Economic Growth Statement*, which are ‘the backbone of Victoria’s economy and focus for future growth’, namely:

- advanced manufacturing and defence
- health technologies and medical research
- circular economy
- digital technologies
- agribusiness.¹²

In its submission to the Inquiry, the Victorian Government explains that ‘[i]nvestment and growth in these sectors will change workforce needs, increasing demand for some existing occupations and creating demand for emerging roles and skills’.¹³ Many of these priority sectors are a part of other in-demand industries referred to in this report. Therefore, advanced manufacturing is referred to as part of manufacturing; health technologies and medical research as part of health care and social assistance; digital technologies as part of professional, scientific and technical services; and agribusiness as part of agriculture, forestry and fishing. The clean and circular economy is referred to as an industry by itself, although it can be seen to span various sectors.

In framing this report, the Committee considered the industries discussed below, based on workforce size, projected growth in new workers, stakeholder evidence, and alignment with the Victorian Government’s priority sectors. However, the Committee intends that its findings and recommendations are broadly applicable, including to other in-demand and emerging industries.

Health care and social assistance

Victoria’s health care and social assistance industry comprises 595,000 workers (15.8% of the workforce).¹⁴ Of these, 30% have VET qualifications and 56% higher education qualifications.¹⁵ The Victorian Skills Authority expects 90,000 new workers over three years and 363,000 over a decade.¹⁶ Roles most in-demand include:

- aged and disabled carers
- registered nurses

¹¹ Victorian Government, *Submission 136*, p. 9.

¹² Department of Treasury and Finance, *Economic Growth Statement: Victoria: Open for Business*, Victorian Government, Melbourne, 2024, p. 10.

¹³ Victorian Government, *Submission 136*, p. 9.

¹⁴ Victorian Skills Authority, *Employment projections dashboard 2025–2035*, 12 January 2026, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/employment-projections-dashboard>> accessed 18 July 2026.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

- receptionists
- nursing support and personal care workers
- child carers.¹⁷

The Victorian Government's submission also highlights growth in the health technologies and medical research sectors—for example, clinical project managers, medical technicians, and engineers.¹⁸ The Committee received significant evidence from stakeholders within the health care and social assistance industry, including workers and organisations representing nurses, midwives, pharmacists, allied health professionals, and students studying to enter the industry.¹⁹

Construction

Construction employs 349,000 workers (9.3% of the Victorian workforce).²⁰ A majority (53%) hold VET qualifications and 15% have higher education qualifications.²¹ The Victorian Skills Authority expects 65,000 new workers over the next three years and 162,000 over the next decade.²² The top occupations for new workers are:

- carpenters and joiners
- construction managers
- plumbers
- electricians.²³

Demand for painting trades workers is also expected to grow over the next decade.²⁴ The Committee received substantial evidence from unions and industry groups within these sectors.

¹⁷ Victorian Skills Authority, *Employment projections dashboard 2025–2035*, 12 January 2026, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/employment-projections-dashboard>> accessed 18 July 2026.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ See, for example, Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF), *Submission 14*; Advanced Pharmacy Australia, *Submission 57*; Bendigo Association of Pharmacy Students, *Submission 60*; Victorian Pharmacy Students' Association, *Submission 61*; Australian Association of Psychologists, *Submission 63*; National Australian Pharmacy Students' Association, *Submission 69*; Victorian Allied Health Professionals Association, *Submission 82*; The Pharmacy Guild of Australia, Victoria Branch, *Submission 128*.

²⁰ Victorian Skills Authority, *Employment projections dashboard 2025–2035*, 12 January 2026, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/employment-projections-dashboard>> accessed 18 July 2026.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

Professional, scientific and technical services

The professional, scientific and technical services industry comprises businesses that sell specialised expertise. It employs 380,000 workers, which comprises 10.1% of the Victorian workforce.²⁵ Of these, 16% have VET qualifications and 72% higher education qualifications.²⁶ The Victorian Skills Authority predicts 35,900 new workers over three years and 136,000 over a decade.²⁷ The most in-demand occupations for new workers over this time will be:

- software and applications programmer
- architect and landscape architect
- civil engineering professional
- solicitor
- ICT manager.²⁸

In line with its *Economic Growth Statement*, the Victorian Government identifies digital technologies (including Victoria's information and communications technology industry) as a key in-demand industry, with growing demand for skills in data, analytics, cyber security, cloud computing, artificial intelligence, machine learning, and quantum technologies.²⁹ Other stakeholders participating in this Inquiry emphasised the importance of artificial intelligence as an industry in itself.³⁰

Education and training

Education and training employs 339,000 workers or 9% of the Victorian workforce.³¹ 18% of these employees have VET qualifications and 71% have higher education qualifications. The Victorian Skills Authority expects modest growth in the next three years: 31,200 workers will enter the workforce, largely to replace retiring workers.³² It predicts stronger growth over the next decade (139,000 new workers), especially for primary and secondary school teachers and university lecturers and tutors.³³

²⁵ Victorian Skills Authority, *Employment projections dashboard 2025–2035*, 12 January 2026, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/employment-projections-dashboard>> accessed 18 July 2026.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Victorian Government, *Submission 136*, p. 9.

³⁰ See, for example, Dilan Jayasekara, *Submission 138*, pp. 1–2; Future Skills Organisation, *Submission 96*, p. 11, Federation University, *Submission 100*, p. 2.

³¹ Victorian Skills Authority, *Employment projections dashboard 2025–2035*, 12 January 2026, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/employment-projections-dashboard>> accessed 18 July 2026.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

Agriculture, forestry and fishing

Victoria's agriculture, forestry and fishing industry employs 72,000 workers or 1.9% of the workforce.³⁴ Of these workers, 34% hold VET qualifications and 17% hold higher education qualifications. Livestock farmers, and crop farmers and farm workers are expected to have the highest number of new workers over the decade. Although the industry is expected to experience a decline in the total number of workers in the next decade, it is expected to employ a large number of workers over the next three years (5,400) and in the next decade (20,200).³⁵ Therefore, it is significant to Victoria's regional workforce, with over 75% of agricultural jobs located in regional Victoria.³⁶ In accordance with its *Economic Growth Statement*, the Victorian Government emphasises the importance of agribusiness in particular³⁷—a priority sector encompassing the commercial, technological and logistics dimensions of farming.³⁸ As well as evidence from the Government, the Committee received evidence from the industry itself.³⁹

Clean economy

In line with the *Economic Growth Statement* and *Victorian Industry Policy*, the Government identifies 'clean economy' as an in-demand industry, comprising jobs and skills needed to facilitate Victoria's transition to net zero emissions.⁴⁰ This includes jobs in energy retailing, residential electrification, rooftop solar and household battery.⁴¹ It also includes existing jobs such as electricians, plumbers and engineers, which will need to evolve to meet the needs of this transition.⁴² The Victorian Skills Authority does not collect data relating to the clean economy as an industry in itself, and jobs within the sector exist across several industry classifications. However, given its increasing importance to the Victorian economy, the clean economy can be referred to as a new and emerging in-demand industry in itself.⁴³

³⁴ Victorian Skills Authority, *Employment projections dashboard 2025–2035*, 12 January 2026, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/employment-projections-dashboard>> accessed 18 July 2026.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Victorian Government, *Growing jobs in regional Victoria*, 17 January 2026, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/victorian-skills-plan-2022-publication/growing-jobs-in-regional-victoria>> accessed 7 August 2026.

³⁷ Victorian Government, *Submission 136*, p. 10.

³⁸ Victorian Skills Authority, *Agriculture, horticulture and agribusiness*, 2 April 2025, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/skills-agriculture-horticulture-agribusiness>> accessed 19 January 2026.

³⁹ See, for example, Primary Industries Education Foundation Australia (PIEFA), *Submission 19*; Timboon Agricultural Project (TAP), *Submission 28*; Australian Chicken Meat Federation, *Submission 70*.

⁴⁰ Victorian Government, *Submission 136*, pp. 10–11.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 5.

Manufacturing

The manufacturing industry in Victoria employs 275,000 workers, making up 7.3% of the workforce.⁴⁴ The Victorian Skills Authority projects a net decline of more than 6,000 workers over the next decade, with 52,000 new workers largely expected to replace retirees. The Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU) notes that, after decades of decline, the sector recorded a 9.1% increase in employment across Australia between 2014 and 2024.⁴⁵ The Victorian Government is prioritising advanced manufacturing, which consists of:

- basic chemical manufacturing
- transport equipment manufacturing
- machinery and equipment manufacturing.⁴⁶

The Government's submission states Victoria is turning to 'advanced manufacturing to further its economic growth and retain global competitiveness', and as such 'the skills needs of the manufacturing workforce are changing'.⁴⁷ Workers will require skills in robotics and automation, additive manufacturing, the Internet of Things, and sensor technology.⁴⁸ The AMWU emphasises that 'this growth will stall without urgent investment in workforce development and trade training'.⁴⁹

Transport, postal and warehousing

Victoria's transport, postal and warehousing industry employs 199,000 workers or 5.3% of the workforce.⁵⁰ Of these workers, 32% have VET qualifications and 26% higher education qualifications.⁵¹ The Victorian Skills Authority projects 19,300 new workers will join the industry over three years and 86,000 over a decade.⁵² Many of these workers will become:

- truck drivers
- automobile drivers
- store persons
- delivery drivers
- bus and coach drivers.⁵³

⁴⁴ Victorian Skills Authority, *Employment projections dashboard*, 12 January 2026, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/employment-projections-dashboard>> accessed 15 July 2026.

⁴⁵ Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU), *Submission 27*, p. 2.

⁴⁶ Victorian Government, *Submission 136*, p. 10.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU), *Submission 27*, p. 2.

⁵⁰ Victorian Skills Authority, *Employment projections dashboard 2025–2035*, 12 January 2026, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/employment-projections-dashboard>> accessed 15 July 2026.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

The transport, postal and warehousing industry also includes the aviation sector.

FINDING 1: Victoria faces growing demand for workers in major employing industries such as health care and social assistance, construction, education, and transport, alongside new and emerging industries including advanced manufacturing, digital technologies and the clean economy.

1.1.2 Regional Victoria faces unique labour market challenges

Regional Victorians make up a sizeable portion of the state's workforce. Of the 3.7 million workers employed in Victoria, 772,000 (21%) are from regional areas.⁵⁴ Whereas in metropolitan Victoria a greater percentage of workers have higher education than VET qualifications, the opposite is true in regional areas.⁵⁵

Despite this, workforce demand in regional Victoria is similar to statewide demand, with health care and social assistance, construction and education expected to induct the highest number of new workers in the next decade.⁵⁶ A smaller number of new workers are expected to enter the professional, scientific and technical services and retail trade industries, with more expected in the agriculture and accommodation and food industries.⁵⁷

In terms of occupations, the top three projections reflect statewide demand, albeit in a different order. Aged and disabled carers are by far the highest in demand, followed by registered nurses and sales assistants (general). Reflecting regional contexts, the fourth highest projected occupation for new workers over the next decade is livestock farmers, with a projected 8,100 new workers between 2025 and 2035.⁵⁸

1.1.3 More workers will require a post-secondary qualification

To meet the changing needs of the Victorian economy, the Victorian Skills Authority predicts around 87% of new workers in the next decade will require a VET or higher education qualification.⁵⁹ Almost half (49%) are expected to enter occupations aligned with a VET qualification, and nearly two in five (38%) occupations aligned with a higher education qualification.⁶⁰

Table 1.1 shows that between 2025 and 2035, many in-demand occupations will require a VET qualification, particularly in health care and social assistance and construction.

⁵⁴ Victorian Skills Authority, *Employment Projections Dashboard 2025–2035*, 12 January 2026, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/employment-projections-dashboard>> accessed 15 July 2026.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Victorian Government, *Snapshot of the Victorian labour market 2025, 2025*, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2026-01/snapshot-of-the-victorian-labour-market-2025.pdf>> accessed 17 June 2026.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Other occupations will require a higher education qualification. Occupations requiring a VET qualification are shaded orange, occupations requiring a higher education qualification are shaded yellow, and occupations requiring neither are not shaded.

Table 1.1 Number of new workers expected in Victoria between 2025 and 2035 by occupation

Top five industries	Top five occupations				
Health care and social assistance	Aged and disability carers (62,000)	Registered nurses (42,100)	Receptionists (19,700)	Nursing support and personal care workers (16,900)	Child carers (14,000)
Construction	Carpenters and joiners (17,600)	Construction managers (14,100)	Plumbers (12,000)	Electricians (11,300)	Painting trades workers (9,000)
Professional, scientific and technical services	Software and applications programmers (13,500)	Accountants (8,600)	Solicitors (5,500)	Architects and landscape architects (5,400)	Civil engineering professionals (5,300)
Education and training	Primary school teachers (28,100)	Secondary school teachers (23,900)	University lecturers and tutors (9,400)	Education aides (7,700)	General clerks (5,500)
Retail trade	Sales assistants (general) (34,100)	Retail managers (13,300)	Storepersons (6,300)	Purchasing and supply logistics clerks (3,600)	Pharmacy sales assistants (3,100)

Source: Victorian Skills Authority, *Employment projections dashboard 2025–2035*, 12 January 2026, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/employment-projections-dashboard>> accessed 19 January 2026.

Stakeholders told the Committee that, despite the increasing need for workers with a VET qualification, negative perceptions of VET lead many young people to prefer higher education.⁶¹ One reason for this identified in Chapter 2 is that there are gaps in accurate labour market information for both students and parents. The Victorian Government attempted to address this issue through senior secondary pathways reforms, including the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) Vocational Major (VM), which replaced the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning, and the Victorian Pathways Certificate (VPC), alongside VET delivered to secondary schools (VETDSS), school-based apprenticeships and traineeships (SBATs) and the Government's Head Start program.⁶²

⁶¹ See, for example, Tony Bates, Secretary, Department of Education, public hearing, Melbourne 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 6–7; Shanay Gao-Kuhlmann, public hearing, Melbourne, 21 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 5–6; Hiwan, student, public hearing, Melbourne, 28 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 10.

⁶² Victorian Government, *About the VCE Vocational Major*, 2 July 2024, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/about-the-vce-vocational-major>> accessed 27 May 2026; Victorian Government, *About the Victorian Pathways Certificate*, 22 May 2024, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/about-the-victorian-pathways-certificate>> accessed 27 May 2026; Victorian Government, *Senior secondary schooling pathway reforms*, 9 May 2024, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/senior-secondary-schooling-pathway-reforms>> accessed 27 May 2026.

The Committee acknowledges the Government's reforms implemented in the last few years aim to improve student uptake of VET in government secondary schools. However, the Committee heard throughout the Inquiry that not all government school students have access to the new VCE VM and VPC pathways, VETDSS, or SBATs. It also heard that there is room for the Government to address structural issues within VET and higher education that result in some students being unable to complete their post-secondary qualifications. These pressures highlight the importance of ensuring students are supported to access and complete the post-secondary qualifications increasingly required across in-demand industries. Considering these findings, the Committee makes a number of recommendations in Chapter 3 about reforming student pathways to better align with the workforce needs of in-demand industries.

FINDING 2: Most new workers entering Victoria's labour market over the next decade will require a post-secondary qualification, including a vocational education and training (VET) qualification, to meet demand in key growth industries.

1.2 Student pathways in a changing economy

To help futureproof the Victorian workforce, students need pathways and career guidance that are properly suited to the needs of the changing economy. Despite recent reforms, concern about the future of the Australian workforce has not diminished. Students require improved career education to align their knowledge, skills and attributes with the state's most in-demand industries.

1.2.1 Inconsistent career education delivery

The Committee heard consistently throughout the Inquiry that 'you can't be what you can't see', highlighting the importance of career education for encouraging and supporting students into in-demand industries. Career education refers to 'a planned program of learning experiences designed to help students make informed decisions about their future, including career paths, education, and training options'.⁶³ The Victorian Government explains that '[c]areer education helps students learn about themselves and their options. It includes learning about themselves and the world of work, exploring, trying things out and planning for the next stage in their journey'.⁶⁴

⁶³ Australian Centre for Career Education, *Submission 93*, p. 4.

⁶⁴ Victorian Government, *Senior secondary pathways reform*, 12 June 2026, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/senior-secondary-pathways-reform>> accessed 15 July 2026.

In 2023, the Government introduced several initiatives to improve career education in government schools.⁶⁵ These initiatives were based on the principles of starting early, engaging with workplaces, and making career development a priority.⁶⁶ They included:

- funding for schools to implement career education activities, including career action plans and course and career counselling for all students before completing Year 12⁶⁷
- access for all year 9 students to the Morrisby online career discovery tool and analysis by a career practitioner⁶⁸
- industry engagement for priority cohorts such as First Nations students and students with a disability⁶⁹
- study grants to upskill career practitioners.⁷⁰

While there is no standalone career education subject in the Victorian curriculum, schools can integrate career education into their teaching and learning programs using the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority's Career Education Framework.⁷¹ The Framework is aligned with the Victorian Curriculum F-10 and specifies what students need to learn, what schools can do and what resources are available for teachers.⁷² Victorian independent schools also provide career education for students but there are no specific guidelines or activities they must follow.

Despite recent initiatives aimed at improving career education, the Committee received evidence that not all Victorian school students have adequate access to it. The Victorian Government also focused on reducing schools' administrative burden around work experience, getting more students from disadvantaged cohorts participating, and partnering with industry to offer more placements in clean energy and other priority industries.⁷³ However, issues persist with career education in Victorian schools, limiting students' knowledge of and access to already existing pathways to in-demand industries. The Committee makes specific recommendations for addressing these issues in Chapter 2 of this report.

65 Victorian Government, *Senior secondary pathways reform*, 12 June 2026, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/senior-secondary-pathways-reform>> accessed 15 July 2026.

66 Ibid.

67 Victorian Government, *Career education funding*, 2 June 2026, <<https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/career-education-funding/policy>> accessed 19 July 2026.

68 Victorian Government, *Career pathways and course exploration with your child*, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/career-and-course-exploration-your-child#year-9-%E2%80%93-10>> accessed 19 July 2026.

69 Victorian Government, *Career education equity and support*, 12 August 2026, <<https://www.schools.vic.gov.au/career-education/equity-support>> accessed 12 August 2026.

70 Victorian Government, *Senior secondary pathways reform*, 12 June 2026, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/senior-secondary-pathways-reform>> accessed 15 July 2026.

71 Victorian Government, *Career education in the curriculum*, 1 March 2024, <<https://www.schools.vic.gov.au/career-education/curriculum>> accessed 12 July 2026.

72 Ibid.

73 Victorian Government, *Submission 136*, p. 24.

1.2.2 Disadvantaged and underrepresented cohorts

The Committee heard not all Victorians have equal access to the guidance and pathways needed to pursue careers in in-demand industries. Certain student and worker cohorts require additional support to enter and participate in these industries. In particular, submitters and witnesses identified the following disadvantaged and underrepresented groups:

- regional Victorians
- girls and women in male-dominated industries
- people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities
- First Nations people
- people with disability.

In Chapter 4, this report explores the barriers these groups face in greater detail. It sets out recommendations for how the Government, educational institutions, and industry can provide more targeted and effective support to enable their participation in in-demand industries.

1.3 Research on workforce and future skills needs

There is a growing national discussion about how Australia can better prepare its workforce for the future needs of the labour market. Several academic papers have examined how young people perceive vocational education and found that its low standing—driven by limited understanding about its usefulness—contributed to students favouring university degrees, creating skill shortages in some occupations.⁷⁴ These studies also found that interactions with parents, teachers and peers play a central role in young people's decision-making, and schools and governments need to better engage and inform young people about the value of vocational education as a post-school pathway.⁷⁵ Recent government reports and parliamentary inquiries have also considered these issues, as outlined below.

⁷⁴ See, for example, Stephen Billett, Sarojni Choy, Anh Hai Le and Steven Hodge, 'Vocational education teachers: perspectives on the standing of their educational sector and how it might be improved', *International Journal of Training Research*, doi: 10.1080/14480220.2022.2081240; Stephen Billett, Sarojni Choy and Steven Hodge, 'Enhancing the standing of vocational education and the occupations it serves: Australia', *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, 2020, doi: 10.1080/13636820.2020.1751247; Sarojni Choy, Darryl Dymock, Anh Hai Le and Stephen Billett, 'Understanding student decision-making about VET as a pathway: an Australian study', *International Journal of Training Research*, 2020, doi: 10.1080/14480220.2020.1860302.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

1.3.1 Inquiry into building a skilled and adaptable workforce

In 2024, the Australian Treasurer requested the Productivity Commission conduct inquiries to identify priority reforms under each of the five pillars of the Australian Government's productivity growth agenda.⁷⁶ One of these inquiries was into building a skilled and adaptable workforce. In its 2025 final report, the Productivity Commission made recommendations that focussed on four key policy reform areas, including boosting work-related training to build skills and adaptability.⁷⁷ Recommendations also included improving the recognition of work-related training and piloting co-funded training vouchers and advisory supports to encourage small and medium enterprises to increase work-related training.

1.3.2 Inquiry into the perceptions and status of vocational education and training

Also in 2024, the House of Representatives' Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training completed an inquiry into how VET is perceived by students, employers, parents and other stakeholders. It found that many people hold negative perceptions of VET and instead believe that university is the key to professional success.⁷⁸ It also found that readily available information about VET and the marketing of VET pathways are insufficient and that apprentices often need more support to complete their qualifications. It made 34 recommendations to address the negative perceptions of VET and how to enhance quality and accessibility.

1.3.3 White paper on jobs and opportunities

In 2023, the Australian Government released a white paper on the future of the Australian labour market.⁷⁹ Part of this white paper considered how to address skills shortages and proactively build the future workforce.⁸⁰ It reported that by 2033, job growth would be greatest in the digital and technology, care and support, and clean energy industries and 9 out of 10 new jobs expected to be created will require a post-secondary qualification.⁸¹ It stated that students need effective school education to pursue study in areas with high skills need and greater support if they are facing disadvantage. In addition, it encouraged more collaboration between higher education, vocational education, industry and governments.⁸²

⁷⁶ Australian Government, Productivity Commission, *Five pillars of productivity inquiries*, 2026, <<https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries-and-research/five-productivity-inquiries>> accessed 18 February 2026.

⁷⁷ Australian Government, Productivity Commission, *Building a skilled and adaptable workforce*, Canberra, 2025.

⁷⁸ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *Shared vision, equal pathways: inquiry into the perceptions and status of vocational education and training*, Canberra, February 2024, p. vii.

⁷⁹ Australian Government, *Working future: the Australian Government's white paper on jobs and opportunities*, Canberra, 2023.

⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 97–138.

⁸¹ Ibid., pp. ix–xi.

⁸² Ibid.

1.3.4 Inquiry into career advice activities in Victorian schools

The Parliament of Victoria's Economic, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee completed its Inquiry into career advice activities in Victorian schools in 2018.⁸³ The Committee found that:

- school career development was not meeting the needs of Victorian students
- delivery of career development was inconsistent across schools
- employers were concerned that career advice often did not reflect the nature of their industries and the reality of the labour market.⁸⁴

The Committee recommended providing schools and Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) with more resources and career practitioners, providing tailored career services to students and increasing their exposure to workplaces, VET and tertiary education before they leave school.⁸⁵ In its response, the Victorian Government stated it supported all 46 of the Committee's recommendations in full or in principle and explained it would implement a suite of reforms responding directly to the recommendations.⁸⁶ These included:

- helping teachers embed career education in their teaching programs
- giving schools dedicated career education funding
- providing career practitioners grants to complete a graduate certificate in career development
- investing in the delivery of VET and the Head Start program which supports students to complete school-based apprenticeships or traineeships.

Despite improvements, many of the issues present in that inquiry persist and are addressed again in this report.

1.3.5 Inquiry into school to work transition

In 2018, the House of Representatives' Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training completed an inquiry into how students are supported from school into work.⁸⁷ It found that there was a poor perception of VET pathways and that more could be done to improve the transition process, especially for disadvantaged students.⁸⁸ It recommended better industry engagement with schools, better marketing

⁸³ Parliament of Victoria, Economic, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee, *Inquiry into career advice activities in Victorian schools*, Melbourne, August 2018.

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 27–47.

⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 65, 72, 142.

⁸⁶ Victorian Government, *Response to the Parliament of Victoria, Economic, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee, Inquiry into career advice activities in Victorian schools*, Melbourne, 21 February 2019, p. 1.

⁸⁷ Parliament of Australia, *Inquiry into school to work transition*, n.d., <https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Former_Committees/Employment_Education_and_Training/School_to_WorkTransition> accessed 18 February 2026.

⁸⁸ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *Unique individuals, broad skills: inquiry into school to work transition*, Canberra, May 2018.

of apprenticeships and traineeships, support for trades training in schools, and the development of a national career education framework or strategy.⁸⁹ In 2024, the Australian Government noted these recommendations but did not provide a substantive response to the Committee's report.⁹⁰

1.4 Scope of the Inquiry

The Inquiry's Terms of reference required the Committee to examine how students can be more effectively supported into jobs in in-demand industries, including through improved pathways and better advice. As explained above, the Committee defines 'in-demand industries' as industries that employ a large number of people in Victoria, with specific reference to anticipated employment growth in the coming decade, as well as new and emerging industries.

In this report, the Committee considers both academic and vocational pathways. It focusses on senior secondary and tertiary pathways, particularly in government secondary schools, universities, TAFEs, and independent and not-for-profit Registered Training Organisations (RTOs). However, it notes that students' career decisions are influenced from as early as primary school, and that career education should also extend to primary school students. It also notes the importance of lifelong learning and the need for Victorians to upskill and reskill throughout their working lives so they can meet the evolving needs of the state's economy.

1.4.1 Other initiatives during this Inquiry

While this Committee was conducting this Inquiry, multiple reviews related to this topic were conducted and the Victorian Government introduced changes relevant to student pathways' government programs.

The *Independent Review of the Victorian Public Service Final Report* (the Silver Review), commissioned by the Government, and released in June 2025, provided some recommendations on how to improve TAFE effectiveness.⁹¹ These recommendations included:

- mandate and accelerate shared service reforms across the TAFE sector over the next three to four years
- consider TAFE consolidation opportunities
- develop and implement a long-term asset strategy to sell under-utilised TAFE assets.⁹²

⁸⁹ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *Unique individuals, broad skills: inquiry into school to work transition*, Canberra, May 2018.

⁹⁰ Australian Government, *Response to the Parliament of Victoria House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment Education and Training, Inquiry into school to work transition*, Canberra, 16 May 2024, p. 1.

⁹¹ Helen Silver AO, *Independent review of the Victorian public service final report*, Melbourne, June 2025, p. 109.

⁹² Ibid.

In addition, the review indicated that the Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) model ‘appears to be inefficient and ineffective, with only a small proportion of all placements in work-based learning opportunities being the result of LLENs’ work.’⁹³ For this reason, the report recommended ceasing the current LLENs model.⁹⁴

While the Government has continued to deliver the program,⁹⁵ a separate review was conducted by the Department of Education, and the School to Work program will change its structure and delivery in 2027.⁹⁶ LLENs are discussed in detail in Chapters 2 and 3.

In May 2026, the Victoria Auditor-General’s Office (VAGO) released a report on whether the Free TAFE initiative provides training for priority skills and delivers benefits to Victorians. The report identified strengths and weaknesses of the program. More information is provided in Chapter 3. Despite the issues identified by VAGO, the Government continues to support the Free TAFE initiative. In the 2026–27 State Budget, the Government committed \$459.4 million for Skills and TAFE to keep building a training system that delivers essential skills to the most in-demand sectors.⁹⁷

The Committee noted the changes implemented by the Government and the findings and recommendations made by the independent reviews in relation to student pathways initiatives. This information was considered by the Committee when making recommendations to the Government in this report.

1.5 Inquiry process

The Committee called for submissions to this Inquiry on 10 June 2025 by writing directly to over 280 stakeholders and advertising the Inquiry on LinkedIn, X, YouTube, Facebook and Instagram. It received 141 submissions, including from industry groups and unions, educational institutions, and organisations representing school staff, students and their families.

Between November 2025 and March 2026, the Committee also held seven days of public hearings. Three of these were held in Melbourne, two online, one in Warrnambool, and one in Geelong. A variety of stakeholders presented to the Committee, including the Victorian Government, career practitioners, TAFEs, universities, unions, school principals, students, and organisations representing disadvantaged and underrepresented cohorts.

Youth Associates supported this Inquiry by conducting their own peer interviews, with a final report presented at a Youth Associate panel hearing.

⁹³ Helen Silver AO, *Independent review of the Victorian public service final report*, Melbourne, June 2025, p. 112.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Victorian Government, *School to Work*, 15 May 2026, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/school-to-work>> accessed 18 June 2026.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions, *2026 to 2027 Victorian state budget released*, media release, Victorian Government, Melbourne, 9 May 2026.

Individuals and organisations who made submissions to the Inquiry, as well as those who gave evidence at public hearings, are listed in Appendix A. Submissions and public hearing transcripts can be found on the Committee's website.

1.5.1 The Committee actively consulted young people in this Inquiry

Given the focus of the Inquiry, the Committee ensured that the voices of young people were heard. Through the submissions and hearings processes, the Committee received evidence from school, higher education and VET students, as well as young workers.

Committee members also nominated young people between the ages of 18 and 25 to become Committee Youth Associates. Chosen from members' electorates, these young people needed to meet certain criteria, including having strong communication and facilitation skills, as well as the ability to complete consultations and reporting. Additional Youth Associates were recommended by Parliament's Community Engagement Unit to help ensure a diverse range of backgrounds and perspectives were represented.

These Youth Associates each consulted between 20 and 30 young people using questions provided by the Committee Secretariat. Each Youth Associate produced a written report summarising their consultations, highlighting key issues and suggestions for change, and presented their findings to the Committee at a public roundtable held at Parliament House. Through this process, the Committee was able to hear a variety of young people's perspectives, including young regional Victorians, First Nations young people, and young people with disability.

The Youth Associates described the experience as a meaningful opportunity to ensure young people's voices informed parliamentary decision-making. As Youth Associate Matilda Ryan reflected, 'I think it's really important for young people to be here in Parliament speaking directly with MPs who are making decisions on our behalf'.⁹⁸

Another participant, Atharva Nerlikar, said the experience was 'really reassuring because I got to understand how parliamentary inquiries work and I found it really comforting that MPs listen to student voices and youth voices as much as all the voices of the experts as well'.⁹⁹

The Youth Associates program complemented the formal evidence received through submissions and public hearings by providing direct insight into the experiences of young Victorians as they navigate education, training and employment pathways.

It also demonstrated the value of participatory approaches to parliamentary inquiries, enabling the Committee to hear from young people in their own words and ensuring their lived experience informed the Committee findings and recommendations.

⁹⁸ Parliament of Victoria, *Inquiry into student pathways to in-demand industries*, n.d., <<https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/jobpathwaysinquiry>> accessed 31 July 2026.

⁹⁹ Ibid.



Youth Associates discussing student pathways to in-demand industries at the roundtable.



Committee members listening to Youth Associates' perspectives on student pathways to in-demand industries.



Youth Associates and Committee members after the roundtable.

The Youth Associates reports and a transcript of the roundtable can be read on the Committee's website. A recording of the roundtable¹⁰⁰ can also be viewed on the Parliament of Victoria's YouTube channel.

1.6 Report outline

This report consists of four chapters:

- Chapter 1 introduced the Inquiry by identifying key in-demand industries in Victoria. It provides an overview of the qualification and skills required by the current and future workforce and outlines the Inquiry's scope and process.
- Chapter 2 examines the effectiveness of career education in Victorian schools. It discusses some of the ongoing challenges, including the shortage of qualified career practitioners. It also explores the influence of parental guidance and negative perceptions of education and career pathways on students' decisions. The Committee's recommendations aim to improve career guidance and encourage more students to pursue pathways into industries experiencing workforce shortages.
- Chapter 3 provides an overview of the current vocational education and training (VET) landscape in Victoria. It identifies key strengths, challenges and opportunities for reform. It also explores the impact of recent reforms, various barriers to participation, and the role of TAFE, Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) and

¹⁰⁰ Parliament of Victoria, *Inquiry into student pathways to in-demand industries*, n.d., <<https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/get-involved/inquiries/jobpathwaysinquiry/hearings>> accessed 31 July 2026.

higher education providers in supporting workforce needs. The Committee makes recommendations for further action to increase participation in VET and ensure the system responds effectively to the needs of a changing economy.

- Chapter 4 highlights the disadvantage faced by certain groups of students accessing pathways to in-demand industries, including regional students, First Nations students, students with disability and female students seeking to work in male-dominated industries, and recommends providing tailored support to these students to enable and encourage their participation.

Chapter 2

Improving career education for all students

Throughout this Inquiry, stakeholders emphasised the importance of career education in exposing school students to a range of industries and supporting them to pursue pathways to in-demand industries.

Career education helps students build their knowledge, skills and attitudes through a planned program of learning experiences in education and training settings. This is part of a broader process of career development, which involves managing life, learning, work, leisure and transitions to move towards a personally determined future. Good career education supports young people to make informed decisions about their life, learning and work options and to participate effectively in working life.¹

Despite strong labour market demand across the industries identified in Chapter 1, most students still choose from a narrow group of options—including medicine, teaching—even though the economy needs workers in a much broader range of roles.² This gap highlights the importance of strengthening career education so students can explore a wider variety of occupations, including those in industries facing critical skills shortages. Ensuring students' decisions align more closely with Victoria's most in-demand industries is essential for supporting both individual career success and the future capability of the state's workforce.

This Chapter discusses how career education is delivered in Victorian schools and the challenges students face in accessing career practitioners. This Chapter analyses the persistent negative perceptions of vocational education and training and how this perception is affecting the number of students enrolling in vocational education and training. In particular, this Chapter discusses the crucial role of parents in guiding children on their career choices and the importance of involving them in career education. This Chapter also looks at the importance of age-appropriate and lifelong learning in in-demand industries.

¹ National Careers Institute, *The Australian blueprint for career development*, Canberra, 2022, pp. 31–2.

² Loddon Mallee Local Learning and Employment Network, *Submission 54*, p. 6.

2.1 Career education in schools is delivered in a variety of ways

The Victorian Government considers career education a core component of secondary schooling.³ To support its delivery, the Government provides funding for schools to employ career practitioners and to deliver a planned program of career education activities centred around four main elements:

- career action planning
- My Career Insights career profiling
- work-based learning
- career counselling.⁴

Each component plays a different role in helping students understand themselves, explore their options and make informed decisions about future study and work.

2.1.1 Career action plans

Career action plans are student-owned documents that help students reflect on their motivations and strengths, set goals and identify the steps they need to take to reach them. Schools are required to support students in Years 9 to 12 to create and update their career action plans each year, with the option to start earlier from Year 7. The aim is to build students' knowledge, skills, attitudes and confidence to manage their careers over time.⁵

2.1.2 My Career Insights

The Government describes My Career Insights as a 'world leading' program that helps students identify potential career paths.⁶ In Year 9, students complete a series of quizzes, through access to the Morrisby online career education tool. The outcomes of these quizzes generate a personalised profile of the students' strengths and interests and suggest career and study options. After taking the quiz, students meet with a career consultant from the Australian Centre for Career Education (ACCE)—a not-for-profit organisation that provides and advocates for career education—to interpret their results and discuss possible pathways. Students are encouraged to use this profile to update their career action plan and make informed choices about senior secondary pathways.⁷ The Government is also piloting an Enhanced My Career Insights

³ Victorian Government, *Submission 136*, p. 20.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Victorian Government, *Career action plans*, 1 March 2024, <<https://www.schools.vic.gov.au/career-education/action-plans>> accessed 3 February 2026.

⁶ Tony Bates, Secretary, Department of Education, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

⁷ Victorian Government, *My Career Insights*, 6 May 2026, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/my-career-insights>> accessed 24 July 2026.

program to provide tailored support for certain cohorts including First Nations students and students with disability.⁸

2.1.3 Work-based learning

Work-based learning gives students real-world exposure in different industries. Common activities include:

- work experience
- vocational tasters
- structured workplace learning
- school-based apprenticeships and traineeships.

These activities improve student motivation, strengthen their willingness to learn, familiarise young people with the types of skills industry needs and help keep students from disadvantaged groups engaged in education.⁹

The Government's School to Work program funds Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs), which are independent organisations, to connect schools with local employers and industries and improve students' access to work-based learning opportunities.¹⁰

The Committee discusses the current work-based learning options and makes recommendations to improve the current system in Chapter 3.

2.1.4 Career counselling

Career counselling involves informed, supportive and intentional conversations between students and qualified career practitioners about education, training and employment options.¹¹ As part of the My Career Insights program, all participating students receive a one-on-one counselling session with an external career practitioner. Students from certain disadvantaged backgrounds may access additional counselling sessions through the Enhanced My Career Insights program. In addition to external support, many students receive advice from their school's own career practitioner or other staff involved in course selection and pathway planning.

Table 2.1 summarises career education activities provided in Victorian government secondary schools.

⁸ Australian Centre for Career Education, *Enhanced My Career Insights (ECMI) Program*, 2025, <<https://acce.org.au/services/my-career-insights/enhanced-my-career-insights>> accessed 3 February 2026.

⁹ Victorian Government, *Submission 136*, pp. 23–4.

¹⁰ Victorian Government, *School to Work*, 2023, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/school-to-work>> accessed 4 February 2026.

¹¹ Victorian Government, *Career counselling*, 26 June 2026, <<https://www.schools.vic.gov.au/career-education/counselling>> accessed 4 February 2026.

Table 2.1 Overview of career education activities in a government schools

Stage	Description	Career education activities
Years 7 and 8: Discover self	Students self-assess and identify interests, passions, strengths and aspirations	• Self-assessment activities • Career education lessons • Tailored discussions about pathways and aspirations • Excursions and incursions with local employers • Career Action Plan drafting
Years 9 and 10: Explore opportunities	Students explore their horizons, learn about areas of interest and try out experiences	• My Career Insights program – Morrisby online career diagnostic assessment – One-on-one session with career practitioner • Vocational tasters • Work experience • Engagement with tertiary education providers • Career Action Plan updating
Years 11 and 12: Pursue pathways	Students build skills, confidence and networks to help them pursue suitable pathways	• Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), VCE Vocational Major (VM) or Victorian Pathways Certificate (VPC) • Continued engagement with tertiary education providers • Researching post-school options • Targeted pathways guidance including: – revisiting Morrisby profile – researching labour market information • Guidance from alumni • Higher Education Studies Program • Targeted pastoral care and continued work-based learning • Transition support • Choosing VCE units and vocational education and training (VET) and school-based apprenticeship and traineeship courses • For VCE VM students, the Work Related Skills unit

Source: Victorian Government, *Submission 136*, pp. 15–19.

Stakeholders discussed students' career development journeys during the inquiry. Case Study 2.1 below provides a case study illustrating how the journey might look in practice.

Case Study 2.1 Example of a secondary student's career education journey

“ I have just got a little case study here of a student, Amir, in the south-eastern suburbs of Melbourne. In year 7 and 8 Amir starts to think about what interests him and discusses that with his teacher. In year 9 he has an individualised assessment through My Career Insights, followed by an appointment with a specialised career adviser. This helps him set his sights on a career in the health sector. His school partners with the Monash Tech School, where he gains exposure to a cutting-edge STEM program through the Superhealth program at the Monash Tech School. He can then try a vocational taster program at Holmesglen TAFE and get some work experience at Austin Health.

During year 11 and 12 he can enrol in a VET course at Certificate II or III level and can also choose VCE subjects aligned with his interests in the health area. This prepares Amir with the knowledge and experiences to choose his postsecondary pathway into VET or university or directly to employment. Among the range of options available to him, Amir would have access to a range of Free TAFE courses, including allied health, health services assistance, emergency health care, aged and disability care, dental assisting and mental health. Those are just some of the 500 government-subsidised courses and short courses, including 80 Free TAFE courses for Victorian learners.

Following a Free TAFE course Amir could continue his learning or take up a position in the high-demand sector. This integrated pathway through school and beyond sets Amir up for a rewarding and fulfilling career in one of Victoria's priority areas.

Source: Tony Bates, Secretary, Department of Education, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 3.

While a student's career journey provides different options for the student to consider, the Committee heard that the quality of career education is inconsistent across the state. The following sections outline the major issues with the quality of career education in Victorian government secondary schools identified by stakeholders to the Inquiry. The following sections identify the changes needed to ensure all students are supported to explore pathways into in-demand industries.

2.2 Access to high-quality career education is uneven across Victoria

Victoria's career development system is not currently fit-for-purpose if we are serious about connecting students to in-demand industries. It lacks structure, resources, and consistent quality. Schools must be resourced to prioritise career development as a core component of education, with qualified staff, funded access to industry engagement, and strong partnerships with LLENs and community organisations.

Victorian Local Learning and Employment Networks, *Submission 24*, p. 5.

The Committee heard that high-quality career education can make a significant difference to students' engagement and future pathways. The Smith Family, a not-for-profit organisation supporting students from disadvantaged backgrounds, praised Victoria's 'universal and sequenced system' and reported positive outcomes for students.¹²

At the same time, access to quality career education is uneven. Some schools deliver strong, well-structured programs, while others lack the staffing, expertise and resources to help students explore and transition into in-demand industries. Stakeholders repeatedly described a system where the quality of a student's career education depends heavily on the school they attend.

This inconsistency affects the delivery of all four major career education activities. A common concern was the uneven use of the My Career Insights program. Many stakeholders valued the program but explained that implementation varies widely between schools. VicLLENs—a network of 31 LLENs across Victoria—noted:

While powerful tools such as the Morrisby assessment are available to assist with personalised career planning, they are inconsistently used, particularly in rural areas where qualified staff are lacking. Students in these areas are further disadvantaged without the proper interpretation and follow-up of these tools.¹³

Access to one-on-one career counselling with a qualified career practitioner is also inconsistent. In many schools, career counsellors juggle teaching responsibilities, limiting their availability, or the role is assigned to staff without specialist qualifications. Australian Logistics Council, the national peak body for the logistics industry, argued that:

What was once a dedicated advisory function is now frequently absorbed into general teaching responsibilities. Many career practitioners are expected to support hundreds of students using limited tools, outdated labour market data, and minimal professional development. This severely restricts the capacity of schools to provide informed, tailored advice on emerging career opportunities.¹⁴

The Young Workers Centre, which supports young workers to understand and assert their rights in the workplace, described teachers as 'under-resourced and unsupported', leading to highly variable student experiences.¹⁵ Survey data reinforce this concern: according to the Government's On Track survey, which monitors outcomes of Year 12 completers and early leavers six months after leaving school, only 66.6% of non-completers in 2024 had a one-on-one conversation with their school's career advisor.¹⁶

¹² The Smith Family, *Submission 76*, p. 6.

¹³ Victorian Local Learning and Employment Networks, *Submission 24*, p. 5.

¹⁴ Australian Logistics Council, *Submission 79*, pp. 3–4.

¹⁵ Young Workers Centre, *Submission 101*, p. 2.

¹⁶ Department of Education, *On track 2024: destinations of Victorian school leavers*, May 2025, Melbourne, p. 9.

Stakeholders highlighted similar issues with work-based learning, discussed in Chapter 3.

Taken together, these problems point to a core challenge: many schools do not have the staffing and resources to deliver consistent, high-quality career education for their students. The remainder of this section examines these challenges and proposes practical solutions.

FINDING 3: Despite the Department of Education requiring every government secondary school to deliver a planned program of career education activities, the quality and consistency of delivery vary across schools and regions due to staffing and resource constraints.

2.2.1 Supporting schools to deliver consistent and meaningful career education

The Victorian Government expects government secondary schools to use their budgets to hire career practitioners to oversee career education, as well as vocational education and training coordinators, administrative supports and Head Start coordinators, who support students undertaking School-Based Apprenticeships and Traineeships (SBATs) and coordinate between schools, families, employers and training providers.¹⁷ However, the Government also provides dedicated career education funding to government secondary schools to supplement the delivery of career education activities to students in Years 7 to 12.¹⁸

According to the Government, career education funding supports schools to provide career education activities for all students in Years 7 to 12. Schools are required to deliver a planned program of career education activities centred around the key activities, such as career action planning, My Career Insights, work-based learning and career counselling.¹⁹ Schools can use these resources to fund local approaches to delivering career education activities.²⁰ Career education funding is calculated based on the number of enrolled students, with more money being allocated for students in higher year levels.²¹ Additional career education funding is given for schools with a certain number of students at risk of disengaging or not making a successful transition to further education, training or secure employment.²²

¹⁷ Victorian Government, *Submission 136*, p. 37.

¹⁸ Victorian Government, *Career education funding*, 1 June 2026, <<https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/career-education-funding/policy>> accessed 7 July 2026.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Victorian Government, *Submission 136*, p. 20.

²¹ Victorian Government, *Student resource package – targeted initiatives*, 2026, <<https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/student-resource-package-srp-targeted-initiatives/guidance/career-education-funding-reference>> accessed 9 February 2026.

²² Ibid.

Despite government funding, the Committee was told many schools lack appropriate resourcing to deliver quality career education for their students. Merri-bek City Council and Inner Northern LLEN described school career development as ‘critically ineffective’, not due to a lack of effort from existing staff, but from ‘chronic and systemic under-resourcing’.²³ It argued ‘[t]his resourcing failure directly undermines the single most effective form of career support,’ leaving students ‘to navigate a complex system alone’.²⁴

Stakeholders suggested practical solutions including funding for qualified career practitioners, implementing a whole-of-school approach to career education and embedding mandatory career education into the curriculum.

The following sections address the issues identified by stakeholders in relation to career education to understand how the current offering can be improved.

2.2.2 Schools have too few career practitioners to provide adequate career guidance

A professionalised workforce of qualified career practitioners, recognised and remunerated as core members of the education team, is essential to ensuring that every student in Victoria receives the personalised guidance they need to pursue in-demand industry pathways, whether through TAFE, apprenticeships, university, or direct entry to employment.

Career Industry Council of Australia, *Submission 48*, p. 3.

A professional workforce of qualified career practitioners is essential for every student to receive meaningful career education. As the Career Industry Council of Australia (CICA)—the career industry’s national peak body—explained, career practitioners ‘possess specialised knowledge in career development theory, labour market information, ethical practice and communication skills’ and can provide:

- career conversations
- expertise in mapping curriculum learning to employment pathways
- accurate, up-to-date labour market information
- structured programs supporting transitions into post-secondary education
- advocacy for students facing barriers to engagement or aspiration.²⁵

Despite this, the Committee heard that many schools do not have enough qualified career practitioners to meet the needs of students. Trevor Black, a career practitioner

²³ Merri-bek City Council and Inner Northern Local Learning and Employment Network, *Submission 36*, p. 5.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Career Industry Council of Australia, *Submission 48*, p. 3.

and President of the Australian Centre for Career Education (ACCE), told the Committee:

[Y]ou have schools which have no career practitioner or very few career practitioners, schools which have 0.1 or 0.2 time allotment for one person and what they are going to get, compared to another school that has a compulsory career education program and meets one-on-one with every student—is enormous. So it is an equity issue—completely different between one school and another at the moment. That is why a compulsory program would make such a huge difference.²⁶

Similarly, Jacqui Van de Velde from the Victorian Parents Council said:

We have got some schools that are well resourced, that have dedicated career practitioners, whether it be full-time or on a part-time basis, but they are there in the school and that is their sole gig within the school. That is terrific for those students and for those communities. Again, it is patchy. We have got teachers who are doing careers as part of their load, and they are also teaching a significant load across the school and that makes it very tricky, obviously, when they have got what is seen as a real priority.²⁷

CICA noted that career practitioners have a complex and important job, but ‘many career practitioner roles are categorised as administrative or ancillary, leading to inadequate remuneration, limited influence within school leadership structures and reduced retention of skilled professionals’.²⁸ Colin Axup, President of the Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, explained that it is difficult for schools to find qualified career practitioners and that most schools hire non-teaching staff as career practitioners for financial reasons:

An education support staff person, from a salary perspective, is cheaper than a teacher. Then the question becomes: actually, can we pay them enough? This is probably a repeated comment that you hear in this Committee, but can we pay them enough to keep them?²⁹

VicLLENs wrote in its submission that ‘[m]any schools treat career support as a secondary function, often filling the role with part-time or unqualified staff’.³⁰ It explained that:

Without a qualified Career Practitioner in every school, career guidance lacks consistency and depth, especially critical in supporting students in making informed pathway choices that align with labour market needs.³¹

²⁶ Trevor Black, ACCE President, Career Practitioner and Mathematics Teacher, Carey Baptist Grammar School, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 15.

²⁷ Jacqui Van de Velde, VPC Education Consultant, Victorian Parents Council, public hearing, Melbourne, 26 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 10.

²⁸ Career Industry Council of Australia, *Submission 48*, p. 3.

²⁹ Colin Axup, President, Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, public hearing, Melbourne, 28 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 64–5.

³⁰ Victorian Local Learning and Employment Networks, *Submission 24*, p. 4.

³¹ Ibid.

Since 2019, the Government's Upskilling Career Practitioners program has supported more than 460 government secondary school staff to complete a Graduate Certificate in Career Development.³² The Government advised this has 'enabled the upskilling of at least one fully qualified Career Practitioner in each government school'.³³

The Committee welcomes this progress but notes that one career practitioner is not enough for many schools. According to data provided by the Department of Education, in 2025, there were more than 266,000 students enrolled among the 258 government secondary schools in Victoria.³⁴ While enrolments are not consistent across the state due to metro and regional context, it is estimated that, on average, each secondary school has more than 1,000 students. These numbers show the challenges career practitioners face in school, especially if there is only one per education facility.

A minimum ratio would ensure more equitable access to career education

ACCE wrote that because there is no minimum ratio of students to career practitioners in Victoria, 'career education practitioners are under-resourced for the number of students needing support' and '[e]ach school sets its own agenda of career activities'.³⁵ ACCE and other stakeholders recommended mandating and funding a minimum ratio of one full-time equivalent career practitioner for every 450 students.³⁶

In 2018, as part of its Inquiry into career advice activities in Victorian schools, the Victorian Legislative Assembly's Economic, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee also recommended the Department of Education:

- employ one career practitioner for every 450 students
- commit ongoing funding to enable government schools to do this
- limit the teaching loads of career practitioners to enable more time for career development and student counselling.³⁷

Although the Government supported all the Committee's recommendations in full or in principle, it has not since established a minimum ratio of career practitioners in schools. The Committee recognises the Government's effort to upskill career practitioners and to reform career education. However, upskilling alone cannot ensure students receive consistent, high-quality support. The Committee reaffirms the need for the Government to ensure all students in government secondary schools have

³² Victorian Government, *Submission 136*, p. 20.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

³⁴ Victorian Schools, *Summary statistics 2025*, February 2025, <<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/summarystatisticsnapshot.pdf>> accessed 18 June 2026.

³⁵ Australian Centre for Career Education, *Submission 93*, p. 6.

³⁶ Career Industry Council of Australia, *Submission 48*, p. 3; Merri-Bek City Council and Inner Northern Local Learning and Employment Network, *Submission 36*, p. 7.

³⁷ Parliament of Victoria, Economic, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee, *Inquiry into career advice activities in Victorian schools*, August 2018, p. 65.

access to career education, including via a team of qualified career practitioners. To help achieve this, it recommends the Government introduce a minimum ratio of one full-time equivalent career practitioner for every 450 students in every government secondary school.

FINDING 4: Many schools do not have a sufficient number of qualified career practitioners, leading to uneven and inequitable access to meaningful career education.

RECOMMENDATION 1: That the Victorian Government ensure that every government school has at least one qualified full-time equivalent career practitioner per 450 students.

2.2.3 Career education is not sufficiently embedded in the Victorian curriculum

The Victorian Curriculum F–10 sets out what students should learn from prep to Year 10. Learning areas include Arts, English, Health and Physical Education, Humanities, Languages, Mathematics, Science and Technologies. The Curriculum F–10 also includes four capabilities—critical and creative thinking, ethical capability, intercultural capability and personal and social capability.³⁸ Career education is not a standalone learning area or capability. However, teachers can incorporate career-related learning through the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) Career Education Framework.³⁹

The Career Education Framework outlines why career education matters, what students need to learn and what schools can do to support career development. It also provides resources to help teachers identify existing learning activities within the Victorian Curriculum F–10 that can be adapted to include a career education focus.⁴⁰ Table 2.2 summarises the skills and attributes students are expected to develop under the Framework.

³⁸ Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, *The Victorian curriculum F–10*, n.d., <<https://f10.vcaa.vic.edu.au>> accessed 21 January 2026.

³⁹ Victorian Government, *Career education in the curriculum*, 1 March 2024, <<https://www.schools.vic.gov.au/career-education/curriculum>> accessed 21 January 2026.

⁴⁰ Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, *Career education resources*, n.d., <<https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/career-education/career-education-resources-2>> accessed 28 January 2026.

Table 2.2 What students need to learn according to the Career Education Framework

Key areas	Skills	Attributes
Know yourself—self-development	Students need to understand their own skills, strengths, interests and values to make informed decisions for their future	Be self-aware Work well with others Be a lifelong learner Be adaptable Present yourself well
Know your world—career exploration	Students need accurate information about all the possible options for future work, including through work experience or developing practical skills	Know what's possible Use technology and information effectively Understand work Explore the labour market Experience work
Manage your future—be proactive	Students can use insight gained from self-development and career exploration to build and manage their careers over a lifetime	Find and use opportunities to learn and explore Make informed decisions Plan and build your career Balance work and life Embrace change

Source: Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, *Career education skills and attributes*, n.d., <<https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/career-education/career-education-skills-and-attributes>> accessed 21 January 2026.

After completing the Victorian Curriculum F–10, students undertake the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), the VCE Vocational Major (VCE VM), or the Victorian Pathways Certificate (VPC). Mainstream VCE students who take the Industry and Enterprise subject learn about workplace participation, industry change and innovation;⁴¹ however, this subject is not compulsory. By contrast, all VCE VM and VPC students complete a work-related skills subject that develops their understanding of workplace environments and the future of work and supports their transition into post-school pathways.⁴² The subject comprises four units, including careers and learning for the future and workplace skills and capabilities.⁴³ From 2025, schools have also been able to offer VM Work Related Skills to general VCE students.⁴⁴

Stakeholders told the Committee that making career education more explicit within the formal curriculum would strengthen students' preparedness for post-school transitions. CICA argued that career education is too often 'treated as an add-on to the curriculum.'⁴⁵ ACCE similarly urged that career development be placed 'at the core of curriculum.'⁴⁶ CICA recommended introducing compulsory, developmentally

⁴¹ Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, *Industry and enterprise*, n.d., <<https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/vce-curriculum/vce-study-designs/industry-and-enterprise/industry-and-enterprise>> accessed 24 February 2026.

⁴² Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, *VCE Vocational Major: work related skills: study design*, Melbourne, 2022, p. 6.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 9.

⁴⁴ Victorian Government, *VCE VM core subjects*, 27 March 2025, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/vce-vm-core-subjects>> accessed 7 July 2026.

⁴⁵ Career Industry Council of Australia, *Submission 48*, p. 3.

⁴⁶ Australian Centre for Career Education, *Submission 93*, p. 7.

appropriate career education into the curriculum from Year 7 onwards,⁴⁷ while ACCE recommended starting from prep and underpinning it with the Australian Blueprint for Career Education.⁴⁸ ACCE explained:

Without set time in the curriculum to support career education and development throughout schooling, students can remain unprepared for transitioning. Career education and development requires curriculum integration, life skills development, career guidance, experiential learning, self-awareness, connecting learning to work, career exploration and transition support. It needs to include a level of assessment against a framework such as the Australian Blueprint for Career Development that has been developed for this purpose.⁴⁹

The Australian Blueprint for Career Development provides a national framework for designing, implementing and evaluating intentional career development learning.⁵⁰ Developed by the Australian Government's National Careers Institute with input from CICA, the Blueprint 'identifies the knowledge, skills and attitudes that an individual needs to make sound choices and effectively manage their own career'.⁵¹ Its three learning areas and 12 competencies for career management are presented in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3 Learning areas and career management competencies in the Australian Blueprint for Career Development

Learning area	Competencies
Personal management	Build and maintain a positive self-concept Interact positively and effectively with others Change and grow throughout life Manage wellbeing, mental and physical health
Learning and work exploration	Participate in lifelong learning supportive of career goals Locate and use career information effectively Understand the relationship between work, society and the economy Understand the changing nature of life and work roles
Career building	Secure/create and maintain work Make career-enhancing decisions Maintain balanced life and work roles Understand, engage in and manage the career-building process

Source: National Careers Institute, *Australian Blueprint for Career Development*, Canberra, 2022, pp. 10–14.

⁴⁷ Career Industry Council of Australia, *Submission 48*, p. 6.

⁴⁸ Australian Centre for Career Education, *Submission 93*, p. 18.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 6.

⁵⁰ National Careers Institute, *Australian Blueprint for Career Development*, Canberra, 2022, p. 3.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 5.

Despite the availability of the Blueprint, ACCE noted that ‘it is not embedded throughout schooling’ and that formal, comprehensive K-12 career development programs remain rare.⁵² Other stakeholders echoed the need to more firmly embed career education within the Victorian curriculum.⁵³

The 2018 inquiry by the Economic, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee found overwhelming stakeholder support for making career development a mandatory part of schooling, though some worried it might contribute to curriculum overcrowding.⁵⁴ The Committee recommended designating career management as a capability within the curriculum, rather than a learning area.⁵⁵ The Government agreed with the recommendations in full or in principle but has not yet implemented any associated changes.

The Committee acknowledges concerns about overcrowding the Victorian curriculum. However, it considers that explicitly embedding career education in the curriculum—whether as a learning area or capability—would create more consistency in the delivery of career education and help prepare students for growing opportunities in in-demand industries.

FINDING 5: While the Victorian Career Education Framework provides teachers with resources to integrate career education, the Victorian Curriculum F-10 does not require career education as a learning area or capability, contributing to inconsistent student access and outcomes.

RECOMMENDATION 2: That the Victorian Government embed developmentally appropriate career education within the Victorian Curriculum F-10, underpinned by the Australian Blueprint for Career Development.

2.2.4 Supporting students requires a whole-of-school approach

Stakeholders emphasised that career education works best when it is supported by a whole-of-school approach. While career practitioners are central, subject teachers and school leaders also influence students’ understanding of different pathways and

⁵² Australian Centre for Career Education, *Submission 93*, p. 4.

⁵³ Gail McHardy, Chief Executive Officer, Parents Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 26 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 7; Jaqui Van de Velde, VPC Education Consultant, Victorian Parents Council, public hearing, Melbourne, 26 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 7; Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation, *Submission 14*, p. 2; Victorian Local Learning and Employment Networks, *Submission 24*, p. 2.

⁵⁴ Parliament of Victoria, Economic, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee, *Inquiry into career advice activities in Victorian schools*, August 2018, pp. 48–51.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

industries. The Victorian Government acknowledged this, noting that school leadership and the broader school workforce have:

[A]n important role to play in supporting career education through curriculum delivery and assisting career practitioners with activities such as subject selection and career action planning.⁵⁶

To build a whole-of-school approach to career development and ensure students receive consistent, informed messages from all staff, Independent Schools Victoria—which represents 230 independent schools across Victoria—recommended that the Victorian Government deliver professional learning on vocational pathways for all school staff and promote best practice in the delivery of career education.⁵⁷ The Victorian Parents Council similarly called for ‘a whole school approach that involves all staff’ and ‘commitment from leadership’.⁵⁸

The Department of Education advised that it will be ‘working to develop a program of professional learning opportunities that aim to build the skills and knowledge of all school staff to support whole-school delivery of career education’.⁵⁹ However, it did not provide further details. Recognising the importance of a whole-of-school approach to career education, the Committee urges the Government to release details about this professional development, including what it will consist of and when it will be rolled out to school staff.

FINDING 6: Effective career education relies on a whole-of-school approach involving career practitioners, subject teachers and school leadership. However, many schools lack the resources and skills needed to implement this approach.

RECOMMENDATION 3: That the Victorian Government develop and deliver planned professional development for teachers to support a whole-of-school approach to career education. The professional development should enable teachers to:

- find, understand and communicate accurate, up-to-date labour market information
- embed career education within their lesson plans
- confidently explain student pathways, including vocational education and training (VET) options.

⁵⁶ Victorian Government, *Submission 136*, p. 21.

⁵⁷ Independent Schools Victoria, *Submission 108*, p. 4.

⁵⁸ Jacqui Van de Velde, VPC Education Consultant, Victorian Parents Council, public hearing, Melbourne, 26 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 7.

⁵⁹ Victorian Government, *Submission 136*, p. 21.

2.3 Negative perceptions of vocational education and training discourages some students from pursuing vocational pathways

Skills shortages have many drivers, but awareness, attitudes and perceptions of students and parents contribute significantly. It is critical that students are aware of and encouraged to pursue relevant careers and their TAFE pathways. TAFE must be promoted as an equal first option to university, providing distinctive employment-based pathways. We need students, parents, teachers and career advisers to have accurate information about TAFE and industry careers and to support informed choices. To do this we need to challenge outdated perceptions of TAFE, like myths that TAFE graduates are less employable than university graduates.

Alex White, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian TAFE Association, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 21.

As set out in Chapter 1, almost half of new workers over the next decade will require a VET qualification. Despite this, the Committee heard that many students are discouraged from pursuing vocational pathways because of persistent negative perceptions of VET and vocational occupations among some school staff, students and their families.

In its submission, the Victorian TAFE Association—a not-for-profit organisation advocating for TAFE institutes and dual sector universities—attached a report it commissioned from research firm McCrindle. The report, titled *The TAFE value and perception challenge*, showed that despite TAFE's responsiveness to evolving workforce requirements', negative views remain common.⁶⁰ These include beliefs that:

- TAFE graduates are less employable and earn less than university graduates⁶¹
- TAFE is an inferior, less prestigious choice than university⁶²
- people who are smarter go to university.⁶³

These perceptions continue to influence student choices despite labour market demands.

2.3.1 Stigma towards vocational pathways persists despite senior secondary reforms

The Victorian Government acknowledged that, to meet demand for VET-qualified workers, it must 'continue to work to shift community perceptions about the importance of vocational pathways'.⁶⁴ Tony Bates, Secretary of the Department

⁶⁰ Victorian TAFE Association, *Submission 72, Attachment B*, p. 10.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁶⁴ Tony Bates, Secretary, Department of Education, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

of Education, told the Committee that the former Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL)—now replaced by the VCE VM—had gained a reputation that ‘the not-so-smart kids were streamed into VCAL’.⁶⁵ The Housing Industry Association also said VET is still too often seen as a ‘second-tier option’ or ‘last resort’.⁶⁶

Youth Associate Shanay Gao-Kuhlmann explained the impact of these attitudes:

When your teachers and parents and even the sentiment held online all tell you that VET is an inferior choice, though that being wholly untrue, it pushes the stigma and reduces student pride, desire and passion to continue down those paths.⁶⁷

The Australian Education Union (AEU)—which represents teachers and educators in public schools, TAFEs and early childhood—similarly noted that:

much career guidance received through years 10–12 leans strongly towards university education and often schools refer disengaged or academically struggling students into VET pathways. This results in a common perception that VET pathways are “easier” and not for traditional academic individuals.⁶⁸

However, according to the AEU, there has been a perception shift on these courses. The AEU argues that the introduction of the VCE VM has ‘start[ed] to change perceptions of vocational pathways.’⁶⁹ The Committee notes this change has been gradual. Other witnesses are more cautious in acknowledging this shift. VM student Hiwan told the Committee that perceptions have improved ‘slightly’ but that ‘there is still a very, very long road ahead’:

I think there are still a lot of stigma and stereotypes surrounding the vocational major. I think it is still seen as the pathway that is lesser than VCE: VCE is the smart way, and then you have VM ... I think there is still so much stigma around it not being seen the same and the pathways not being put on a level playing field. I think it is still going to take a lot of work for that to happen. I think particularly in year 7s and 8s and early years bringing it up more so that in every careers lesson you are not just hearing about exams in VCE, you are being told that there is another pathway. You are hearing that there is a vocational major. You are being told by your schools that you can do what you want as long as it is what is best for you.⁷⁰

Stakeholders emphasised that this shift could happen only if school staff are equipped to answer questions about VET, not only university. Steven Wojtikiw from the Housing Industry Association—the peak industry association for residential building—argued while the introduction of the VCE VM is slowly changing perceptions of VET, the Government needs to ‘continue to invest in professional development for all school

⁶⁵ Tony Bates, Secretary, Department of Education, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 6.

⁶⁶ Housing Industry Association, *Submission 113*, pp. 5–6.

⁶⁷ Shanay Gao-Kuhlmann, Youth Associate, public hearing, Melbourne, 21 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 5.

⁶⁸ Australian Education Union, *Submission 123*, p. 12.

⁶⁹ Scott Widmer, Deputy Secretary, Strategy and Secondary School Reform, Department of Education, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 5–6.

⁷⁰ Hiwan, Student (VCE VM), The Gordon, Victorian Student Representative Council, public hearing, Melbourne, 28 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 9.

staff'.⁷¹ Inner Northern LLEN reported that many students are open to vocational careers, but schools still disproportionately promote university.⁷²

The Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC) recommended working with students, families, schools and VET providers to address stigma and misinformation:

Stigma continues to shape the attitudes of students, families, and teachers towards vocational education in ways that discourage engagement. Students consistently share that alternative school pathways such as VET, the VCE VM and the VPC are often viewed as being for students who are “less capable” or who have “failed” to keep up with VCE. These attitudes create a culture in which students feel judged or marginalised for even considering vocational options.⁷³

VicSRC also urged action to correct misconceptions, including that employers do not value vocational qualifications and that vocational pathways lead to exclusively to trades or apprenticeships.⁷⁴ Master Builders Association of Victoria—which supports builders across the building industry—recommended promoting VET as a strategic empowering choice and using data and success stories to demonstrate job prospects, earning potential and career progression.⁷⁵ Amanda Threlfall, Assistant Secretary of Victorian Trades Hall Council—which coordinates 41 labour unions—explained that lots of students lack awareness of VET pathways and contended the Government needs to do more to promote and advertise VET.⁷⁶

Outdated views of certain industries, including in-demand industries, are also fostering the negative perception about VET. Loddon Mallee LLEN argued that limited understanding of changes in the economy has led to stigma and a poor perception of certain industries as ‘dirty’.⁷⁷ The Australian Manufacturing Workers’ Union echoed that ‘[o]utdated perceptions of manufacturing as dirty or unsafe continue to deter students, parents and career practitioners’.⁷⁸ The Young Workers Centre told the Committee that part of addressing young people’s perceptions of VET is ‘showing them that these careers are safe, respected and viable’.⁷⁹ Reforms to VET pathways and vocational careers are considered in Chapter 3.

In 2024, the Government launched its *Your world. Your VCE* public awareness campaign, which aimed to ‘inspire students to explore the breadth of options for

⁷¹ Steven Wojtkiw, Deputy Executive Director, Victoria, Housing Industry Association, public hearing, Melbourne, 28 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 52.

⁷² Merri-Bek City Council and Inner Northern Local Learning and Employment Network, *Submission 36*, p. 3.

⁷³ Victorian Student Representative Council, *Submission 42*, p. 3.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Master Builders Association of Victoria, *Submission 71*, p. 4.

⁷⁶ Amanda Threlfall, Assistant Secretary, Victorian Trades Hall Council, public hearing, Melbourne, 26 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 24.

⁷⁷ Loddon Mallee Local Learning and Employment Network, *Submission 54*, pp. 7–8.

⁷⁸ Australian Manufacturing Workers’ Union, *Submission 27*, p. 1.

⁷⁹ Angus Leech, Outreach Organiser, Young Workers Centre, public hearing, Melbourne, 28 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 14–15.

senior secondary education', including the VCE, VCE VM and VPC.⁸⁰ Alongside the Government's senior secondary pathways reform, the campaign focuses on challenging negative perceptions about VET. However, stakeholders emphasised that parents and guardians—key influencers of students' pathway and career decisions—also need clear, evidence-based information about VET and the changing labour market.

Penne Dawe and Trevor Black from ACCE said students sometimes feel pressure from parents to pursue higher education rather than VET and that 'more work needs to be done with parents' to address this.⁸¹ McCrindle's 2024 report into challenging perceptions about TAFE likewise found parents are more likely to encourage students to explore a university pathway than a TAFE pathway and that myths persist about employability, earnings and quality of TAFE teaching and facilities.⁸² The report, commissioned by the Victorian TAFE Association, suggested positioning TAFE as a compelling option, leveraging industry voices and engaging students earlier than Year 10.⁸³ The role that parents play in career education will be discussed in more detail in Section 2.4 of this Chapter.

Cultural expectations also influence students' choices, which will be discussed further in Chapter 4. One of the Youth Associates involved in this Inquiry, Atharva Nerlikar, explained that university is seen as the default pathway and noted that some schools provide limited information on TAFE:

I think in the electorate of Glen Waverley tertiary education is seen a lot more as university. That is the kind of stereotype or that is the sort of status quo. So even though within the area there are a lot of really strong other pathway options like TAFE and apprenticeship programs and things like that, it is not something that is pushed heavily and it is not something that is pushed by schools unless you go to specific schools. I can speak from my experience in Glen Waverley; we were not even given a brochure about a TAFE or things like that. So it is very different to other schools where I interviewed some people where they were encouraged actively to pursue other pathways, explore other things like VCE VM or VET courses and things like that. But in the area of Glen Waverley, I think it has a lot to do with the kind of societal thing, a lot of parental influence.⁸⁴

Several stakeholders called for a public awareness campaign to improve knowledge about VET pathways and outcomes. For example, the Minerals Council of Australia, the leading representative of Australia's minerals industry, highlighted the need to

⁸⁰ Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, *Your world. Your VCE. New VCE campaign and resources to inform secondary choices*, 18 April 2024, <<https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/administration/school-administration/notices-schools/2024/notice-schools-43-18-april-2024>> accessed 27 February 2026.

⁸¹ Trevor Black, Australian Centre for Career Education President, Career Practitioner and Mathematics Teacher, Carey Baptist Grammar School, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 19; Penne Dawe, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Centre for Career Education, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 19.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Atharva Nerlikar, Youth Associate, public hearing, Melbourne, 21 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 4.

target learners and key influencers, noting that family and friends remain central to perceptions and choices:

To adjust these perceptions, attention needs to be given to improving knowledge, awareness and understanding about career pathways and opportunities created through VET with a particular focus on learners and their key influencers. Young people obtain industry knowledge through television or online, school classes and via family and friends which remain the key influencers of career decisions and perceptions of different industries. This influence is based on trust in the information received and relevance of a parent knowing the student best.⁸⁵

The Victorian TAFE Association also proposed that the Government:

[W]ork in partnership with industry to produce a major, multichannel public awareness campaign focused on improving the perception of industry. This campaign must promote in-demand career pathways, the rewards of entering pathways, and how to get there with TAFE.⁸⁶

Shortly after submissions had been collected by the Committee, in September 2025, the Victorian Government launched an awareness campaign for Free TAFE, called 'Free TAFE Makes It REAL'.⁸⁷ The campaign centred on 11 stories from students and graduates who had successfully completed TAFE programs which had directly resulted in their careers. These stories were broadcast through online film, social media, digital platforms and outdoor placements.⁸⁸ At this point, its impact is undetermined.

The Committee acknowledges the awareness campaign and that the introduction of the VCE VM and VPC has helped reduce stigma about VET. It commends schools, teachers and career practitioners for their efforts to deliver VET to students and challenge outdated perceptions. However, negative perceptions persist among some students, families and in some cases, school staff as explained earlier in the Chapter. The Committee therefore supports continued professional development for school staff to promote accurate, up-to-date information about VET pathways and outcomes.

In addition, to ensure students are not discouraged from pursuing VET pathways that lead to employment in in-demand industries, the Committee recommends a coordinated approach that includes both public communication and a clear response to the McCrindle findings.

FINDING 7: Senior secondary pathway reforms have improved perceptions of vocational education and training (VET), but stigma and misconceptions among students, families and some school staff continue to discourage some students pursuing vocational pathways that lead to in-demand industries.

⁸⁵ Minerals Council of Australia, Victorian Division, *Submission 66*, p. 8.

⁸⁶ Victorian TAFE Association, *Submission 72*, p. 3.

⁸⁷ Premier of Victoria, *Free TAFE Makes It Real for hundreds of thousands of Victorians*, 9 September 2025, media release.

⁸⁸ Ricki Green, 'TAFE Victoria celebrates the life-changing impact of Free TAFE in new campaign via The Fuel Agency', *Campaign Brief*, 17 December 2025, <<https://campaignbrief.com/tafe-victoria-celebrates-the-life-changing-impact-of-free-tafe-in-new-campaign-via-the-fuel-agency>> accessed 31 July 2026.

RECOMMENDATION 4: That the Victorian Government provide mandatory professional development for principals, subject teachers and career practitioners on vocational education and training (VET) pathways addressing local labour market needs and common misconceptions about vocational careers.

RECOMMENDATION 5: That the Victorian Government develop a strategy for addressing negative perceptions of vocational education and training (VET) among students, parents and the broader community. The strategy should be informed by expert advice.

RECOMMENDATION 6: That the Victorian Government review in 2027–28 the promotional campaigns used to promote the value of vocational education, including the Free TAFE Makes it REAL campaign, to understand the impact of these campaigns on enrolment and completion rates.

2.4 Parents play a significant role in influencing the career decisions of their children

As mentioned earlier in this Chapter, the Committee heard how parents and families play a crucial role in influencing career decisions and as such, need to be guided to understand the value of vocational and alternative pathways to in-demand industries. Stakeholders highlighted the importance of helping parents to understand new career opportunities. The Committee believes this topic has been underestimated by the Government over the years and more should be done to educate parents on vocational pathways.

2.4.1 Parents and families hold influence over their children's career pathways

Stakeholders told the Committee repeatedly that parental and familial expectations hold sway over children's choices around their education and careers. The report provided by the Youth Associates referenced the importance that parents have in influencing their decisions. Dylan McBurney, a Youth Associate from Melbourne, wrote that one of the three main factors when deciding on a career pathway was 'parents' expectations'.⁸⁹ Elijah Lacey also wrote that students reported 'parental guidance ... when choosing pathways after school'.⁹⁰ Harlequin Goodes, a Youth Associate from Latrobe Valley in Gippsland, wrote that '[m]ost participants say their parents or teachers were the largest or only real influences in their decision while others stated that grandparents or other family members had input'.⁹¹ Yesha Kandel also flagged

⁸⁹ Dylan McBurney, *Youth associate final report: Inquiry into student pathways to in-demand industries*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 1.

⁹⁰ Elijah Lacey, *Youth associate final report: Inquiry into student pathways to in-demand industries*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 2.

⁹¹ Harlequin Goodes, *Youth associate final report: Inquiry into student pathways to in-demand industries*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 2.

that her interviewees had stated that '[f]amily influence was significant, particularly through parents, cousins, and teachers'.⁹²

The significance of parents' opinions is a recurrent topic among submissions. Dallian D'Cruz, Deputy Chair of VicLLENs and CEO of WynBay LLEN stated that:

[T]here is a lot of research, and I cannot cite you the exact research at this moment but all of us would be aware of it, that the single biggest influence on a young person choosing a particular career pathway is their parents. Now, all of our teenagers would hate to admit that, but that is the reality.⁹³

Kit McMahon, the CEO of Women's Health in the South East, also affirmed parental influence, specifically as it related to gendered stereotypes around career pathways:

Well, they absolutely do, right? So how do they? They do: 'I will do what mum or dad say to do' ... by engaging with young women and teenagers in the community, they do listen to Mum and Dad.⁹⁴

While the Committee acknowledges that some stakeholders indicated that their primary drive to choose their career pathway was their passion, with limited influence from parents,⁹⁵ the role played by parents and close relatives nonetheless requires attention.

2.4.2 Parents require better education about the economy and value of vocational pathways

Through submissions and testimony during the hearings, it became apparent to the Committee that parents do not necessarily understand the modern labour market and what jobs are available, nor the value of VET. Given the influence that they have over their children's decisions, this is concerning.

The Victorian Government noted that the labour market had changed over the last couple of decades and that the Government needed to ensure parents stayed up to date on the options for vocational careers. Tony Bates, the Secretary of the Department of Education, told the Committee that '[i]ndustry has just evolved so much over the last 10, 20, 30 years, so it is a real challenge to make sure that parents in particular understand the diverse range of things, which is particularly why we have got the tech schools where we have modern, cutting edge technology available in those tech schools'.⁹⁶

⁹² Yesha Kandel, *Youth associate final report: Inquiry into student pathways to in-demand industries*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 1.

⁹³ Dallian D'Cruz, Deputy Chair, Victorian Local Learning and Employment Networks and Chief Executive Officer, WynBay Local Learning and Employment Network, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 52.

⁹⁴ Kit McMahon, Chief Executive Officer, Women's Health in the South East, public hearing, Melbourne, 26 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 29.

⁹⁵ Sienna Seychell, Youth Associate, public hearing, Melbourne, 21 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 1.

⁹⁶ Tony Bates, Secretary, Department of Education, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 5.

Brad Davies, a Strategic Advisor to the Chief Executive of Independent Schools Victoria, also spoke to the contemporary job market and how parents' conceptions of the market are dated. He stated that:

In terms of being able to give parents a more up-to-date understanding and expectations of what the contemporary job market looks like, if we think about the impact of digital and have AI at front of mind—no doubt that has been mentioned a few times as well—and how quickly it is changing industries and changing often not entire roles but certainly impacting on tasks within roles, often parents will have a quite dated understanding of particular vocations and job roles and will have closed off certain careers in their minds. So the schools are trying to get the message out that 'There is a lot changing in this space and it is really important for your sons and daughters to understand what jobs are out there and what options are out there,' but it is a real challenge.⁹⁷

Similarly, Gary Workman of the Apprenticeship Employment Network noted that parents' impressions of the value of university may not be wholly correct in today's context, where more in-demand industries are requiring VET. This was spoken about in Chapter 1. Gary Workman told the Committee that:

A lot of parents historically would have said, 'You'll get a better paying job if you go to university,' and their knowledge of that would have come from the very early days when only 10 per cent of people went to university. Now we have got 60 to 70 per cent of people going to university. You still have not got the same opportunities and the same well-paying jobs for 70 per cent of the population as you did have when it was 10 per cent. So there are certainly some structural things there.⁹⁸

Beyond misunderstanding the labour market, the Committee was repeatedly told that parents, broadly speaking, undervalued vocational education and defaulted to a university education as being the best choice.

Rowan Farren, a Youth Associate, noted that parents did not always appreciate the value of VET and pushed their children towards university education. During public hearings, he emphasised that:

There is definitely a need to communicate with parents as well as the students themselves, because even if we give all the information in the world to students, if they go home and get shut down by the parents, they are not going to consider it. I have had people from different communities and different groups say 'We really wanted to go do a VET in nursing,'—so a certificate in nursing—or 'I wanted to do a diploma' or 'I wanted to do XYZ', but it was very much hammered on the head with 'No, you've got to go study this at university' or 'You've got to go do a pathway to a JD or a pathway to a medical degree'. And a lot of the time, students who were given that exposure very much were in that burnt-out university camp; they dropped out and they never actually continued on in any form of study.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Brad Davies, Strategic Advisor to the Chief Executive, Independent Schools Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 26 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 33.

⁹⁸ Gary Workman, Executive Director, Apprenticeship Employment Network, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 64.

⁹⁹ Rowan Farren, Youth Associate, public hearing, Melbourne, 21 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 8.

He later reiterated that ‘pressure from family was very much pushing students towards that destination of “You’ve got to go off and do what we are saying you’ve got to do” ... [to do] something to appear as though you are achieving something.’¹⁰⁰

The Victorian TAFE Association (VTA) highlighted the difficulty of ensuring that parents did not view VET as a less desirable option than university education. Pam Jonas, a Senior Adviser, stated that ‘[w]e [the VTA] are bumping up against parental expectations. Lots of parents think it is a second choice for their child to go to TAFE rather than go to university, even if the university is completely the wrong choice for their child. So there are parental expectations about where their child will go.’¹⁰¹

Finally, the Victorian Parents Council affirmed the misconception of vocational pathways as second-tier education among parents. They told the Committee that:

We are still struggling with this concept that vocational careers are often undervalued and misunderstood by parents, particularly in our non-government schools. They do often see them as second tier compared with university pathways. We need to be doing a lot more work around that—and I say ‘we’; I think that this is a collective issue.¹⁰²

As such, it is necessary for parents to be better educated about both the economy and value of vocational pathways. The Committee notes it is important not to evoke blame in addressing this issue. Kit McMahon emphasised that parents’ concerns about vocational education came from a place of good intention and should be addressed with this in mind. In speaking specifically about gendered stereotypes of certain careers, she stated that:

[T]he best way we can help parents is by actually doing the deep work to address those perceptions that they have got, which, in my experience, are pretty well founded. Parents are not saying, ‘We don’t want our daughters to go there because (a) we don’t think they’re clever enough or (b) we don’t think that they should earn more money,’ they are doing it because they think that is where it is best for their daughter to go. I think unless you embrace the fact that they are trying to do the best thing and take it from there, that is the best step forward, by actually working with the parents.¹⁰³

Stakeholders offered various solutions for educating parents. The Victorian Parents Council emphasised that ‘[p]arents do want and aspire to have access to comprehensive, early and practical career education that prepares them for the rapidly changing workforce.’¹⁰⁴ Parents Victoria echoed this, telling the Committee that it was clear ‘that parents want to actively support their children in making career

¹⁰⁰ Rowan Farren, Youth Associate, public hearing, Melbourne, 21 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 9.

¹⁰¹ Pam Jonas, Senior Adviser, Victorian TAFE Association, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 24.

¹⁰² Jacqui Van de Velde, VPC Education Consultant, Victorian Parents Council, public hearing, Melbourne, 26 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 8.

¹⁰³ Kit McMahon, Chief Executive Officer, Women’s Health in the South East, public hearing, Melbourne, 26 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 29.

¹⁰⁴ Jacqui Van de Velde, VPC Education Consultant, Victorian Parents Council, public hearing, Melbourne, 26 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 7.

decisions but often need clear information, practical guidance and access to real-world experience.’¹⁰⁵

Kit McHahon advised that ‘[t]he best way to do it is to go and work directly in the community with parents at the points of connection’ and referred to TAFE as a possible avenue of connection.¹⁰⁶ The Victorian Parents Council also noted the importance of being present in the community and told the Committee that to address parents’ information gaps about TAFE and other vocational pathways, they ‘suggest some sort of regional parent support network’.¹⁰⁷

The Victorian Parents Council reflected on webinars it had offered in the past, recommending that they be offered annually to keep parents up to date:

We have run a number of webinars helping parents with that information [i.e. the value of vocational education]. Can I just say that we were discussing this the other day, and we are recognising that it needs to be a continuous education process. It is not one and done; it needs to happen annually, as a minimum, so that that information is getting out to parents on a regular basis, because things are revised, they are updated and parents need to be aware of those changes as they get to the decision-making stage, particularly around subject selection and so on.¹⁰⁸

In terms of the information provided, it made suggestions on what to include:

The information needs evidence-based data on those vocational education outcomes, including employment rates and salary prospects, success stories and role models from those vocational education backgrounds and a clear mapping about how those vocational education pathways integrate with those senior studies certificates and lead to further study or employment. All of those things are critical. We know they are there, but it is about making sure that they are front and centre and parents have a very good understanding of them.¹⁰⁹

Brad Davies, the Strategic Advisor to the Chief Executive of Independent Schools Victoria, stated that in communicating to parents, it was also important to advise them why certain vocations are being offered:

A lot of it comes through the communications to parents about not only what is being offered by way of career advice but also why it is important. I think that is one of the areas, though, that can definitely be improved, and I am assuming not just in independent schools but more broadly.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ Gail McHardy, Chief Executive Officer, Parents Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 26 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 6.

¹⁰⁶ Kit McMahon, Chief Executive Officer, Women’s Health in the South East, public hearing, Melbourne, 26 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 29.

¹⁰⁷ Jacqui Van de Velde, VPC Education Consultant, Victorian Parents Council, public hearing, Melbourne, 26 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 10.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Brad Davies, Strategic Advisor to the Chief Executive, Independent Schools Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 26 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 33.

FINDING 8: Parents and families are key influencers in students' pathway choices, but many do not have accurate, up-to-date information about vocational education, training pathways and the needs of the labour market.

RECOMMENDATION 7: That the Victorian Government collaborate with the Victorian Parents Council and/or Parents Victoria to increase and improve the education of parents as it relates to the value of vocational education and pathways to in-demand industries.

RECOMMENDATION 8: That the Victorian Government invest in an online 'live-update' portal for schools and parents to access current data on in-demand industries and job vacancies.

2.5 Age-appropriate career education should be introduced earlier

The Victorian Career Education Framework provides resources for both primary and secondary school teachers to embed career education in their teaching and learning programs.¹¹¹ Likewise, the Australian Blueprint for Career Development is intended to apply from early childhood through to adulthood, including in pre-schools, primary schools, secondary schools and post-secondary settings.¹¹² However, as noted in Section 2.2.3, both the Framework and Blueprint are optional and the Victorian Curriculum F–10 does not explicitly require any government primary school to deliver career education.

However, stakeholders consistently highlighted the importance of introducing age-appropriate career education from the primary years.¹¹³ Early exposure builds language, curiosity and aspiration, which in turn supports informed decision-making later on in life. Penne Dawe, Chief Executive Officer of ACCE, explained:

The career education conversations change, but really what you are doing with young people is you are getting them familiar with the language of the world of work. So young people are already pretending to be things, whether it is Superman ... a firefighter ... or a princess out of *Frozen* or whatever it happens to be. What you are doing is you are introducing them to language about different jobs. So you are really just starting the conversations: 'What do you see?', 'What did you see on your way to school today?', 'Where does mummy work?', 'Where does daddy work?', 'What do people do for roles?' It is not what people think—that it is difficult—but you are just starting the language and

¹¹¹ Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, *Career education in Victorian schools*, n.d., <<https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/career-education/career-education-victorian-schools>> accessed 23 February 2026.

¹¹² National Careers Institute, *Australian Blueprint for Career Development*, Canberra, 2022, pp. 3–7.

¹¹³ Sunraysia Institute of TAFE, *Submission 41*, p. 1; Loddon Mallee Local Learning and Employment Network, *Submission 54*, p. 7; Master Builders Association of Victoria, *Submission 71*, p. 2; The Smith Family, *Submission 76*, p. 8; The University of Melbourne, *Submission 106*, p. 3; Independent Schools Victoria, *Submission 108*, p. 4.

starting an exploration to open their awareness about what is happening, because that is really what school is about. It is preparing young people for the world of work.¹¹⁴

Stakeholders noted that early exposure is not about choosing a career, but about developing curiosity, awareness and vocabulary. Master Builders Victoria urged broader exposure to a wide range of professions, noting that:

Early career advice and information play a pivotal role in encouraging and supporting students into vocational education and training (VET) and higher education pathways that lead to employment in in-demand industries.¹¹⁵

Other participants to this Inquiry also emphasised the value of fostering children's interests in in-demand industries. The Primary Industries Education Foundation Australia—a not-for-profit organisation that educates schools and the community about food and fibre production—stated that:

Fostering an interest in food and fibre industries amongst school students from an early age will increase their likelihood of pursuing food and fibre career across the whole supply chain.¹¹⁶

Similarly, one of the individual submitters, Cameron Bowles, recommended actively promoting construction-related learning in early childhood and primary school settings—for example, by funding kindergartens to purchase construction-style sandpit tools and trade-themed costumes.¹¹⁷

However, career education in primary school must be developmentally appropriate. South West TAFE advised that encouraging young people to choose careers prematurely is inappropriate, as they are still forming their sense of identity and place in the world.¹¹⁸ It argued that primary school career education should instead focus on fostering:

- curiosity
- problem-solving
- communicating effectively
- critical thinking
- resilience
- lifelong learning.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴ Penne Dawe, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Centre for Career Education, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 16.

¹¹⁵ Master Builders Association of Victoria, *Submission 71*, p. 2.

¹¹⁶ Primary Industries Education Foundation Australia, *Submission 19*, p. 3.

¹¹⁷ Cameron Bowles, *Submission 23*, p. 1.

¹¹⁸ South West Institute of TAFE, *Submission 105*, p. 3.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

In its submission, South West TAFE further noted that:

Enabled by these skills young people will be able to identify and understand the reasons for in-demand industries and be more moved to pursuing careers related to those industries. That work needs to start in primary school and be built upon in junior and middle secondary school.¹²⁰

The Victorian Council of Social Service recommended engaging students from late primary school onwards, emphasising that ‘exposure to career pathways at such a young age should emphasise exploration rather than decision making’.¹²¹ Loddon Mallee LLEN added that ‘work readiness in older students is built on younger children building aspiration ... from primary school’.¹²²

The Committee acknowledges the Government’s commitment to secondary school career education and that the needs of primary students differ significantly from those of secondary students. However, the Committee reiterates the value of providing explicit, structured career education opportunities in government primary school and considers its absence a missed opportunity to build aspiration and support long-term engagement with in-demand industries.

FINDING 9: Career education delivered in primary school can build aspiration, broaden awareness of future possibilities and support long-term engagement with in-demand industries.

RECOMMENDATION 9: That the Victorian Government introduce career education for government primary school students, focused on exploration and aspiration-building rather than decision-making or work readiness and to actively counter gendered career stereotypes.

2.6 Conclusion

This Chapter examined how career education is delivered in Victorian schools to assess the effectiveness of the current system in helping students identify and pursue suitable education and career pathways. While the Victorian Government implemented a range of initiatives to strengthen career education, the Inquiry found that the shortage of qualified career practitioners continues to undermine the quality and consistency of career guidance, particularly in government schools.

The Chapter also explored how negative perceptions and stigma associated with certain education and career pathways influence students’ decisions. Although students’ choices are shaped by a range of factors, the Committee heard that parents

¹²⁰ South West Institute of TAFE, *Submission 105*, p. 3.

¹²¹ Victorian Council of Social Service, *Submission 130*, p. 11.

¹²² Loddon Mallee Local Learning and Employment Network, *Submission 54*, p. 15.

play a critical role in supporting their children's education and career decisions. The Committee considers that parents should be better supported with information about education pathways and labour market opportunities to enable them to provide informed guidance.

Finally, the Chapter examined opportunities to further strengthen career education, including the introduction of age-appropriate career education in primary schools. Through its recommendations, the Committee identified key areas requiring government action to improve career education and to encourage more students to pursue pathways into industries experiencing workforce shortages.

Chapter 3

Reforming student pathways to align with in-demand industries

Meeting the workforce demands of the Victorian economy requires students to be encouraged and supported to pursue careers in in-demand industries through clear and accessible pathways across the education and training system.

Throughout this Inquiry, the Committee heard that student pathways to in-demand industries are not always clear, coordinated or accessible. While Victorians have access to a wide range of education and training options, navigating these pathways can be complex. For example, individuals are often not supported to move efficiently from school into further education, training and employment.

This Chapter provides an overview of the current vocational education and training (VET) landscape in Victoria and examines recent reforms aimed at strengthening the existing system. It explores how current student pathways are aligned, coordinated and accessible, while identifying barriers that limit students' participation and progression. In addition, this Chapter examines the extent to which current pathways meet workforce demands and identifies opportunities for further improvement. The Committee has made recommendations to address barriers and improve the effectiveness of VET pathways.

3.1 Secondary school pathways reform offers a step in the right direction

For many students, the VET journey begins in secondary school. Ensuring that school-based VET is accessible and effective is therefore critical to supporting students in obtaining VET qualifications. The section below examines the reforms introduced to strengthen school-based VET, assesses their effectiveness and explores the barriers students face in accessing this form of training.

3.1.1 Recent reforms have strengthened school-based vocational education and training

In 2023, the Victorian Government reformed senior secondary schooling by introducing an integrated senior secondary certificate system that embeds a vocational specialist pathway within the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE). The reforms are based on education consultant John Firth's 2020 review (also known as 'the Firth review') into vocational and applied learning pathways in senior secondary schooling. The Firth review found that major reform was needed to set up young people for careers that

met the needs of the economy, and that this often involves vocational pathways in industries with a skills shortage.¹

From 2023, students studying for their VCE could include a Vocational Major (VM), which replaced the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL). The VCE VM is a two-year program that includes a Certificate II (or higher) in addition to units in literacy, numeracy, work-related skills and personal development skills. Students do not receive study scores or an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank and therefore it suits students who want to pursue Technical and Further Education (TAFE), an apprenticeship or employment after school rather than university.²

There is also the Victorian Pathways Certificate (VPC), which is a more flexible and inclusive option for students who are unable or not ready to complete the VCE or VCE VM. It can be completed over two years or longer and the coursework material is at a more accessible level than the VCE or VCE VM. It is only available upon recommendation by a school, based on a student's needs.³

Alongside the VCE, VCE VM and VPC, school students can undertake VET certificates as part of the VET delivered to school students (VETDSS) program. VETDSS offers certificates within 14 pathways, including six priority pathways in health, community services and early childhood education, building and construction, digital technologies, hospitality, events and tourism and renewable energy and engineering. The other pathways are automotive, agriculture and environment, animal care, salon services and cosmetics, design and manufacturing, creative industries, sport and recreation and business services.⁴

The Victorian Government told the Committee that participation in vocational pathways has increased since the reforms were introduced. It stated that in 2024, 477 schools delivered the VCE VM and 26% more students are choosing the VCE VM compared to the previous VCAL.⁵ Tony Bates, Secretary of the Department of Education, further explained:

Last year we had 55,162 students enrolled in a VET subject, marking Victoria's fourth consecutive year of growth in school students undertaking VET while still at school. We now have 31 per cent of year 11 and 12 students across all sectors—government, Catholic and independent schools—who are doing at least one VET subject as part of their studies.⁶

1 John Firth, *Review into vocational and applied learning pathways in senior secondary schooling: final report*, Melbourne, 2020, pp. 1–2.

2 Victorian Government, *About the VCE Vocational Major*, 29 June 2026, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/about-the-vce-vocational-major>> accessed 22 July 2026.

3 Victorian Government, *About the Victorian Pathways Certificate*, 29 June 2026, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/about-the-victorian-pathways-certificate>> accessed 22 July 2026.

4 Victorian Government, *Vocational Education and Training Delivered to School Students*, 8 July 2026, <<https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/vet-delivered-school-students/policy>> accessed 22 July 2026; Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, *Discover VET VCE subjects* n.d., <<https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/vet/shape-your-vce/vce-vet-subjects>> accessed 22 July 2026.

5 Tony Bates, Secretary, Department of Education, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

6 Ibid.

The Government also reported improvements in student retention and more positive student perceptions of their transition to further education and employment.⁷ The work done by the Government to prioritise senior secondary pathways and vocational education has been acknowledged by stakeholders, including Parents Victoria representatives.⁸

FINDING 10: Senior secondary pathways reforms introduced in 2023, including the introduction of the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) Vocational Major and the Victorian Pathways Certificate, have increased the uptake of vocational education and training (VET) in Victorian Government schools.

3.1.2 Barriers limit student participation in school-based vocational education and training

Students continue to face significant structural barriers when attempting to pursue vocational education, barriers that go beyond stigma and a lack of information. These include limited subject offerings, poor integration into school timetables, lack of staff support, and minimal opportunities for students to influence how vocational education is delivered. A meaningful increase in the uptake of vocational pathways will require a system-wide shift in how these options are presented, supported, and resourced, to highlight their viability as sound study and career options.

Victorian Student Representative Council, *Submission 42*, p. 7.

While the 2023 reforms have been a step in the right direction, the Committee heard that a range of barriers continue to prevent students from accessing school-based vocational education and training, including uneven VET access, timetabling constraints, course inflexibility and cost.

Not all secondary students have access to VET

Victorian students have inconsistent and sometimes limited access to vocational education and training pathways. Accessing VET was described as one of the core challenges identified in the Firth review that prompted the senior secondary schooling reform in vocational and applied learning pathways. During the public hearings, Scott Widmer, Deputy Secretary, Strategy and Secondary School acknowledged that:

The access was really variable across Victoria. Not all schools offered a vocational program and not all students had access to a full variety of VET, and the quality of what was being delivered was really variable.⁹

⁷ Tony Bates, Secretary, Department of Education, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

⁸ Gail McHardy, Chief Executive Officer, Parents Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 26 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 6; Carley Brennan, Director, Engagement and Partnerships, The Gordon, public hearing, Geelong, 26 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 6.

⁹ Scott Widmer, Deputy Secretary, Strategy and Secondary School Reform, Department of Education, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 4.

The Victorian Government currently funds 36 VET clusters, place-based secondary school networks that collaborate with employers, industry, TAFEs and Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) to increase school students' access to VET. With the assistance of Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs), these clusters:

- coordinate student access and facilitate shared provision of VET among schools
- streamline administrative requirements of VET for member schools
- respond to student demand, local needs and opportunities to expand VET.¹⁰

All government secondary schools are assigned to a VET cluster and encouraged to participate and work with their cluster to ensure availability of VET in priority industry areas.¹¹ The Government explained that the Department of Education is 'working with the LLENs to ensure all government schools receive the benefit of being a member' of a VET cluster, including by:

[D]esigning a single digital platform that allows schools and VET providers to complete key stages in provision including provision planning, pathways counselling and course selection, application and enrolment processes and monitoring of student participation and VET delivery. Accompanying this platform is a framework called the VET Delivered to School Students (VDSS) Lifecycle, which will serve as a guide for schools, clusters and providers, ensuring consistency and alignment across the VDSS system.¹²

However, the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions stated that 'one of the particular challenges that regional and rural students face is access to VET because of distance.'¹³ This was reinforced by some of the young people who participated in this Inquiry. For instance, Gippsland-based Youth Associate Harlequin Goodes stated that 'there are young people who I interviewed who never had the choice to do VET because they could not keep going to high school because they could not physically access a high school within two hours of their home.'¹⁴ The challenges faced by students living in regional Victoria will be further discussed in Chapter 4.

In addition, school career practitioners with the Australian Education Union highlighted that there is 'lack of sufficient funding for schools to partner with enough VET clusters to meet the needs of their students.'¹⁵ Similarly, Independent Schools Victoria and the Independent Education Union stated there is a need for increased resourcing, staffing and funding across all school sectors to support consistent delivery.¹⁶

10 Victorian Government, *Vocational education and training clusters*, 21 July 2025, <<https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/vocational-education-training-clusters/print-all>> accessed 7 April 2026.

11 Ibid.

12 Victorian Government, *Submission 136*, p. 35.

13 Scott Widmer, Deputy Secretary, Strategy and Secondary School Reform, Department of Education, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 4.

14 Harlequin Goodes, Youth Associate, public hearing, Melbourne, 21 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 10.

15 Australian Education Union, *Submission 123*, p. 13.

16 Independent Schools Victoria, *Submission 108*, p. 6.

FINDING 11: Despite the existing vocational education and training (VET) clusters, access to VET in government schools remains uneven across Victoria.

Timetabling issues and costs are limiting access to VET

The Committee heard that timetabling issues are common, making VET non-viable for many students. As John Flett, Director of Strategy, Research and Clean Economy Initiatives at South West Institute of TAFE explained:

For the VET delivered in secondary school programs, timetabling is really challenging, because there is only one day a week that the schools will let them come. Then we have got to try and fit everybody in on that one day, whereas if we could spread the load over four or five days a week, it would be much easier for us.¹⁷

Other witnesses continued to highlight scheduling conflicts between academic subjects and vocational training opportunities and recommended a ‘sector approach policy framework that supports timetable adjustments for students enrolled in in-demand VET programs’.¹⁸

A lack of course flexibility further restricts student participation. The Gordon Institute of TAFE (The Gordon) noted VETDSS programs often cannot be changed midstream, meaning students who disengage have limited ability to transfer into more suitable courses.¹⁹ It recommended introducing more flexible entry points and exposing students to VET earlier through taster programs.²⁰

Stakeholders also argued that traditional school curriculum structures are affecting the potential of the VCE VM. According to Charlotte Bracey, Programs Coordinator at You thrive Victoria, the program has an incredible potential, however:

If you look at how the curriculum is written, these personal development projects and the community development projects are amazing. It is just allowing the schools to break the traditional structure and actually do them, not fit them in the same timetable that they are fitting everything else in and not structure it in the same way.²¹

The Committee acknowledges the current timetable structure is not suitable for programs like VET and more flexibility should be considered to accommodate programs involving VET students.

¹⁷ John Flett, Director, Strategy, Research and Clean Economy Initiatives, South West Institute of TAFE, public hearing, Warrnambool, 25 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

¹⁸ South West Institute of TAFE, *Submission 105*, p. 9; Victorian Student Representative Council, *Submission 42*, p. 1.

¹⁹ The Gordon Institute of TAFE, *Submission 81*, pp. 5, 11.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

²¹ Charlotte Bracey, Programs Coordinator, You thrive Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 20.

Another issue identified during this Inquiry to access VET is the cost associated with participation in these programs. The Victorian Government explained it ‘provides funding to government schools to cover the cost of VET tuition and materials, so costs are not a barrier for student access’.²² At a public hearing, Scott Widmer, Deputy Secretary for Strategy and Secondary School Reform at Department of Education, explained:

Around 13,000 students have been supported to access VET that they otherwise would not have been able to get access to ... One of the key things that has happened over these reforms is that access to VET certificates and access to the materials that students need to participate—we call them VET materials—has been made cost-free to parents and families, and that has made a really significant difference in students being able to access VET certificates.²³

However, stakeholders including the Youth Affairs Council Victoria noted that transport, accommodation and materials associated with students’ fields remain a significant barrier for students.²⁴ As Gary Workman from the Apprenticeship Employment Network explained, ‘when it comes to VET in school programs, again the school or the VET provider is looking for the individual or the parents to pay the shortfall and costs’.²⁵

The Committee believes more should be done to ease the financial pressure on students and families to facilitate access to VET. Cost should not be the deciding factor for students to enrol in studies, especially in courses linked to jobs in in-demand industries.

FINDING 12: Structural and coordination barriers, including timetable constraints, limited subject availability, indirect costs and inconsistent coordination across education providers, continue to limit school students’ participation in vocational education and training (VET).

RECOMMENDATION 10: That the Victorian Government strengthen vocational education and training (VET) coordination between schools, Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) and industry by devising a better conduit between the sectors. This may include the role of Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs), not-for-profit organisations and Group Training Organisations (GTOs).

²² Victorian Government, *Submission 136*, p. 32.

²³ Scott Widmer, Deputy Secretary, Strategy and Secondary School Reform, Department of Education, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 4.

²⁴ Youth Affairs Council Victoria, *Submission 98*, p. 11.

²⁵ Gary Workman, Executive Director, Apprenticeship Employment Network, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 63.

RECOMMENDATION 11: That the Victorian Government, through the Department of Education, work with schools and Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) to improve flexibility in the delivery of vocational education and training (VET) to school students, including:

- enabling block timetable models
- supporting schools to release more time for VET participation
- introducing more flexible entry points and opportunities to change courses.

RECOMMENDATION 12: That the Victorian Government consider reducing indirect costs associated with school-based vocational education and training (VET) by subsidising course-related expenses.

3.2 TAFEs and independent Registered Training Organisations are central to the provision of vocational education and training

Post-school VET, delivered by TAFEs and independent RTOs, plays a critical role in supporting transitions into employment, particularly in industries requiring technical and trade-based skills.

Stakeholders consistently emphasised the importance of a strong and accessible VET system to meet Victoria's current and future workforce needs. However, the Committee heard that post-school VET pathways continue to face challenges relating to capacity, funding, coordination and system design. These issues, and strategies to address them, are discussed in this section.

3.2.1 The challenges in delivering vocational education and training pathways in Victoria

Victoria is facing growing workforce shortages across sectors critical to our economic future. At the same time, there is the challenge of building a more diverse workforce, one that better reflects our communities and taps into the full productivity potential of our population. The Victorian TAFE Network is one of the most powerful levers available to Government to address these shortages, providing inclusive, high-quality training aligned to workforce needs.

Victorian TAFE Association, *Submission 72*, p. 3.

TAFEs form the backbone of Victoria's VET system, with the Victorian TAFE network comprising 12 TAFEs and four dual-sector universities.²⁶ There are over 90 TAFE

²⁶ Victorian Government, *Submission 136*, p. 13.

campuses across metropolitan and regional Victoria.²⁷ The Victorian Government explained that TAFEs ‘deliver training with practical, supported pathways into 80 of the top 100 fastest-growing occupations in Victoria’, including in in-demand industries such as:

- construction
- clean economy
- education and training
- health care and social assistance.²⁸

Through the Skills First program, the Government funds TAFEs and other RTOs to deliver subsidised VET courses. These include 450 accredited courses and over 60 accredited short courses.²⁹ Despite these initiatives, stakeholders discussed with the Committee the key challenges in delivering VET programs.

Free TAFE improves access to vocational education, but challenges remain

In 2019 the Victorian Government introduced Free TAFE, removing tuition fees from some vocational educational and training courses for eligible Victorians. Since then, Free TAFE has expanded to include over 80 courses with more than 60,800 students currently enrolled in a Free TAFE course.³⁰

Stakeholders consider the role of Free TAFE as crucial in supporting participation and alignment with in-demand industries. The Victorian Government explained that:

[T]he Free TAFE list, for example, and other high-priority courses subsidised through Skills First, are completely based on the work of the VSA [Victorian Skills Authority] and the priority qualifications so that all of those sorts of indicators to people about the kinds of qualifications that are more likely to lead to jobs are then reflected in those training opportunities that are better supported by government to really encourage people down those pathways, to respond to the broader economy and the job needs that exist.³¹

In May 2025, the Victorian Auditor-General’s Office (VAGO) found that, despite more than 190,600 students commencing a Free TAFE course between 2019 and 2024 and government expenditure of \$718.3 million on tuition fee waivers, there is limited publicly available information on participation and outcomes. Government data shows that 52% of students who commenced a Free TAFE course in 2019 and 2020 completed

²⁷ Victorian Government, *Find a TAFE*, 29 May 2026, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/find-tafe>> accessed 30 May 2026.

²⁸ Victorian Government, *Submission 136*, pp. 13–14.

²⁹ Victorian Government, *Skills First for training providers*, 13 July 2026, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/skills-first>> accessed 16 July 2026.

³⁰ Premier of Victoria, *Free TAFE: Bigger, better, guaranteed*, media release, 24 April 2026.

³¹ David Miller, Chief Executive Officer, Office of TAFE Coordination and Delivery, Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 13.

their course within four years.³² VAGO recommended that the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions publicly report additional performance measures, including four-year completion rates and employment outcomes.³³

Despite the lack of public data, evidence to the Inquiry suggests that Free TAFE has improved access to vocational education and training, particularly for young people who may otherwise be unable to afford study. According to the Victorian Council of Social Service, Free TAFE is an important incentive for attracting young people into community sector careers.³⁴

During this Inquiry, the Committee heard how stakeholders have different perspectives on how to improve the current program. For example, the Australian Centre for Career Education supports expanding Free TAFE into additional in-demand industries, while Federation University, The Gordon, Young Workers Centre and the Victorian Trades Hall Council called for Free TAFE to be strengthened through additional support for course materials, equipment, student services and apprenticeships.³⁵

However, some stakeholders emphasised that removing tuition fees alone is insufficient to address structural barriers to participation and workforce shortages. Community Work Australia stated that the increase in Free TAFE has resulted in:

- more students than available fieldwork placements
- pressure on staffing and resources, affecting the quality of teaching
- greater reliance on less experienced and less qualified teaching staff
- students starting diploma-level without the skills or knowledge needed to succeed
- too many graduates entering the workforce without being prepared.³⁶

Youth Projects similarly noted that transport costs, digital exclusion and housing instability continue to prevent some young people from enrolling in or completing training, while Uniting Vic.Tas and the Victorian TAFE Association argued that greater investment is needed in student support services, career guidance and providing information about training pathways. Industry and independent training providers also mentioned that Free TAFE funding should be broadened to better recognise the role of private and specialised providers in delivering training.³⁷

³² Premier of Victoria, *Free TAFE: bigger, better, guaranteed*, media release, 24 April 2026; Victorian Government, *Victorian training system – first quarter (Q1) 2024 overview*, May 2024, p. 3 <<https://www.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-05/Q1-2024-Training-System-Overview-%28final-for-publishing%29.pdf>> accessed 6 July 2026.

³³ Victorian Auditor General's Office, *Free TAFE: independent assurance report on program costs, participation and outcomes*, 13 May 2026, <<https://www.audit.vic.gov.au/report/free-tafe>> accessed 3 July 2026.

³⁴ Victorian Council of Social Service, *Submission 130*, p. 12.

³⁵ Australian Centre for Career Education, *Submission 93*, p. 14; Federation University, *Submission 100*, p. 12; The Gordon Institute of TAFE, *Submission 81*, p. 21; Young Workers Centre, *Submission 101*, p. 4; Victorian Trades Hall Council, *Submission 102*, p. 5.

³⁶ Community Work Australia, *Submission 90*, p. 2.

³⁷ Youth Projects, *Submission 94*, p. 4; Uniting Vic.Tas, *Submission 131*, p. 2; Victorian TAFE Foundation, *Submission 72*, p. 20; Civil Contractors Federation Victoria, *Submission 109*, p. 4; Independent Tertiary Education Council Australia, *Submission 120*, p. 7.

Completion rates remain a key challenge

The Gordon reported that '[e]nrolments in courses that pathway into in-demand occupations and high growth industries such as construction (electrical), advanced manufacturing (engineering) and health (community services and individual support) have steadily increased from 2022–2024'.³⁸

However, during this Inquiry, stakeholders emphasised that data on enrolment alone is insufficient to assess the success of the program because completion rates remain a key challenge. According to Justin Mullaly, President, Australian Education Union in Victoria:

Part of the promotion of the valuing of vocational education and training has to be in the context of not just enrolling but also completing ... I think that all of that is underlined by some chronic problems, and the biggest chronic problem is the amount of resources available both in our schools and in our TAFEs.³⁹

Jesuit Social Services highlighted that '52 per cent of students who commenced a Free TAFE course in 2019 or 2020 completed their course in a four-year period'.⁴⁰ They noted that the remaining non-completion rate represents a significant cost to both students and the Government and argued that 'ensuring increased uptake of foundational skills programs could ensure not only improved outcomes for learners, but more value from the government's investment in free TAFE'.⁴¹

It is important to note that there are various factors influencing completion rates and retention. For example, students decide to start a full course but only need to complete some units. Other students find work while undertaking a course and decide to stop their studies. Students can also decide to change careers mid-course. To address retention issues, microcredentials have been established to allow students to complete courses within a shorter timeframe. Microcredentials are discussed in detail later in this Chapter (see Section 3.6.2)

FINDING 13: Free TAFE has improved access to vocational education and training (VET). However, Free TAFE alone is insufficient to address structural barriers to participation and workforce shortages.

RECOMMENDATION 13: That the Victorian Government develop a reporting mechanism to monitor retention and completion rate of Free TAFE courses in Victoria and to inform the impact of the program on in-demand industries and to fully understand the movement of students across TAFE.

³⁸ The Gordon Institute of TAFE, *Submission 81*, p. 3.

³⁹ Justin Mullaly, President, Australian Education Union, Victorian Branch, public hearing, Melbourne, 28 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 36.

⁴⁰ Jesuit Social Services, *Submission 74*, p. 5.

⁴¹ Ibid.

Funding levels still represent major concerns for the delivery of VET programs

Despite the existing initiatives, funding levels still represent a major concern among stakeholders. The Australian Education Union explained that, with the exception of 2020, 'Victorian funding for VET has been the lowest or close to the lowest of any state or territory for more than a decade'.⁴² According to the union, this '[c]hronic underfunding has placed Victorian TAFEs under a great deal of financial pressure', and without proper investment in TAFE the Government will 'fail to provide the education and training to ensure we have a highly skilled and sustainable workforce'.⁴³ During public hearings, Justin Mullaly, President of the Australian Education Union, also explained that since the public education system is the lowest funded:

[I]t is no surprise that we find it hard to attract a workforce and keep them ... you cannot do that unless you have got a funding base, and we do not have a funding base in Victoria as it stands—to Victoria's shame.⁴⁴

To address this, the union called for the Government to 'develop a fair and transparent TAFE funding model that actually covers the cost of providing education and training'. This includes 'quarantining' at least 70% of VET funding for public provision through TAFE.⁴⁵

The Australian Services Union similarly emphasised the importance of the public provision of VET:

Overall, these skills and training needs must be state-funded. Training opportunities cannot be withdrawn when a private operator determines there is no financial benefit to be gained in circumstances where scale cannot be leveraged for profit. Public funded training is not a business opportunity. TAFE must remain at the core of skills and training for the jobs of the future, consistent with the National Skills Agreement commitment to TAFE at the heart.⁴⁶

The lack of funding also affects the opportunity for student placements. As Swinburne University of Technology explained during the hearing, '[o]ur base funding model does not include funding for placements for students, but ... there is often a dollar value attached to those placements'.⁴⁷

One of the issues identified regarding the shortage of funding is also linked to the removal of community service obligation funding. As Pam Jonas, Senior Adviser of the Victorian TAFE Association, noted:

⁴² Australian Education Union, *Submission 123*, p. 9.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁴⁴ Justin Mullaly, President, Australian Education Union, Victorian Branch, public hearing, Melbourne, 28 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 39.

⁴⁵ Australian Education Union, Victorian Branch, *Submission 123*, pp. 10–11.

⁴⁶ Australian Services Union, *Submission 110*, p. 8.

⁴⁷ Madelyn Bolch, Pro Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive, Vocational training and Training, Swinburne University of Technology, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 34.

Previously TAFEs were funded for community service obligation. It was specific funding that they received. That was removed a number of years ago. The community service obligation—the wraparound services for students—now sits under a broader funding bucket, in which case the discretion to use that is with the TAFE, and the discretion to use that is determined by the other pressures that they have for other community activities.⁴⁸

The Committee understands that the lack of funding can have a significant impact on opportunities offered to students, affecting the ability of TAFE providers to provide suitable services to students.

FINDING 14: Technical and Further Education (TAFE) courses play a central role in vocational education and training (VET) pathways aligned to workforce needs, but funding pressures and capacity constraints limit their effectiveness, including completion rates.

RECOMMENDATION 14: That the Victorian Government review the funding model for vocational education and training (VET), to reflect the full cost of delivering high-quality training for courses and provide more opportunities for industry-based training in in-demand sectors.

3.2.2 Registered Training Organisations play an important role in delivering VET

Independent RTOs play a crucial role in delivering vocational education and training in Victoria. Providers include for-profit, not-for-profit and industry-based RTOs. Felix Pirie, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Independent Tertiary Education Council Australia, explained the role of RTOs:

Independent RTOs are innately connected to industry, so they are businesses and they are part of the business community ... they are almost always able to engage directly with schools.⁴⁹

In addition, the Independent Tertiary Education Council Australia highlighted how the services provided by RTOs are ‘very agile’ and tailored to the needs of the employer.⁵⁰

Stakeholders noted that independent RTOs support the most enrolments from underrepresented student groups, including First Nations students and rural and regional students. This can be attributed to these providers’ abilities to deliver niche programs with smaller class sizes and tailored wraparound services.⁵¹ This topic will be discussed in Chapter 4.

⁴⁸ Pam Jonas, Senior Adviser, Victorian TAFE Association, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript for evidence*, p. 23.

⁴⁹ Felix Pirie, Chief Executive Officer, Independent Tertiary Education Council Australia, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 68.

⁵⁰ Sally Deane, State Policy Manager, Independent Tertiary Education Council Australia, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 69.

⁵¹ Independent Tertiary Education Council Australia, *Submission 120*, pp. 6–7.

Despite the role played in the community, the Committee heard representatives from the RTO sector expressing concerns on the changes made to the Victorian Government's Skills First program. RTO representatives claim these changes have resulted in students preferencing public providers. For example, the Civil Contractors Federation Victoria reported that the Government's Free TAFE initiative 'effectively excludes private and industry-led Registered Training Organisations from accessing sufficient funding support to deliver civil construction training at scale required by industry.'⁵² Noting that 'industry RTOs have deep experience and flexible delivery models', Civil Contractors Federation Victoria recommended extending Free TAFE funding to certain independent RTOs.⁵³

Dean Luciani, CEO of Westvic Staffing Solutions, highlighted how the Government should work together with RTOs and create more collaboration between schools and independent organisations:

Stop trying to be everything to everyone in the secondary schools and saying to the education department to worry about educating and to allow suitably qualified organisations to do the industry engagement, the mentoring, the job placement and then the ongoing support to lead to better completion rates.⁵⁴

Despite the role played by RTOs, stakeholders representing the sector believe there is a funding imbalance: '[a]cross Australia students at independent providers tend to receive ... around 11 per cent of total government funding. It is a very, very small proportion'.⁵⁵ According to Felix Pirie, the Government should focus on supporting students rather than focusing on the providers to assign funding:

Where it is a particular skill that is in need, one thing we have advocated for a long time is that government investment in skills training should be focused on students; it should be student centred. I think at the moment, where we are talking about how it should be centred on a particular provider type, it sort of misses the mark, because if you are a student in a community like that or a potential learner, you might be in a situation where the nearest fully subsidised or largely subsidised course is 2, 3 or 4 hours away, and you have got to drive to and from that on a country road—notoriously not very safe—each way.⁵⁶

FINDING 15: Independent Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) (including for-profit, not-for-profit, and industry-based RTOs) play an important role in delivering flexible and industry-aligned vocational education and training (VET), including to under-represented student cohorts.

⁵² Civil Contractors Federation Victoria, *Submission 109*, p. 4.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Dean Luciani, Chief Executive Officer, Westvic Staffing Solutions, public hearing, Warrnambool, 25 March 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 32.

⁵⁵ Felix Pirie, Chief Executive Officer, Independent Tertiary Education Council Australia, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 70.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

RECOMMENDATION 15: That the Victorian Government develop collaborative strategies with Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) to address shortages in in-demand industries.

3.3 Many in-demand jobs require students to complete apprenticeships and traineeships

Apprenticeships and traineeships are key pathways from education into employment. Combining structured training with paid employment represents a crucial way to provide a direct route into in-demand industries.

Apprenticeships take up to four years to complete and provide training in a skilled trade, such as building and construction, hairdressing, cooking, electrical and automotive. Traineeships take between one and four years to complete and provide training in a vocational area, such as business administration, childcare, IT systems or retail.⁵⁷

This section discusses issues with the current apprenticeship and traineeship system and identifies opportunities for increasing uptake.

3.3.1 Apprenticeship and traineeship participation and completion rates are declining

The Committee heard concerns regarding declining apprenticeship and traineeship commencements in Victoria. The Housing Industry Association reported that apprenticeship commencements fell by 32.5% in 2023–24, raising concerns about future workforce supply.⁵⁸

The National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) reported that apprentice and trainee contracts in-training have declined across all states and territories in the 12 months to 31 December 2025, with larger decreases observed in non-trade contracts in Australia.⁵⁹ Trade commencement contracts registered a significant decrease in Tasmania, Victoria and Queensland.⁶⁰ However, Victoria is one of the few states where non-trade commencement contracts increased.⁶¹

The NCVER also stated that, at a national level, around two-thirds of trade apprentices and trainees (62.9%) attended a TAFE training provider as part of their training.

⁵⁷ Victorian Government, *What is an apprenticeship or traineeship?*, 29 April 2026, <<https://www.apprenticeships.vic.gov.au/what-apprenticeship-or-traineeship>> accessed 2 July 2026.

⁵⁸ Housing Industry Association, *Submission 113*, p. 7.

⁵⁹ National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), *Apprentices and trainees 2025: December quarter*, 22 June 2026, <<https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/apprentices-and-trainees-2025-december-quarter>> accessed 17 July 2026.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

In contrast, most apprentices and trainees in non-trade occupations (76.2%) trained with a private provider.⁶²

In addition to declining commencements, stakeholders highlighted ongoing concerns about apprenticeship and traineeship completion rates. This is consistent with NCVER data showing that only 47.9% of apprenticeships and traineeships commencing in 2020 were completed within four years.⁶³ Angus Leech, Outreach Organiser from the Young Workers Centre, suggested that falling apprenticeship commencements and completions reflected unsafe and inadequately supported workplace conditions rather than a lack of resilience among young people.⁶⁴

Other stakeholders emphasised the importance of retaining students once they commence their apprenticeship or traineeship. For example, Rod Barton from ManpowerGroup Australia, explained:

We know that about 50 per cent of apprentices do not finish their time. That is a massive failure by everybody—by where they are working, for the companies, for the apprentices and for the economy. We get the kids to start, but we have got to find a way to keep them.⁶⁵

Gary Workman suggested that the cause of the low completion rates is that:

[W]e are putting far too much pressure on young people to pick a four-year qualification when they do not even really understand the industry or the career pathway ... think we are overtraining people and putting them into too many qualifications without giving them the real opportunity to explore what the world of work looks like.⁶⁶

He noted that Group Training Organisations (GTOs), which directly employ apprentices and trainees and place them with suitable host employers for on-the-job training, achieve significantly higher completion rates than direct employers. The higher completion rate is achieved even when accounting for disadvantaged cohorts including First Nations students, young women, people from culturally diverse backgrounds and people with a disability.

The Committee believes that understanding the trends on apprenticeship and traineeship commencement and completion rates is crucial to identifying ways to improve retention rates and incentivise young people to successfully complete their apprenticeships and traineeships.

⁶² National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), *Apprentices and trainees 2025: December quarter*, 22 June 2026, <<https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/apprentices-and-trainees-2025-december-quarter>> accessed 17 July 2026.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Angus Leech, Outreach Organiser, Young Workers Centre, public hearing, Melbourne, 28 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 15.

⁶⁵ Rod Barton, Lead, Government Relations, ManpowerGroup Australia, public hearing, Melbourne, 26 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 5.

⁶⁶ Gary Workman, Executive Director, Apprenticeship Employment Network, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 61.

FINDING 16: Commencement and completion rates for apprentices and traineeships have declined in Victoria since 2023.

RECOMMENDATION 16: That the Victorian Government develop new strategies to incentivise and support apprentices and trainees to successfully complete their training, especially in in-demand industries.

3.3.2 There are opportunities to improve access to school-based apprenticeships and traineeships

School-based apprenticeships and traineeships (SBATs) enable students to complete school while undertaking an apprenticeship or traineeship. SBATs combine part-time employment with training toward a nationally recognised VET qualification.⁶⁷

Ashleigh Nugent, Manager at the Learning and Development at Symal Group, told the Committee that SBATs can lead to real employment outcomes for young people, giving them the opportunity to explore a career:

We have seen positive outcomes through our school-based apprenticeship programs. When they come in through that program, what we are seeing is they are trying before they buy. And with that, when they join us as that first-year apprentice, in their second year, they are coming with that job readiness.⁶⁸

The Committee heard several successful stories about SBATs. For example, Robert Boucher, Principal of Swifts Creek P-12 School and member of the Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, described the story of one student and the importance of SBATs:

It has been fantastic for our kids. We had a little girl that in year 10 struggled to get to school. We worked with her intensively with our psych. That young lady signed up to a school-based apprenticeship in child care this year. That young lady led a whole-school assembly around a motor neurone disease fundraising activity. Her life has been forever changed because of the SBAT. That would never have happened if the Head Start program was not there.⁶⁹

The Victorian Government's Head Start program helps students in government schools access SBATs. In 2024, 1,558 students from 278 government schools commenced a SBAT through the program, and 77% remained in their training contract after 12 months.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Victorian Government, *School-Based Apprenticeships and Traineeships*, 26 March 2026, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/school-based-apprenticeships-and-traineeships>> accessed 17 July 2026.

⁶⁸ Ashleigh Nugent, Manager, Learning and Development, Symal Group, public hearing, Geelong, 26 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence* p. 11.

⁶⁹ Robert Boucher, Principal, Swifts Creek P-12 School, public hearing, Melbourne, 28 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 63.

⁷⁰ Scott Widmer, Deputy Secretary, Strategy and Secondary School Reform, Department of Education, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

However, other stakeholders raised concerns about the effectiveness and scalability of current programs. For example, school career practitioners with the Australian Education Union identified that Head Start is under-resourced and that Head Start staff are unable to keep up with the demand of students wanting to do a SBAT.⁷¹ Gary Workman believed that ‘the government in Victoria, whether it is the Head Start program or the vocational major—they are certainly a step in the right direction. I just think they are poorly implemented’.⁷²

Belinda Hudak, Principal of Mildura Senior College, highlighted the complexity in running such programs, while acknowledging the positive impact:

[T]he nature of SBATs is a little bit complex in the fact that you have the school involved, the employer involved, the apprenticeship network involved and the TAFE or the training provider involved ... [M]anaging of all of the training contracts plus how that impacts their VCE or vocational major program is quite complex in its nature ... Without the support of Head Start for schools to be that conduit, it becomes too hard for the schools to manage.⁷³

Other stakeholders spoke negatively on the effectiveness of Head Start. For example, the Apprenticeship Employment Network believed the Head Start program has ‘largely failed to deliver the scale or outcomes required to significantly lift school-based apprenticeship participation or completion’.⁷⁴ Despite the program’s intended objectives, implementation challenges have reduced its effectiveness. Key issues identified include:

- inconsistent implementation across regions
- limited access to Head Start services for some schools
- limited employer partnerships and mentoring support to help participants succeed
- administrative complexity and limited flexibility, making it harder for employers to participate.⁷⁵

Regional GTO Westvic Staffing Solutions likewise referred to Head Start as ‘a major failure across the board, and in particular in regional Victoria’ due to the program ‘clearly lacking the necessary employer partnerships, placement services, WHS [Work Health and Safety] qualifications and mentoring framework to be successful’.⁷⁶

Dean Luciani believed the program could be improved through the inclusion of GTOs in Head Start:

I think there is a perfectly willing and able and qualified GTO network in Victoria that can deliver these outcomes. In fact we were delivering these outcomes before the

⁷¹ Australian Education Union, *Submission 123*, p. 13.

⁷² Gary Workman, Executive Director, Apprenticeship Employment Network, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 64.

⁷³ Belinda Hudak, Principal, Mildura Senior College, public hearing, Melbourne, 28 November, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 63.

⁷⁴ Apprenticeship Employment Network, *Submission 20*, p. 6.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Westvic Staffing Solutions, *Submission 29*, p. 2.

Head Start program was introduced, we were specifically excluded from participation. To this day I still do not know what legal instrument was used to make that decision ... I welcome this inquiry and an opportunity to improve that moving forward.⁷⁷

He suggested that redesigning and reinventing the work experience program should be considered as a feeder into SBATs.

The Committee notes the conflicting evidence around the success of Head Start and believes the program should be reviewed to understand how it could operate more collaboratively, including working with GTOs, to improve outcomes for all apprentices and trainees.

FINDING 17: School-based apprenticeship and traineeship programs have the potential to strengthen pathways into employment. However, current approaches—including Head Start—are not delivering consistent or system-wide outcomes.

RECOMMENDATION 17: That the Victorian Government review and strengthen school-based apprenticeship and traineeship programs, consider expanding the role of group training organisations (GTOs), and ensure programs are adequately resourced to meet student demand.

3.3.3 Workplace conditions contribute to low apprenticeship and traineeship completion rates

Workplace conditions can discourage some students from undertaking or completing apprenticeships and traineeships. According to Alex White, CEO of the Victorian TAFE Association, low wages and poor work conditions are the main reason apprentices drop out in their first year:

The vast majority of apprentices who do not complete their apprenticeship drop out in their first year, and it is caused by either low wages or working conditions. Those are two things that TAFEs cannot change; the employer or the industry needs to change. Paying a living wage would be great, and having safer, more inclusive workplaces would have a real impact.⁷⁸

Amanda Threlfall, Assistant Secretary at Victorian Trades Hall Council, also told the Committee that many apprentices encounter poor work conditions:

Through our direct engagement with apprentices, the reason they are leaving their employment is not because of the educational experience. It is because of what is happening in the workplace, and often when they reach out for assistance, it is too late; they have already quit their apprenticeship. They often reach out as well with really

⁷⁷ Dean Luciani, Chief Executive Officer, Westvic Staffing Solutions, public hearing, Melbourne, 25 November, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 31.

⁷⁸ Alex White, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian TAFE Association, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 28.

complex and hybrid issues. They might reach out because they are experiencing wage theft, but it turns out there are also unsafe workplace practices; they are also being bullied at work. This is often their first job in the workplace as well, so if they are being empowered around their workplace rights, this will really set them up for their career, being aware of issues when they arise before they get to the stage where they have quit.⁷⁹

Stakeholders identified wages as part of the poor workplace conditions. Angus Leech, Outreach Organiser for the Young Workers Centre, relayed the inadequacy of apprentice wages:

If you are an apprentice that starts your apprenticeship a day before you are 21, you will be put on junior apprentice rates throughout the entirety of your apprenticeship. So that means you can be in the fourth year, 24 years old, making like \$16 an hour. I mean, I do not know how they do it, honestly—I do not know how I did it.⁸⁰

The impact of low wages can be particularly significant for mature-age people considering a career in the trades. Symal Group, a national construction and services organisation, stated that:

Low apprentice wages drive turnover and deter career changers, while insufficient subsidies leave employers carrying costs they cannot sustain. Mature-aged apprentices with families cannot survive on current wages, and some leave the profession entirely as a result.⁸¹

Since July 2026, apprentice and trainee pay rates have increased following new minimum wages increases, to \$1,004.90 per week or \$26.44 per hour.⁸² These changes were implemented after evidence for this Inquiry had been collected, and the Committee welcomes these reforms and hopes they will have a positive impact on apprenticeship and traineeship outcomes.

FINDING 18: Low wages and poor work conditions impact the uptake and completion of apprenticeships.

RECOMMENDATION 18: That the Victorian Government, in three years, review apprenticeship and traineeship commencement and completion rates before and after July 2026, to understand the impact of the new minimum wage legislation on apprenticeship and traineeship participation and completion.

⁷⁹ Amanda Threlfall, Assistant Secretary at Victorian Trades Hall Council, public hearing, Melbourne, 26 November, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 23.

⁸⁰ Angus Leech, Outreach Organiser, Young Workers Centre, public hearing, Melbourne, 28 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 19.

⁸¹ Symal Group, *Submission 135A*, p. 1.

⁸² Fair Work Ombudsman, *Apprentice and trainee pay rates*, n.d., <<https://www.fairwork.gov.au/pay-and-wages/minimum-wages/apprentice-and-trainee-pay-rates>> accessed 17 July 2026.

RECOMMENDATION 19: That the Victorian Government work with the Australian Government to reduce financial barriers to apprenticeships and traineeships, including by reviewing apprentice wage settings and incentives, and expanding financial support for apprentices in in-demand industries.

3.3.4 Employers need support to provide real workplace experience to students

Universities, TAFEs and unions told the Committee that placements, work experience and structured workplace learning help students build practical skills, build professional networks and improve employment outcomes.⁸³

However, the Committee heard that many students struggle to secure relevant placement opportunities because too few employers offer them. This can limit students' abilities to gain experience in their preferred industries, as highlighted by the case study below.

Case Study 3.1 '[W]ork experience is supposed to be where you want to work in the future, but how are students supposed to do that if no company wants to take them?'

“ I did work experience in year 10 for one week. I also did one where it was not my first pick. I spent weeks calling different companies, and every company just told me, 'Well, we don't do work experience. We don't do work experience.' And it was the same answer over and over and over again. I know a lot of my peers had the same issue just like me where they were left in the same spot, where they were just going to Chemist Warehouse or Woolworths and doing their work placement there, when work experience is supposed to be where you want to work in the future, but how are students supposed to do that if no company wants to take them? I understand it is a lot of extra work for that company to have a student on board for five days, but then it kind of gets rid of the whole point. If we are going to have work experience, then it is kind of important that we have companies who are willing to take on students. Or there are companies who would say, 'Sorry, we already have a student', so their max is one, and then that company is going, 'You have to find something else'. I think work experience is something that is great and I think it can really help students, but in its current state, with the lack of industries, I do not think it is really helping anyone.

Source: Hiwan, Student (VCE VM), Gilson College, Victorian Student Representative Council, public hearing, Melbourne, 28 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 11.

Swinburne University of Technology suggested that government funding could be used to encourage greater employer participation in student placements. It recommended

⁸³ Merri-bek City Council and Inner Northern Local Learning and Employment Council, *Submission 36*, pp. 4, 5, 7; Victorian Local Learning and Employment Networks, *Submission 24*, p. 3; Australian Education Union, *Submission 123*, p. 17; Gordon Institute of TAFE, *Submission 81*, p. 19; Swinburne University of Technology, *Submission 68*, p. 3; Victoria University, *Submission 87*, p. 4.

that ‘any funding to industry should also require that a certain number of student placements are taken on per year, attached to a university or TAFE qualification’.⁸⁴

Other participants said employers may need financial support or incentives because hosting students can involve costs, supervision time and compliance requirements. National Disability Services, the peak body for disability service organisations, stated:

To be able to provide student placements and traineeship opportunities in in-demand industries like the disability sector, there is a need to introduce employer incentives. This will allow employers to host placements and fund supervision costs. In addition, financial supports to offset compliance costs, including NDIS Worker Screening Checks, should be considered.⁸⁵

Darren Gray, the Pro Vice-Chancellor of VET and Pathways, and CEO of TAFE at Federation University, similarly suggested:

[I]ncentivising ... local employers to take students for placements, whether there is some sort of incentive that could be implemented to assist with that similar to the apprenticeship and traineeship model where there might even be payroll tax exemptions to create an environment where there are those opportunities, particularly in the regional areas.⁸⁶

3.3.5 Providing apprenticeships and traineeships can present challenges for employers

The participation of employers is central to an effective apprenticeship and traineeship system. However, the Committee heard that many employers, particularly small- and medium-sized businesses, face challenges in taking on apprentices, including:

- the cost of wages, training and other employment-related expenses
- limited financial incentives to offset apprenticeship costs
- concerns about apprenticeship retention and completion rates
- employer obligations associated with supporting apprentices through training.⁸⁷

Dr Caroline Smith, the Executive Director of the Centre for Education and Training, Australian Industry Group, told the Committee that a survey of employers who engage apprentices and trainees found that 32% considered costs were too high in early to mid-2025. Dr Smith emphasised that while the members valued offering the programs, it was becoming ‘more costly for them to be getting involved in the system’.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Swinburne University of Technology, *Submission 68*, p. 3.

⁸⁵ National Disability Services, *Submission 51*, p. 6.

⁸⁶ Darren Gray, Pro Vice-Chancellor, VET and Pathways, and Chief Executive Officer TAFE, Federation University, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 35.

⁸⁷ Steven Wojtkiw, Deputy Executive Director Victoria, Housing Industry Association, public hearing, Melbourne, 28 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 50; Gary Workman, Executive Director, Apprenticeship Employment Network, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 65.

⁸⁸ Dr Caroline Smith, Executive Director, Centre for Education and Training, Australian Industry Group, public hearing, Melbourne, 28 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 42–3.

Similarly, Gary Workman of the Apprenticeship Employment Network told the Committee that a contributing reason to lower apprenticeship commencements in Victoria was the reduction of employer incentive payments that had previously encouraged employers to take on apprentices.⁸⁹ With employers not being financially incentivised, many could not offer apprenticeships.

Bianca Florent, Manager of Outreach and Future Skills in the Master Builders Association of Victoria, similarly stated that the Associations members identified the financial and time costs associated with supervising apprentices and trainees as a significant challenge.⁹⁰ For small businesses, the lack of time, resources, and compliance capacities represent major hurdles to enter the programs. Similarly, Steven Wojtkiw, Deputy Executive Director Victoria at the Housing Industry Association, noted '[t]here is a bit of a hesitation around whether they will get a return on that investment ... Then there is the paperwork burden'.⁹¹

The Committee heard that these challenges could limit the number of apprenticeship opportunities available to students. VCE VM student Meika Fenech noted '[o]ne big problem when trying to get an apprenticeship is that there are more people looking than there are jobs available', a view also expressed by other students.⁹²

Stakeholders proposed a range of measures to support employers to offer apprenticeships and traineeships:

- recognise and incentivise employers who implement successful programs⁹³
- provide Free TAFE for apprenticeships and traineeships⁹⁴
- assist with navigating administrative complexities⁹⁵
- maintain, if not expand, or better target the priority wage subsidy⁹⁶
- build on the GTO model and network.⁹⁷

FINDING 19: Structured workplace learning is valuable, but many students are unable to access placements because a limited number of employers participate.

⁸⁹ Gary Workman, Executive Director, Apprenticeship Employment Network, public hearing, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 65.

⁹⁰ Bianca Florent, Manager, Outreach and Future Skills, Master Builders Association of Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 28 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 49–50.

⁹¹ Steven Wojtkiw, Deputy Executive Director Victoria, Housing Industry Association, public hearing, Melbourne 28 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 49.

⁹² Meika Fenech, *Submission 7*, p. 1.

⁹³ Symal Group, *Submission 135A*, p. 3.

⁹⁴ Gary Workman, Executive Director, Apprenticeship Employment Network, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 63.

⁹⁵ Paolo Damante, Senior Policy Officer, Education and Training, Australian Industry Group, public hearing, Melbourne, 28 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 42.

⁹⁶ Steven Wojtkiw, Deputy Executive Director, Victoria, Housing Industry Association, public hearing, Melbourne, 28 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 50.

⁹⁷ Robyn Stevens, Chief Executive Officer, Symal Group, public hearing, Melbourne, 26 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 9.

FINDING 20: Some employers, including small businesses, struggle to provide apprenticeships and traineeships due to complexities of the paperwork, increasing costs, lack of time, limited resources and compliance capacities.

RECOMMENDATION 20: That the Victorian Government address the barriers of workplace learning placements by exploring ways to reduce compliance, adding resources and incentives such as financial assistance.

RECOMMENDATION 21: That the Victorian Government consider ways to support businesses in in-demand industries that provide apprenticeships and traineeships, including administrative guidance and targeted incentives.

3

3.4 Higher education is a key pathway to some in-demand industries

Higher education plays a critical role in preparing students for employment in many in-demand industries such as those in the health and education sectors. Victoria's higher education sector comprises ten universities (eight public and two private). Four of these universities are dual-sector institutions—RMIT University, Swinburne University of Technology, Victoria University and Federation University—delivering both VET and higher education qualifications.

Many participants in this Inquiry noted that higher education pathways are becoming more closely aligned with workforce demand, but highlighted that structural, financial and coordination challenges remain. This section focuses on the challenges faced by higher education in providing students with pathways to in-demand industries and identifies opportunities to strengthen the role of universities in this area.

3.4.1 Higher education is becoming more aligned with workforce needs

The Victorian Government explained it has made significant direct investments in the higher education sector to address critical workforce shortages, including incentives and support for Victorians to undertake undergraduate and postgraduate studies in in-demand industries such as health care, early childhood teaching and child protection.⁹⁸

Dual sector universities are developing programs in partnership with industries to co-design curriculums and strengthen links between education and employment. For example, Deakin University explained that 'every single one of our major program

⁹⁸ Victorian Government, *Submission 136*, pp. 42–3.

groups will have an industry advisory board whose role is to talk about the context of the curriculum in light of their discipline'.⁹⁹ Professor Iain Martin, the Vice Chancellor of Deakin University,¹⁰⁰ elaborated:

Many of our programs are professionally accredited, and whilst accreditation can be a two-edged sword, it is absolutely a validation by the profession that what you are doing is meeting the needs on the day.¹⁰¹

The Australian Catholic University (ACU) similarly explained to the Committee that:

[I]t is about ensuring that our curriculum is co-created with industry—this is over and above placements or accreditation bodies—and also starting to build authentic assessment tools into our courses.¹⁰²

Programs like these help students access opportunities in in-demand industries. ACU explained that its program 'guarantee[s] our graduates an interview. For instance, St Vincent's Hospital guarantee an interview for our nurses'.¹⁰³

Swinburne University of Technology reinforced the importance of industry connection arguing that 'education should not occur in isolation from the world of work' and recommending that 'any funding to industry should also require that a certain number of student placements are taken on per year, attached to a university or TAFE qualification'.¹⁰⁴

RMIT University discussed during the hearings how their 120 vocational programs are all co-designed with industry advisory committees:

As a university we have deep connections through all of our colleagues working across faculties and also through research. So there can be a range of solutions with researchers at the front end, and we are looking at what the impact is on the workforce for that.¹⁰⁵

Despite stating the importance of the alignment between higher education and industry, some stakeholders noted structural constraints continue to limit the responsiveness of the higher education sector. For instance, Deakin University noted there was a need to 'reduc[e] barriers to seamless training between universities and

⁹⁹ Professor Iain Martin, Vice-Chancellor, Deakin University, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 39.

¹⁰⁰ At the time of the hearing in November 2025, Professor Iain Martin was the Vice-Chancellor. He resigned from his position on 9 June, 2026.

¹⁰¹ Professor Iain Martin, Vice-Chancellor, Deakin University, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 39.

¹⁰² Professor Julie Cogin, Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic), Australian Catholic University, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 39.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Swinburne University of Technology, *Submission 68*, p. 4.

¹⁰⁵ Mish Eastman, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Vocational Education, RMIT University, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 35.

TAFE’ and advised that ‘one of the things that is missing is a systematic approach to engagement with students and building aspiration through primary school into high school’.¹⁰⁶

Deakin University also highlighted the impact of accreditation and regulatory settings, noting that ‘external accreditors vary in their approaches to course entry requirements, recognition of prior learning, counting prior professional experience towards placement hours and location of placement opportunities’.¹⁰⁷ During the public hearings, Professor Jessica Vanderlelie, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) at Deakin University, further explained:

One of the other barriers that we see is when accreditation bodies change the rules. That then means that we can no longer recognise RPL [recognition of prior learning] in some disciplines from TAFE qualifications in the same way. A good example of that was the recent changes to social work accreditation, despite the fact that we had longstanding agreements in place with TAFE partners that were proving beneficial and students were being successful. A blanket change can make a big difference to our capacity to support them.¹⁰⁸

Gregor Kennedy, a Deputy Vice-Chancellor from the University of Melbourne explained the role of the Australian Government in reducing some of the barriers:

If there was more federal funding for those places, we would be able to offer more places ... in areas like teaching and computing and engineering and nursing and education there is a way in which you can think about people more flexibly entering institutions at the graduate level. That is certainly one of the things I think we should be thinking about as a state.¹⁰⁹

The Committee is pleased to see all the work universities have put in place to align their offerings with in-demand industries. While stakeholders acknowledge some structural and regulatory constraints, university representatives believe that higher education is increasingly aligned to workforce demand through industry collaborations.

FINDING 21: The higher education sector is increasingly working together with industries to design curriculums to meet industry demands. However, some structural and regulatory constraints could be removed to allow flexibility and responsiveness to the workforce needs of the Victorian economy.

¹⁰⁶ Deakin University, *Submission 35*, p. 2; Professor Jessica Vanderlelie, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic), Deakin University, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 40.

¹⁰⁷ Deakin University, *Submission 35*, p. 2.

¹⁰⁸ Professor Jessica Vanderlelie, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic), Deakin University, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 44.

¹⁰⁹ Professor Gregor Kennedy, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, University of Melbourne, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 44.

3.4.2 Pathways between vocational and higher education remain fragmented

The roles of education institutions are already well defined in Victoria. Schools primarily provide foundational abilities, TAFEs develop practical, job-ready skills, universities foster scientific understanding and professional training, and graduate research generates new knowledge. The challenge is that pathways between sectors are fragmented.

Australian Academy of Technological Sciences & Engineering, *Submission 31*, p. 2

A 2024 report by the Australian Universities Accord and commissioned by the Australian Government, which included a 12-month review of Australia's higher education system, found that '[p]athways between vocational education and training and higher education are currently fragmented and misaligned, making navigation across sectors very difficult'¹¹⁰ and recommended that the Australian Tertiary Education Commission:

[A]ddress the appropriate diversity of tertiary education providers of varying size, shape, purpose and location to meet national and place-based needs, including by ... encouraging more cross-provision of VET by higher education providers, and vice versa, such that dual sector provision becomes commonplace.¹¹¹

In response, Jobs and Skills Australia released *Opportunity and productivity: towards a tertiary harmonisation roadmap*, which outlined ways to better align the higher education and VET sectors.¹¹² It explained:

Large numbers of students already move from VET to Higher Education and vice versa. Those pathways are not always easy to navigate, and appropriate credit for pre-existing knowledge and skills is often difficult to obtain. One of the aims of tertiary harmonisation is to make existing pathways more efficient, effective and easier to navigate, as well as encouraging more people to follow the pathways.¹¹³

Jobs and Skills Australia stated that a more closely aligned tertiary system could:

- make the system more efficient, effective and transparent
- improve equity and access for disadvantaged groups
- enhance productivity, address skill shortages and reduce unemployment.¹¹⁴

Stakeholders also said the system is difficult to understand. Associate Professor Emmaline Bexley, Academic Director at Widening Participation, at La Trobe University,

¹¹⁰ Australian Universities Accord Review Panel, *Australian Universities Accord: final report*, Canberra, 2024, pp. 12, 91.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 36.

¹¹² Jobs and Skills Australia, *Opportunity and productivity: towards a tertiary harmonisation roadmap*, Canberra, 2025.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 10.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 52–3.

described the system as a ‘bowl of spaghetti of the certificates and diplomas’.¹¹⁵ She emphasised that experienced practitioners found it hard to untangle pathways, and further highlighted structural barriers, arguing that ‘this structural hierarchy ... stands in the way ... of getting students through and then really ready to do the things in their field of interest’, particularly where institutional relationships are weak.¹¹⁶

Stakeholders emphasised the importance of smoother transitions across secondary education, VET and higher education. ACU recommended designing secondary and tertiary curriculums to complement each other, enabling students to ‘seamlessly transition from secondary to tertiary education (and through the workforce)’.¹¹⁷

La Trobe University similarly argued closer collaboration between education providers to ‘offer an unobstructed transition across vocational education and higher education’ would ‘ensure that even those who do not follow the traditional trajectory from school to further education are able to access further learning’.¹¹⁸ To support these transitions, the university recommended:

- developing joint initiatives between TAFEs and universities, including regional study hubs
- improving tracking and monitoring of student movement across sectors to better align provision with workforce needs.¹¹⁹

3.4.3 Dual-sector universities demonstrate the potential for integrated pathways

Dual-sector universities, which as stated earlier deliver both vocational and higher education qualifications, demonstrate the potential for more integrated pathways across the tertiary system.

Stakeholders noted that many in-demand occupations require skills delivered across both VET and higher education. Erin Johnston, General Manager of Group Sales, highlighted that many in-demand occupations require post-secondary qualifications from both VET and higher education, while The Gordon emphasised that ‘[d]iplomas achieved through [TAFE] can lead to pathway entry into a Bachelor degree’.¹²⁰

For example, Peter McKinnon, Executive Director of Growth and Student Experience at The Gordon, explained:

You can do your first couple of years of a diploma of nursing through the Free TAFE system and then pathway to—we have got arrangements with a number of—tertiary

¹¹⁵ Associate Professor Emmaline Bexley, Academic Director, Widening Participation, La Trobe University, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 45.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Australian Catholic University, *Submission 46*, p. 3.

¹¹⁸ La Trobe University, *Submission 119*, p. 1.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 2.

¹²⁰ Gordon Institute of TAFE, *Submission 81*, p. 12; Erin Johnston, General Manager, Group Sales, public hearing, Melbourne, 26 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

providers to get that last year in. As a young person, that is such a great option, rather than paying three years' worth of HECS, whether it is nursing, engineering or accounting. I think there is an opportunity to really promote those pathway programs, and we have got a number of arrangements in place.¹²¹

Universities told the Committee about the ways in which they integrate VET and higher education. Victoria University has a Pathway Guarantee, which enables students to transition from diploma-level VET courses into bachelor's degrees.¹²² Wayne Butson, Chief TAFE Officer and CEO of TAFE at Victoria University, told the Committee that students complete a TAFE program knowing they will have the opportunity to enrol in further learning:

Our students, even if they are only in a TAFE program and do not have any idea about going to undergraduate, can come back later and do it. We find a lot of that in nursing. But all our students say they go to university. That is a big difference. So when you are talking about the barriers and the difference with TAFE, our students see that they are doing a university qualification.¹²³

In its submission, Victoria University suggested the existing system could be strengthened by:

- developing reverse pathways from degrees to certificate IV and diploma levels
- embedding vocational credentials within degree programs
- co-designing courses with industry to develop skills that can be credited across qualification levels.¹²⁴

Professor Mish Eastman, Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Vocational Education at RMIT University, explained that completing a diploma at TAFE guarantees credit equivalent to the first year of a degree at RMIT University. She told the Committee that RMIT University has the highest number of students progressing from vocational education into higher education.¹²⁵

At Swinburne University of Technology, VET staff and higher education staff are connected, allowing VET students to meet their future teachers early:

For our VET students going into HE as a pathway, we have very connected staff between our HE schools and our VET ... Very early on in their study they meet the teachers that they would meet if they went into a bachelor degree. They get an early offer early in the year as a VET student: 'You can take up the opportunity

¹²¹ Peter McKinnon, Executive Director, Growth and Student Experience, The Gordon Institute of TAFE, public hearing, Geelong, 26 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 6.

¹²² Victoria University, *Submission 87*, pp. 4–5.

¹²³ Wayne Butson, Chief TAFE Officer and Chief Executive Officer TAFE, Victoria University, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 31.

¹²⁴ Victoria University, *Submission 87*, p. 5.

¹²⁵ Mish Eastman, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Vocational Education, RMIT University, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 30.

into a bachelor qualification if you choose with this amount of credit.’ And they are well-established pathways.¹²⁶

While education providers positively describe the opportunities to move between vocational training and higher education, other stakeholders report this transition to be more challenging. One of the key issues in the pathway between vocational training and higher education is the recognition of prior learning (RPL). Students must apply through their training provider for RPL, which considers your work-related training and skills, informal training, work experience and volunteer and community work to formally recognise prior experience and provide credits towards your education.¹²⁷ According to Pam Jonas, Senior Adviser at Victorian TAFE Association, RPL should be a priority to facilitate transitions between VET and higher education:

There is a new emphasis on RPL—recognition of prior learning—for people coming in to upskill or to reskill. The Productivity Commission recently raised the issue again. RPL has been around for a long time, but it has never sort of reached its zenith, if you like, so there is a new emphasis on RPL.¹²⁸

Additionally, evidence from the Australian Universities Accord, Jobs and Skills Australia and other stakeholders consistently points to systemic challenges, including poor alignment between tertiary education providers, inconsistent credit recognition and unclear and inconsistent progression pathways. The Committee therefore believes that, despite ongoing efforts to strengthen connections between the VET and higher education sectors, the pathways between them remain difficult for students to access and understand.

FINDING 22: Pathways between vocational education and training (VET) and higher education are fragmented and difficult to navigate, with inconsistent credit recognition and limited coordination between tertiary education providers, reducing the effectiveness of pathways to in-demand industries.

RECOMMENDATION 22: That the Victorian Government advocate to the Australian Government and work with Victorian tertiary education providers to implement a coordinated approach to tertiary harmonisation, including:

- reforms to improve credit transfer
- developing integrated vocational education and training (VET)-higher education pathways
- strengthening system-wide data on student transitions and outcomes.

¹²⁶ Madelyn Bolch, Pro Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive, Vocational Education and Training, Swinburne University of Technology, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 31.

¹²⁷ Victorian Government, *Get recognition for your skills, experience and past study*, 17 June 2025, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/get-recognition-your-skills-experience-and-past-study#recognition-of-prior-learning-rpl>> accessed 17 July 2026.

¹²⁸ Pam Jonas, Senior Adviser, Victorian TAFE Association, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 25–6.

3.4.4 Costs of higher education limit participation

Disciplines like health, technology, and trades will ask students to undertake unpaid or underpaid work experience in an attempt to get their foot in the door. But this is on the assumption that I can give away my time for free—I just can't. With transport costs, lost earnings, and being asked to purchase my own equipment or uniforms, such placements exclude students who just can't afford to pay for those things.

Darwin Smith, *Submission 6*, p. 2.

The Committee heard that young people consider cost-of-living pressure a key factor when deciding to undertake their educational journeys. The Young Workers Centre observed that:

Due to high living costs, ever-increasing course fees and the burden of junior wages, young workers are being forced to decide between what they want to study and what they can afford to study.¹²⁹

Several Youth Associates described to the Committee how the cost of tertiary education was a significant barrier preventing students from accessing pathways to in-demand industries. Atharva Nerlikar spoke about how finances were the second major barrier her interviewees had reported, specifically around the cost of tertiary education and accommodation costs.¹³⁰ Harlequin Goodes told the Committee that 'absolutely every single student, regardless of whether they were personally suffering with issues with money, had raised that'.¹³¹ Sienna Seychell stated that living at home helped alleviate financial burdens associated with tertiary education, but that was obviously not the case for all students, and regardless of living situation, that there 'is truly a massive cost-of-living struggle for all students'.¹³²

While initiatives, such as scholarships, do exist to alleviate financial pressures, the Australian Education Union noted that existing scholarships 'do not sufficiently address the financial barriers experienced by students while undertaking courses'.¹³³ Rowan Farren, a Youth Associate, had the same reflection, stating that '[s]cholarships were obviously a support, but there is a limitation to how much that can actually alleviate at times'.¹³⁴

3.4.5 Unpaid placements can cause significant financial burdens

A common concern raised by stakeholders was the financial burden associated with mandatory unpaid work-based learning. Many pathways to in-demand industries require extensive placements, including:

¹²⁹ Young Workers Centre, *Submission 101*, p. 4.

¹³⁰ Atharva Nerlikar, Youth Associate, public hearing, Melbourne, 21 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 4.

¹³¹ Harlequin Goodes, Youth Associate, public hearing, Melbourne, 21 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 11.

¹³² Sienna Seychell, Youth Associate, public hearing, Melbourne, 21 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 11.

¹³³ Australian Education Union, *Submission 123*, p. 5.

¹³⁴ Rowan Farren, Youth Associate, public hearing, Melbourne, 21 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 11.

- early childhood educators (160+ hours)
- registered nurses (800 hours)
- social workers (1,000 hours)
- teachers (60–80 days)
- occupational therapists (1,000 hours).¹³⁵

While stakeholders acknowledged that placements are necessary to ensure professional competency, many emphasised that the current model places significant financial pressure on students and deters their participation in education that requires placements.¹³⁶ Youth Associate Yesha Khandel described how financial pressures can shape young people's educational choices:

Another issue that was raised was the burden of unpaid placements and internships. For some, this made appealing careers not seem like a financially viable option. Because of the unpaid time that they had to dedicate ... financial pressure shapes educational choice just as strongly as interest or ability, and many participants felt that they had to be practical and cautious with the decisions, not because they lacked ambition, but simply because the financial risks just felt too high.¹³⁷

The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF)'s submission noted the impacts of unpaid placements for students, especially those who are allocated placements in regional or rural areas. In these cases, students face increased transport and accommodation costs and difficulty with access to public transport.¹³⁸ The ANMF stated that these financial burdens 'are deterrents for some people that would otherwise be attracted to working in this in-demand occupation'.¹³⁹

Similarly, Ngaweeyan Maar-oo noted that students 'may hesitate to pursue training paths that involve long periods of unpaid work and training'.¹⁴⁰ The Bendigo Association of Pharmacy Students wrote that its 'members have identified the financial pressure of unpaid mandatory placements as a major concern during their studies, and a factor in their decision to pursue certain degrees'.¹⁴¹ Amanda Threlfall of the

¹³⁵ The Gordon Institute of TAFE, *CHC30121 Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care*, n.d., <<https://www.thegordon.edu.au/courses/all/chc30121-certificate-iii-in-early-childhood-education-and-care>> accessed 15 July 2026; Nursing and Midwifery Board, *Fact sheet: scope of practice and capabilities of nurses*, May 2024, <<https://www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au/Codes-Guidelines-Statements/FAQ/Fact-sheet-scope-of-practice-and-capabilities-of-nurses>> accessed 15 July 2026; Australian Association of Social Workers, *ASWEAS guideline: guidance on field education*, Canberra, 2024, p. 3; Monash University, *Professional teaching experience at Monash Education*, September 2024, <<https://www.monash.edu/education/future-students/teacher-education/teacher-placements>> accessed 15 July 2026; Victorian Allied Health Professionals Association, *Submission 82*, p. 19.

¹³⁶ Australian National University South Asian Research and Advocacy Hub, *Submission 47*, p. 14; Victorian Allied Health Professionals Association, *Submission 82*, p. 19; VICSEG New Futures, *Submission 89*, p. 20; Youth Affairs Council Victoria, *Submission 98*, p. 5; Federation University, *Submission 100*, p. 10; Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, *Submission 114*, p. 19; Australian College of Midwives, *Submission 124*, p. 5; Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation, *Submission 14*, p. 3.

¹³⁷ Yesha Khandel, Youth Associate, public hearing, Melbourne, 21 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 18.

¹³⁸ Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation, *Submission 14*, p. 3.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ngaweeyan Maar-oo, *Submission 132*, p. 22.

¹⁴¹ Bendigo Association of Pharmacy Students, *Submission 60*, p. 2.

Victorian Trades Hall Council told the Committee that, as students are often supporting themselves and not living at home, ‘to have an unpaid placement for weeks on end is just impossible, and it really acts as a barrier to going into training’.¹⁴²

The Victorian Allied Health Professionals Association described the impacts that unpaid placements had on students, which are detailed in the case study below.

Case Study 3.2 ‘[T]here’s a point where ... the money dries up’

“ [A]n Occupational Therapy student, Arabella Hely, talks about her financial struggles whilst undertaking her unpaid clinical placement and the impact it had on her: “For my last placement, I wasn’t working at all for those four weeks, and I really financially struggled” and “I was having to reach out to family for support and reach out to the university student wellbeing [team] so I was able to get vouchers to pay for things like fuel and groceries.”

The article also talks about a Physiotherapy student, Bree Harris, and how her strategy for minimising the financial hit of her placements was to save up as much as she could beforehand, indicating: “In the lead-up to placement, I was working three jobs” and “I worked as a massage therapist ... across two clinics and then I’ve been working a night shift at Woolworths just to supplement my income.” Further, she said that “You try and save as much as you can and try to make it go as far as it can. But there’s a point where ... the money dries up.”

Allied Health Professionals are not entitled to payment when undertaking clinical placements as part of their ... degree, which can result in placement poverty, and the lack of additional Government funding for additional Allied Health Professional students can have the effect of making ... degrees unattractive to students leaving school and going to University, thereby contributing to the shortages in many Allied Health Professions.

Source: Victorian Allied Health Professionals, *Submission 82*, received 10 August 2025, pp. 19–20.

Generally, stakeholders called on financial support for students whose education to work in in-demand industries requires placements. The Committee notes that there are some existing supports in place. In 2025, the Australian Government introduced the Commonwealth Prac Payment which provides \$338.60 per week to eligible students undertaking a mandatory placement as part of a bachelor’s or master’s degree in teaching, nursing, midwifery or social work.¹⁴³ More recently, the Australian Government expanded the eligibility to courses include courses in:

- clinical psychology
- physiotherapy

¹⁴² Amanda Threlfall, Assistant Secretary, Victorian Trades Hall Council, public hearing, Melbourne, 26 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 24.

¹⁴³ Australian Government, Department of Education, *Commonwealth Prac Payment*, 13 May 2026, <<https://www.education.gov.au/commonwealth-prac-payment-cpp>> accessed 3 July 2026.

- occupational therapy
- speech pathology
- paramedicine
- radiography
- pharmacy
- rehabilitation therapies
- audiology
- podiatry.¹⁴⁴

In addition, the Victorian Government has a grant program providing daily grants to teaching students undertaking a placement in an eligible remote, rural or specialist school.¹⁴⁵

However, while stakeholders viewed these initiatives as a step in the right direction, they highlighted gaps in coverage and recommended more financial support. The Youth Affairs Council Victoria (YACVic), the peak body for the youth sector and young people in Victoria, recommended the Victorian Government ‘[a]ddress student placement poverty by working with the Commonwealth to introduce support payments for youth work students undertaking unpaid placements’.¹⁴⁶ The ANMF recommended the Government ‘continue to provide student support payments that cover such course associated costs’.¹⁴⁷

The Bendigo Association of Pharmacy Students urged the Victorian Government, in collaboration with the Australian Government, ‘to consider measures that would alleviate placement poverty for pharmacy and allied health students’.¹⁴⁸ The Victorian Allied Health Professionals Association made a similar recommendation:

The Victorian Government needs to push the Commonwealth Government to expand the \$319.50 a week payment made during Nursing and Social Work students’ mandatory clinical and professional training periods to cover all Allied Health students undertaking a clinical placement as part of their degree. In the interim, the Victorian Government needs to provide such payment to Allied Health students.¹⁴⁹

The Committee appreciates the financial difficulties unpaid placements cause to students and agrees that solutions need to be implemented to reduce financial burdens. However, the Committee notes that the recent announcements made by the Australian Government cover these concerns.

¹⁴⁴ Australian Government, Department of Health, *Australian Government expands paid prac to strengthen Medicare*, <<https://www.health.gov.au/ministers/the-hon-mark-butler-mp/media/australian-government-expands-paid-prac-to-strengthen-medicare>> accessed 31 July 2026.

¹⁴⁵ Department of Education, *Pre-service teacher Placement Grant (PPG) program*, 14 July 2026, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/pre-service-teacher-placement-grants-program>> accessed 3 July 2026.

¹⁴⁶ Youth Affairs Council Victoria, *Submission 98*, p. 5.

¹⁴⁷ Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation, *Submission 14*, p. 3.

¹⁴⁸ Bendigo Association of Pharmacy Students, *Submission 60*, p. 3.

¹⁴⁹ Victorian Allied Health Professionals Association, *Submission 82*, p. 35.

FINDING 23: Financial barriers, notably unpaid placements, can limit participation and impact course selection in higher education to in-demand industries.

RECOMMENDATION 23: That the Victorian Government advocate to the Australian Government and work with higher education providers to reduce financial barriers by:

- increasing scholarships and financial assistance for students in in-demand industries
- supporting measures to offset placement-related costs such as transport, accommodation, and materials.

3.5 Meeting the state's workforce needs requires greater collaboration between industry and education providers

Over the past few decades, industry and governments as well as educational institutions and local communities have worked collaboratively and diligently to build highly skilled and talented workforces ... This collaboration and partnership has been a backbone of our prosperity, productivity and competitiveness and delivered benefits to metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria.

Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, *Submission 125*, p. 2.

Strong collaboration between education providers, industry and government is critical for ensuring student pathways are aligned with workforce needs. However, the Committee heard that engagement between education providers and industry is currently uneven and often reliant on local relationships rather than consistent, system-wide structures. This landscape contributes to fragmented pathways and limits the system's responsiveness to in-demand industries.

Work-based learning provides students with critical real-world exposure to in-demand industries. Common forms of work-based learning in Victorian government schools include work experience and vocational tasters, as well as structured workplace learning (SWL) and SBATs. Through the Victorian Government's School to Work program, local LLENs partner with employers, industry bodies and schools to broaden access to these opportunities.¹⁵⁰

SWL placements enable students undertaking the VCE, VCE VM and VPC to integrate practical, on-the-job experience with their formal studies. As with other types of work-based learning, students may self-organise placements or rely on school-based support, including career practitioners, with additional coordination provided through programs such as the LLENs' delivery of School to Work.

¹⁵⁰ Victorian Government, *School to Work*, 15 May 2026, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/school-to-work>> accessed 22 July 2026.

Stakeholders highlighted how work experience is a practical way to encourage students to pursue pathways to in-demand industries. For example, the ANMF, a trade union representing over 345,000 nurses, midwives and care workers, said sector-specific placements can help attract students to healthcare.¹⁵¹ However, while highlighting the importance of SWL, stakeholders raised concerns about the significant gaps in access and delivery.

Merri-bek City Council and the Inner Northern LLEN indicated that the evidence ‘underscores the disconnect where employers struggle to find suitable apprentices while students are not given the practical opportunities they need’.¹⁵² To address this, they called for ‘[s]tronger leadership from industry ... facilitated through better-resourced intermediaries like the LLENs’.¹⁵³ As part of this, they recommended mandating and funding an SWL placement for every VCE VM student, with significant investment directed to LLENs.¹⁵⁴ This would help provide students with ‘essential real-world experience’, and fix what the organisations call a ‘fundamental flaw’ in the VCE VM pathway.¹⁵⁵

Victorian Local Learning and Employment Networks (VicLLENs) similarly identified systemic limitations, noting ‘an overreliance on employer goodwill’ to provide students SWL placements ‘without remuneration or formal recognition’.¹⁵⁶ It explained this limits the ‘scale and sustainability of industry engagement’ and called for ‘[m]ore robust support and incentives for employers’.¹⁵⁷ The Australian Manufacturing Workers’ Union (AMWU) urged schools to promote participation in a broad range of trade careers, including advanced manufacturing, through targeted access to work experience.¹⁵⁸

Despite its importance, the Committee was told students have inconsistent access to work-based learning opportunities.

3.5.1 Many schools struggle to provide work-based learning opportunities

According to the Government, every year more than 70% of Year 9 and 10 government school students complete a work experience placement, meaning almost one-third miss out.¹⁵⁹ In 2023, the Government committed to securing an additional 10,000 work experience placements by 2027, particularly in the clean energy sector and other in-demand industries.¹⁶⁰ The Department of Education’s Natalia Garcia de Heer told

¹⁵¹ Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation, *Submission 14*, p. 2.

¹⁵² Merri-bek City Council and Inner Northern Local Learning and Employment Network, *Submission 36*, p. 4.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁵⁶ Victorian Local Learning and Employment Networks, *Submission 24*, p. 3.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ Australian Manufacturing Workers’ Union, *Submission 27*, p. 3.

¹⁵⁹ Victorian Government, *Submission 136*, p. 24.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

the Committee that the Department secured 3,000 of these new placements within the first year and a half of implementation, with LLEN support.¹⁶¹

However, several barriers limit the availability of placements. One such barrier described by stakeholders was the administrative burden for schools of arranging work-based learning.¹⁶² To reduce this burden, the Department of Education introduced a work-based learning application that enables schools to digitally manage work experience and SWL arrangements.¹⁶³ The application streamlines creation and approval of forms and reduces staff workload.¹⁶⁴ According to the Victorian Government, it has sped up the process of securing work experience placements, 'opening up much more time for careers educators to be focusing ... on supporting students with high-quality opportunities'.¹⁶⁵

Even so, availability of work-based learning remains uneven. The Australian Centre for Career Education (ACCE) told the Committee that 'the availability of work experience, particularly the range of work experience options, varies enormously and is very unequal'.¹⁶⁶ To help schools overcome issues they face forming partnerships and organising placements, the Government funds LLENs to work with schools and industry to coordinate work-based learning opportunities.¹⁶⁷ At a public hearing, the Government advised that in 2026 a new School to Work program was going to be implemented, giving schools an indicative number of supported student placements.¹⁶⁸ The program was launched by the Government in May 2026.¹⁶⁹ The Committee welcomes these changes with the hope the new program will address the issues identified during this Inquiry.

The Committee considers that meaningful access to work-based learning depends on schools having sufficiently qualified career practitioners to liaise with employers, find suitable roles, match and prepare students for those roles, and provide students counselling after their placements. This reinforces the Committee's recommendation to mandate and fund a minimum career-practitioner-to-student ratio.

¹⁶¹ Natalie Garcia de Heer, Acting Assistant Deputy Secretary, Senior Secondary Pathways Reform Taskforce, Strategy and Secondary School Reform Group, Department of Education, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 10.

¹⁶² Victorian Government, *Submission 136*, p. 6.

¹⁶³ Victorian Government, *Work-based learning*, 1 May 2026, <<https://www.schools.vic.gov.au/career-education/work-based-learning>> accessed 22 July 2026.

¹⁶⁴ Victorian Government, *School operations: work experience*, 11 May 2026, <<https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/work-experience/guidance/work-based-learning-application>> accessed 22 July 2026.

¹⁶⁵ Scott Widmer, Deputy Secretary, Strategy and Secondary School Reform, Department of Education, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 9.

¹⁶⁶ Trevor Black, ACCE President, Career Practitioner and Mathematics Teacher, Carey Baptist Grammar School, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 17.

¹⁶⁷ VicLLENs, *School to Work*, 2026, <<https://www.vicllens.org.au/school-to-work>> accessed 23 February 2026.

¹⁶⁸ Natalie Garcia de Heer, Acting Assistant Deputy Secretary, Senior Secondary Pathways Reform Taskforce, Strategy and Secondary School Reform Group, Department of Education, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 10.

¹⁶⁹ Victorian Government, *School to Work*, 15 May 2026, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/school-to-work>> accessed 22 June 2026.

FINDING 24: The School to Work program and the work-based learning application have made it easier for schools—supported by Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs)—to organise work-based learning. However, the administrative burden, limited placement availability, and insufficient access to qualified career practitioners means not all students can participate.

RECOMMENDATION 24: That the Victorian Government conduct a review of the new School to Work program in the next three years to assess the effectiveness of the program compared to the previous model.

3.5.2 Partnerships with industry can help provide work experience placements

Stakeholders emphasised that industry partnerships would help to provide work-based placements and encouraged the forming of such relationships. Stakeholders provided the Committee with many examples of successful cross-sector collaborations. For example, the Victorian Medtech Skills and Devices Hub is a ‘connection-based initiative designed in collaboration between a specific industry and education and training providers’.¹⁷⁰

Schools also need support to form partnerships with larger organisations. Samet Istar from the Australian International Academy of Education (AIAE), an independent school with multiple campuses, explained:

[W]e have informal partnerships with a lot of local businesses ... But having partnerships with bigger companies and multinationals ... in place ... for all the schools in this area, would be very important. Just to be able to tap into those big businesses ... we need support—maybe a round table or a networking event with schools and with commerce, industry and governments, state and federal, involved; some kind of a platform where the councils can get involved to organise some kind of a networking event where we can as school representatives engage, build relationships, meet these people and try to get partnerships in place ... It is just about exposure and networking. I think that is our biggest challenge.¹⁷¹

Other stakeholders echoed the need for stronger industry-school connections. Jaqui Van de Velde from the VPC said ‘[t]here should be partnerships between schools and local industries to expand ... work experience and mentoring’.¹⁷² The Careers Industry Council of Australia (CICA) recommended a local careers development fund to ‘enable partnerships among schools, TAFEs, employers, LLENs, and community organisations

¹⁷⁰ The University of Melbourne, *Submission 106*, p. 9.

¹⁷¹ Samet Istar, Board Member, Australian International Academy of Education, public hearing, Melbourne, 26 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 38.

¹⁷² Jaqui Van de Velde, VPC Education Consultant, Victorian Parents Council, public hearing, Melbourne, 26 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 10.

to co-design and deliver programs tailored to in-demand industries'.¹⁷³ This would 'facilitate work-based learning career immersion experiences and outreach to underrepresented groups'.¹⁷⁴

The Government acknowledged '[s]chools and employers need more streamlined ways to connect'.¹⁷⁵ It explained that it was 'exploring new channels for communication enabled by technology and effective partnerships between schools and employers'.¹⁷⁶ This includes the Department's work-based learning application, and its funding of LLENs to facilitate partnerships. VET clusters, which are discussed in Section 3.1.2, also aim to foster collaboration between schools, RTOs and LLENs, and to reduce the administrative burden placed on schools organising VET for their students.¹⁷⁷

Collaboration between industry and education providers is not only an issue for schools. TAFE providers experience similar challenges. Kathy Hall, Executive Manager of Education for South West Institute of TAFE, told the Committee the effort in building partnerships with industries: 'we try to embed industry into the courses ... It might be excursions, it might be where people come in and speak to the students. We have a speed dating type event for our graduates and industry to try and get them to connect'.¹⁷⁸ Her colleague, John Flett, the Director of Strategy at Research and Clean Economy Initiatives, provided one example in which South West Institute of TAFE 'delivering a meat project up at Stawell' with a large regional employer.¹⁷⁹

While the Committee heard of many productive collaborations, stakeholders also highlighted that industry engagement is inconsistent across the state and highly dependent on local relationships. For example, in the context of healthcare, the ANMF observed that '[s]ome but not all health services have a relationship with their local/regional VET provider'.¹⁸⁰

Pam Jonas from the Victorian TAFE Association argued that 'industry needs to own this problem ... it is probably more their problem than anybody else's'.¹⁸¹ She further noted that workplace experiences are critical in shaping student retention, and that industry has a key role in influencing whether students remain on a particular pathway. While the Committee cannot provide recommendations to industry directly, it encourages all in-demand industries to consider how they can better develop partnerships with education providers to ensure consistency across Victoria.

¹⁷³ Careers Industry Council of Australia, *Submission 48*, p. 5.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Tony Bates, Secretary, Department of Education, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 3.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Victorian Government, *Vocational education and training clusters*, 21 July 2025, <<https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/vocational-education-training-clusters/print-all>> accessed 20 February 2026.

¹⁷⁸ Kathy Hall, Executive Manager, Education, South West Institute of TAFE, public hearing, Warrnambool, 25 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 6.

¹⁷⁹ John Flett, Director, Strategy, Research and Clean Economy Initiatives, South West Institute of TAFE, public hearing, Warrnambool, 25 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 6.

¹⁸⁰ Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation, *Submission 14*, p. 5.

¹⁸¹ Pam Jonas, Senior Adviser, Victorian TAFE Association, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 27.

LLENs were widely identified by stakeholders as playing an important intermediary role in connecting students, education providers and industry. VicLLENs, a statewide network representing Victorian LLENs told the Committee: ‘LLENs and similar intermediaries play a vital role in bridging these gaps and should be further empowered to do so’.¹⁸² While noting variability between LLENs, Kylie Busk, Deputy General Secretary from the Independent Education Union, stated:

At their strongest they are actually the conduit between schools and local industry, and that is a really meaningful and well-developed relationship ... For anything that has got that partnership element, the time involved in actually maintaining that is significant, but at its best it works really, really well.¹⁸³

Stakeholders suggested that the coordination role of LLENs could be strengthened by increased funding, with Master Builders Victoria recommending specifically ensuring that funding is sufficient to provide ‘coordination support for work placements, site visits and industry taster sessions’.¹⁸⁴ The AMWU noted that short-term funding restricted the work of LLENs, and that funding needed to be stable and long-term.¹⁸⁵ The Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry also recommended that LLENs broaden their composition to include businesses.¹⁸⁶

In its submission, VicLLENs called for stronger, industry-led engagement and emphasised that LLENs are well-positioned to facilitate these partnerships.¹⁸⁷ As noted earlier, career practitioners are also crucial in helping students connect with in-demand industries. The Committee commends the work of LLENs and career practitioners in partnering with employers to provide high-quality work-based learning. However, it stresses the need to ensure both schools and LLENs are adequately resourced and supported to sustain and expand these partnerships, especially in in-demand industries.

The Committee welcomes the changes implemented by the Government on the School to Work program to create work-based learning opportunities for school students. However, as mentioned earlier in the chapter, these changes are too new for the Committee to evaluate the effectiveness of the new program at this stage.

Finally, the role not-for-profit organisations play as intermediaries was explained to the Committee. Beyond the Bell Great South Coast and the Neil Porter Legacy submitted that:

The current system places increasing pressure on schools to act as sole navigators of career pathways and industry connectors, despite being under-resourced to manage this role. In this context, not-for-profit organisations like ours play a vital intermediary

¹⁸² Victorian Local Learning and Employment Networks, *Submission 24*, p. 4.

¹⁸³ Kylie Busk, Deputy General Secretary, Independent Education Union Victoria Tasmania Branch, public hearing, Melbourne, 28 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 37.

¹⁸⁴ Master Builders Victoria, *Submission 71*, pp. 5–6.

¹⁸⁵ Australian Manufacturing Workers’ Union, *Submission 27*, pp. 6–7.

¹⁸⁶ Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, *Submission 125*, p. 8.

¹⁸⁷ Victorian Local Learning and Employment Networks, *Submission 24*, p. 2.

function—embedding real-world learning, building industry capability, and elevating vocational and applied learning to be valued alongside academic pathways.¹⁸⁸

FINDING 25: Partnerships between industry and schools are fragmented, limiting students' access to high quality work experience placements, particularly in in-demand industries and for smaller and regional schools.

FINDING 26: Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) play a role in engaging industry and co-ordinating work-based learning, including work experience.

RECOMMENDATION 25: That the Victorian Government support Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) or place-based organisations to meet the requirement for all year 9 and 10 students to complete a work experience placement. Priority should be given to partnerships with in-demand industries to facilitate work experience within these industries.

3.5.3 Tech Schools and the Vocational Taster Experiences program are also valuable opportunities for students

In addition to work experience, the Committee received evidence about the value of Tech Schools and the Vocational Taster Experiences program.

Victoria's 11 Tech Schools provide 'free, hands-on science, technology, engineer and maths (STEM) learning experiences to secondary students in their local area'.¹⁸⁹ Students remain enrolled at their schools but attend programs run at Tech Schools that are co-located within universities and TAFEs. These programs help them explore study and career pathways in priority industries including construction and health care and social assistance.¹⁹⁰ The Government is setting up five new Tech Schools by the end of 2026 with input from local schools, industry and communities.¹⁹¹

Arguing that many students are entering apprenticeships without 'adequate exposure to hands-on learning environments prior to commencement', TAFE educator Louise Devenyns and apprentice employer Andrew Van Gemert noted the importance of receiving practical training before choosing a trade:

We have found that students would be far better equipped—and more likely to thrive—if they experienced more practical, skills-based training akin to what Tech Schools offer, before making a commitment to a trade.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁸ Beyond the Bell Great South Coast and Neil Porter Legacy, *Submission 25*, p. 3.

¹⁸⁹ Victorian Government, *Submission 136*, p. 26.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Victorian Government, *New Tech Schools*, 1 May 2026, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/new-tech-schools>> accessed 22 July 2026.

¹⁹² Louise Devenyns and Andrew Van Gemert, *Submission 38*, p. 2.

Vocational tasters are a one-to-two-day experience that immerse students in one or more occupations or industries, supporting early exposure to and understanding of pathways.¹⁹³ The Victorian Government noted that:

Vocational tasters require longstanding supported partnerships and dedicated coordination, which schools, and vocational and applied learning providers ... often lack the resources and expertise to provide and sustain without central support and guidance.¹⁹⁴

To address this, the Department of Education is piloting a Vocational Taster Experiences program.¹⁹⁵ Beginning in Term 2, 2025, four TAFEs have been supporting up to 6,000 year 9 and 10 students to participate in ‘vocational explorers’ and ‘VET tasters’ in three priority sectors—building and construction, the clean economy and the care economy.¹⁹⁶ At a public hearing, Darren Gray from the Federation University—which offers both higher education and TAFE courses—praised the pilot:

We are seeing great take-up from the schools, but also significant feedback from the students and the schools on what this is meaning for potential pathways and also an opportunity for lifting the profile of VET within schools.¹⁹⁷

South West Institute of TAFE, one of the TAFEs delivering the pilot, also praised the Government’s Tech School and vocational taster programs.¹⁹⁸ However, it recommended preceding these programs with in-school activities that teach students what skills are needed and what industries are in-demand in their regions.¹⁹⁹

During the regional hearing in Warrnambool, John Fleet, Director of Strategy, Research and Clean Economy Initiatives at South West Institute of TAFE, explained the difficulties encountered with the implementation of this program:

[W]e have seen with some of the early Tech Schools that have been built around the state that having programs running in the feeder schools that link into what they will do when they come into the Tech School for a day or two is really important, really valuable. It makes that experience much more meaningful than if they come to the Tech School for a day and it is like ‘Great, it’s a day out of school’ and it is a ‘going to the show’ sort of thing. It makes that learning experience more extensive over a longer period of time.²⁰⁰

¹⁹³ Victorian Government, *Submission 136*, p. 23.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ Victorian Government, *Vocational taster experiences pilot program*, 6 May 2026, <<https://www.schools.vic.gov.au/vocational-taster-experiences-pilot-program>> accessed 22 July 2026.

¹⁹⁷ Darren Gray, Pro Vice-Chancellor, VET and Pathways, and Chief Executive Officer TAFE, Federation University, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 32.

¹⁹⁸ South West Institute of TAFE, *Submission 105*, p. 4.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ John Flett, Director, Strategy, Research and Clean Economy Initiatives, South West Institute of TAFE, public hearing, Warrnambool, 25 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 4.

The AMWU were more critical, arguing Tech Schools are ‘missing the mark’:

While modern Tech Schools expose students to robotics, 3D printing and production line design, these activities rarely link to actual jobs available in Australia. For example, 3D printing is often glamorised, yet jobs in this field are scarce and typically offer less stability and pay than traditional trades. Meanwhile, trades like fitting and machining offer highly skilled, secure careers involving similar design-thinking and problem-solving skills like CNC work, but students are rarely exposed to them. Tech Schools also frequently fail to explain what jobs the activities relate to, or what pathways lead to those jobs.²⁰¹

The Union recommended broadening the scope of Tech Schools to ‘prioritise practical, hands-on trade careers with clear job outcomes, rather than primarily promoting abstract or university-aligned technology pathways’.²⁰²

Stakeholders also noted rural and regional students have less access to Tech Schools. Corangamite Shire Council, whose local government area is in the south-west of Victoria, highlighted emerging inequities in Tech School access for rural students, and recommended assuring them equitable access ‘via digital delivery, outreach and rural immersion’.²⁰³ The Minerals Council of Australia (MCA) similarly called for expanding access to rural Victoria, noting ‘funding is limited for more rural schools to visit Tech Schools’.²⁰⁴ Regional access to work-based learning is explored further in Chapter 4.

Despite criticisms, the Committee considers Victoria’s Tech Schools and Vocational Taster Experiences program to be valuable tools for exposing students to the world of work.

FINDING 27: The Victorian Government’s Tech Schools and Vocational Taster Experiences program provide school students valuable work-based learning opportunities. However, as the Vocational Taster Experiences program is still in its pilot phase, not all students have access to its benefits.

RECOMMENDATION 26: That the Victorian Government evaluate the Vocational Taster Experience pilot on completion and, if positive, expand access to all year 9 and 10 government school students.

RECOMMENDATION 27: That the Victorian Government review Tech School programs and their links to industry to ensure they expose students to jobs in in-demand industries and teach them the skills needed to pursue these careers.

²⁰¹ Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, *Submission 27*, p. 4.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Corangamite Shire Council, *Submission 92*, p. 2.

²⁰⁴ Minerals Council of Australia, *Submission 66*, p. 6.

RECOMMENDATION 28: That the Victorian Government review Tech Schools placements and engagements in regional Victoria, to ensure all students have access regardless of where they live.

3.6 Lifelong learning will become increasingly important in a rapidly changing economy

In an economy looking to adapt, change and develop new industries brought about by fast paced automation and technological change, our future industries will need employees with new skillsets and capabilities. This will require significant investments in re-skilling and up-skilling.

Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, *Submission 125*, p. 9.

The demands of the rapidly changing labour market will require Victorian workers to upskill and reskill throughout their lives. Ensuring access to high-quality, impartial career education beyond secondary schooling is therefore essential to supporting sustained participation and helping people transition into in-demand industries at all stages of life.

Lifelong learning was emphasised by many Inquiry participants. The Victorian TAFE Association emphasised that ‘workforce shortages cannot be met by the school-age population alone’.²⁰⁵ Similarly, RMIT University stated that ‘to meet the workforce goals for our local industries, we must look to broader up-skilling and re-skilling models to support more working-age Victorians into learning and work.’²⁰⁶

While lifelong learning is critical to addressing both immediate and future workforce demand, the Committee heard that current pathways remain primarily designed around linear transitions from school, including higher education and TAFE, to work.

3.6.1 Career services exist to support lifelong learning

Skills and Jobs Centres, run by the Victorian Skills Authority (VSA), provide important access to career services and support for all Victorians. There are 53 Skills and Jobs Centres across the state, typically located at TAFE or university campuses, offering free career, employment and training support.²⁰⁷ The VSA’s Deputy CEO, Lee-Anne Fisher, told the Committee that about 30,000 people access these Centres’ free services each year, while a further 1.3 million people access the Victorian Skills Gateway, an online resource that provides information about ‘where the jobs of the future will be.’²⁰⁸

²⁰⁵ Victorian TAFE Association, *Submission 72*, p. 6.

²⁰⁶ RMIT University, *Submission 95*, p. 2.

²⁰⁷ Victorian Government, *Skills and Jobs Centres*, 10 July 2026, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/skills-and-jobs-centres>> accessed 22 July 2026.

²⁰⁸ Lee-Anne Fisher, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Skills Authority, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 12–13.

Peter McKinnon from The Gordon, which hosts a Skills and Jobs Centre, told the Committee:

I think there is a perception that the Skills and Jobs Centre is only for Gordon students or people who are involved in the TAFE network. As we know, the Skills and Jobs Centre is open to all, so I think there is a real opportunity around seamless delivery ... People do not realise they can just walk through the door and get that support.²⁰⁹

While stakeholders spoke highly of the role played by Skills and Job Centres, they called for increased funding as well as clarity around their future role.²¹⁰

Learn Locals are registered not-for-profit community organisations that also support lifelong learners by helping them build foundational skills, gain qualifications and broaden their employment options.²¹¹ Over 180 Learn Locals receive Victorian Government funding through the Adult, Community and Further Education Board.²¹² Nina Bekker, Executive Officer for Adult and Community Education Victoria, the peak body for Learn Locals, explained that they offer pre-accredited training and taster courses in in-demand industries such as aged care, early childhood education, manufacturing, and construction.²¹³ She noted that for many young people leaving school without a clear direction, Learn Locals provide a valuable, low-pressure entry point:

A lot of young people come out of school not really knowing what they want to do, but once they have exited, they qualify predominantly for funding in that Learn Local sort of setting. Even if it is just connectedness to community in that local place, I think that is a really good start for some young people as well. It is coming and doing some of those tasters as well—just ‘I don’t know what I want to do’, ‘Let’s go and do a two-week course on early childhood and see what your thoughts are there’ or whatever it is.²¹⁴

She emphasised the need for the Government to increase public awareness and broaden community understanding of the many Learn Locals operating across Victoria.²¹⁵

Stakeholders from the community sector spoke highly of the role of Learn Locals. For example, the Youth Strategic Advocacy Group, a youth advocacy body on the Great South Coast, described Learn Locals as ‘an excellent soft entry opportunity to open doors into training’ but noted that the number of Learn Locals has declined over the past two decades and called for increased investment in the sector with a focus

²⁰⁹ Peter McKinnon, Executive Director, Growth and Student Experience, The Gordon Institute of TAFE, public hearing, Melbourne, 26 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 5.

²¹⁰ Victorian TAFE Association, *Submission 72*, p. 14; Carley Brennan, Director, Engagement and Partnerships, The Gordon Institute of TAFE, public hearing, Melbourne, 26 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 5.

²¹¹ Victorian Government, *Learn Local*, 19 February 2026, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/learnlocal>> accessed 20 February 2026.

²¹² Victorian Government, *About the ACFE Board*, 8 May 2026, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/ACFE-Board>> accessed 22 July 2026.

²¹³ Nina Bekker, Executive Officer, Adult and Community Education Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 73.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

on rural communities and vulnerable learners.²¹⁶ The Victorian Council of Social Service also argued for adequate, stable and sustainable funding of Learn Locals to enable long-term planning, high-quality service delivery and durable partnerships with local industries.²¹⁷

FINDING 28: Victorians benefit from ongoing career education throughout their lives, particularly through Skills and Jobs Centres and Learn Locals which support upskilling, reskilling, and transitioning into in-demand industries.

RECOMMENDATION 29: That the Victorian Government increase promotion and visibility of Skills and Jobs Centres and Learn Locals to ensure Victorians are aware of the career, training and employment support available to them.

3

3.6.2 Microcredentials and flexible learning models provide valuable opportunities for lifelong learning

Many stakeholders identified microcredentials, short courses and stackable qualifications as important for improving the responsiveness of the education and training system and supporting lifelong learning.

For young people, or those contemplating a career change, these smaller study units allow students to quickly and easily explore different study areas, supporting progression across multiple pathways. Lorna Mackie from genU Training, a not-for-profit RTO in Ballarat, noted that stackable microcredentials should support flexibility across industries. For example, by allowing students to complete common foundational modules, students could be exposed to a wider range of industries which would allow them to build skills without being locked into a single pathway too early.²¹⁸ Likewise, the ACU suggested that microcredential offerings could be used to support transitions into further education and employment, including through ‘bridging units or scaffold block learning’.²¹⁹

For those already working, microcredentials offer accessible pathways to quickly and easily up-date their existing skills or learn new skills in an in-demand area. Several stakeholders emphasised the ability of short-form training to respond quickly to changing workforce needs. Drawing on research from BuildSkills Australia, the national Jobs and Skills Council for the built environment sector, one submitter highlighted the importance of ‘agile development of microcredentials and skill sets’ and noted that ‘short, targeted courses can quickly address new skill needs ... without waiting for lengthy qualification updates’.²²⁰

²¹⁶ Youth Strategic Advocacy Group, *Submission 97*, p. 16.

²¹⁷ Victorian Council of Social Service, *Submission 130*, p. 18.

²¹⁸ Lorna Mackie, Director of Strategy, genU Training, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 56.

²¹⁹ Australian Catholic University, *Submission 46*, p. 3.

²²⁰ Name withheld, *Submission 49*, p. 3.

Similarly, the Australian Academy of Technological Sciences & Engineering emphasised the value of microcredentials in rapidly evolving industries:

In-demand industries such as AI, data analytics, and clean energy are quickly evolving. Employees in these industries can benefit significantly from short-term training and qualifications. Microcredentials that are designed to develop job-relevant skills can help teach in a fast-moving space and be integrated into existing qualifications or stand-alone certificates.²²¹

However, stakeholders also identified challenges to the more widespread uptake of microcredentials. DMTC (formerly the Defence Materials Technology Centre) emphasised that, in order to fully realise the benefits of microcredentials, 'greater collaboration and systemisation across both the VET and tertiary sectors is needed'.²²² NORTH Link, an independent regional partnership of industry, education and government in Melbourne's north noted that employers are increasingly seeking 'specific skills on demand' and highlighted the opportunity for education providers to deliver this through short courses, but indicated this requires stronger alignment between providers and industry expectations.²²³

The Committee believes that microcredentials and flexible learning models offer significant potential to improve the education system's responsiveness and to support lifelong learning for all Victorians. Despite this, they are not consistently integrated, recognised, or coordinated across the system, and there is significant scope for the Government to work with education providers to address this.

FINDING 29: Microcredentials and flexible learning models provide an opportunity to improve the responsiveness of the education system to the demands of the economy.

RECOMMENDATION 30: That the Victorian Government work with education providers to support the development of short courses aligned with in-demand industries. As part of this, recognition of microcredentials should be improved across vocational education and training (VET) and higher education.

3.6.3 There are multiple possible reforms to support lifelong learning

Beyond developing short course and microcredential opportunities, stakeholders identified other potential reforms to support a more flexible and responsive lifelong learning system. RMIT University emphasised strengthening connections between education and employment. It noted that attracting learners of all ages into in-demand industries requires both employers and education providers to adapt, including ensuring that:

²²¹ Australian Academy of Technological Sciences & Engineering, *Submission 31*, p. 2.

²²² DMTC, *Submission 58*, p. 2.

²²³ NORTH Link, *Submission 117*, p. 2.

- employers are prepared to hire and support graduates
- qualifications equip learners with relevant, job-ready skills.²²⁴

To support broader participation, including among mature-age and reskilling learners, RMIT recommended:

- developing more work-based learning models across Victoria
- upskilling existing workers through co-designed industry partnerships
- delivering short-form microcredentials and stackable programs.²²⁵

The Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry similarly emphasised the importance of system-wide flexibility. It argued that '[a] system of lifelong learning is crucial to building future skills' and recommended that the 'Unique Student Identifier model could be adapted to facilitate a lifelong learning approach'.²²⁶ In particular, it suggested the Unique Student Identifier could be used to recognise both formal qualifications and non-accredited training, including microcredentials, enabling a more comprehensive record of an individual's skills over time.²²⁷

Stakeholders also suggested improving RPL as another way to reduce barriers to lifelong learning. RPL was discussed earlier in the Chapter, in Section 3.4.1, where the Victorian TAFE Association noted an emphasis on RPL. Professor Sarah McDonald, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Student Experience at Monash University, told the Committee that she believed there was 'significant work we can do around recognition of prior learning', in terms of university admissions being more flexible to encourage more students (including lifelong students).²²⁸ The University of Melbourne stated similarly that '[a] higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enter university as non-school leavers, highlighting the need for ... recognition of prior learning'.²²⁹

Industry organisations also advocated for improved RPL to enable adult students to enter in-demand industries. Engineers Australia wrote in its submission that 'enhanced [RPL] would support workforce mobility and retention by opening new career pathways for experienced workers'.²³⁰ The Plumbing Industry Climate Action Centre also told the Committee that:

[T]here is scope to improve integration of the VET and University accreditation and [RPL] models, to allow student and credit transfer between the two streams of education. This would improve flexibility and fluidity to the overall training system.²³¹

²²⁴ RMIT University, *Submission 95*, pp. 5–7.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, *Submission 125*, pp. 3, 9.

²²⁷ Ibid., p. 3.

²²⁸ Sarah McDonald, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Student Experience, Monash University, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 43.

²²⁹ Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Indigenous), University of Melbourne, *Submission 86*, p. 2.

²³⁰ Engineers Australia, *Submission 91*, p. 6.

²³¹ Plumbing Industry Climate Action Centre, *Submission 85*, p. 2.

While not referencing lifelong learners specifically, the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre noted the fragmentation of recognition processes, and made a recommendation action to ‘harmonise recognition processes, and set up a national online portal for all information on skills recognition’.²³²

FINDING 30: Victoria’s education and training system is not yet fully equipped to support lifelong learning and re-entry pathways. This limits opportunities for workers to upskill and reskill in response to changing workforce demand.

RECOMMENDATION 31: That the Victorian Government develop a coordinated lifelong learning strategy that supports flexible entry and exit points across education pathways.

RECOMMENDATION 32: That the Victorian Government strengthen recognition of prior learning (RPL) and industry experience and improve the tracking of skills and qualifications across an individual’s working life, including through enhancements to the Unique Student Identifier.

RECOMMENDATION 33: The Victorian Government streamline the regulative burden and paperwork required for businesses to take on work experience, School to Work or other workplace assignments.

RECOMMENDATION 34: That the Victorian Government support businesses to become employer-ready by providing training and guidance to employers hosting work-based learning opportunities or student placements. This training should include comprehensive information on compliance requirements, documentation, and the legal responsibilities of businesses participating in these programs.

3.7 Conclusion

This Chapter has provided an in-depth analysis of the current vocational education and training landscape in Victoria, highlighting both the strengths and challenges of the existing system. It has made a series of recommendations to the Victorian Government based on the evidence gathered during the Inquiry.

The Chapter examined the impact of recent reforms in the sector and the barriers students face in accessing school-based VET. It also considered the role of TAFE institutes and independent RTOs in delivering high-quality training and supporting participation in industries experiencing workforce shortages. In addition, the

²³² Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, *Submission 118*, p. 4.

Committee has made a number of recommendations to strengthen apprenticeship and traineeship participation and completion.

This Chapter further explored the role of higher education providers in supporting Victoria's skills needs and emphasised the importance of fostering strong partnerships between education providers and industry. Finally, it highlighted the growing importance of lifelong learning and proposed measures to address the challenges identified by stakeholders, helping to ensure Victoria's education and training system is responsive to the demands of a rapidly changing economy.

While acknowledging the Victorian Government's ongoing efforts to strengthen the sector, the Committee believes that further action is needed to encourage greater participation in vocational education and training and to ensure that future reforms are aligned with the workforce needs of industries experiencing skills shortages.

Chapter 4

Tailoring support for job seekers from disadvantaged groups

Throughout the Inquiry the Committee heard that some groups face additional barriers to navigating career pathways and accessing opportunities in in-demand industries. This Chapter examines the challenges faced by:

- regional students
- girls and women pursuing pathways into male-dominated industries
- culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) students
- First Nations students
- students with disability.

Targeted supports are needed to help these groups navigate education, training and employment opportunities.

The Committee recognises that many students may identify with more than one of the groups discussed in this Chapter. These overlapping circumstances can create additional barriers to accessing pathways into in-demand industries. For this reason, as Western Chances noted, effective support should acknowledge ‘the whole person’ and respond to a student’s individual needs.¹ These types of services are described as wrap-around support and services. genU Training defines these services as ‘holistic support, programs and interventions for students facing disadvantage, disability, or disengagement to transition into vocational education, training and employment’.² In addition:

These services can bridge the gap between education and employment by offering personalised career coaching, mentoring, and capacity-building supports. Equipping students with foundational skills and guidance, these supports enhance their readiness for employment in high-demand sectors and reduce friction during the transition, increasing the chances of them being successful in their chosen vocations.³

The Committee heard that targeted and wrap-around supports can help students navigate education, training and employment pathways by addressing barriers that may not be captured by a single support program or intervention, especially for

¹ Western Chances, *Submission 22*, p. 2.

² genU Training, *Submission 111*, p. 1.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

disadvantaged groups such as students with disability or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.⁴ This Chapter includes recommendations on how to strengthen these services and how to provide better support to members of disadvantaged cohorts who wish to enter vocational and educational training (VET).

4.1 Regional students face geographic, financial and access barriers to pathways into in-demand industries

This is a pivotal moment to realign education-to-employment pathways with the lived realities of young people in rural and regional Victoria. By supporting scalable, evidence-backed models that centre community voice and regional leadership, the State can drive both equity and economic prosperity — now and for future generations.

Beyond the Bell Great South Coast and Neil Porter Legacy, *Submission 25*, p. 5.

As discussed in previous chapters, creating a solid network between schools, employers and local government is crucial for helping students transition from education to work or further studies. Professor Stephen Billett, an educational researcher at Griffith University, calls this '[t]he use of social partnerships'.⁵ This network is even more important when specific cohorts face additional barriers. For example, improving access to pathways into in-demand industries is important to support regional students and regional workforce needs, Bass Coast Health stated:

Like many rural and regional areas, we face significant challenges in retaining a skilled and sustainable staffing model ... The key to overcoming ongoing workforce challenges ... lies in structured and supported local pathways from school to vocational or tertiary education and into employment.⁶

The Committee heard that students from regional and remote areas face additional barriers accessing pathways to in-demand industries compared to students living in metro areas. These barriers include:

- lack of public transport
- financial pressures
- limited awareness of opportunities and pathways.

⁴ Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation, *Submission 14*, p. 3; Apprenticeship Employment Network, *Submission 20*, pp. 5–9; Victorian Local Learning and Employment Networks, *Submission 24*, pp. 5–6; genU Training, *Submission 111*, pp. 1–5; Trent Miller, Chief Executive Officer, Youth Projects, public hearing, Melbourne, 28 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 28; Jesuit Social Services, *Submission 74*, p. 5.

⁵ Professor Stephen Billett, *Submission 33*, p. 4.

⁶ Bass Coast Health, *Submission 116*, p. 1.

4.1.1 Transport barriers limit access to education and training

The Committee consistently heard that transport is a major barrier for regional students accessing education, training and employment pathways. In many parts of regional Victoria, public transport is limited, unavailable, or does not align with class times, work placements, apprenticeships or shift-based employment.

Infrastructure Victoria, an independent group that provides advice to the Government on the State's building needs, found that 90% of young people in regional Victoria cannot access their technical and further education (TAFE) or university by public transport. Even where services exist, long travel times can make participation difficult.⁷ Infrastructure Victoria concluded that improving public transport would 'improve access to education and help young people stay in regional areas' and that it would connect individuals to jobs in in-demand industries, filling labour shortages.⁸

Beyond the Bell Great South Coast and the Neil Porter Legacy, both not-for-profit organisations that collaborate with schools, industries and community groups to deliver regional education support, described transport as 'a critical barrier to accessing structured workplace learning, apprenticeships, and higher education'.⁹ Corangamite Shire Council noted that without access to a private vehicle participation in training or work placements is often impossible.¹⁰

Further, Martina Johnson, General Manager HR and Compliance for the Committee for Greater Shepparton, stated that many regional businesses operate early morning, afternoon or night shifts that do not align with available transport services.¹¹ Similarly, Kylie Busk, Deputy General Secretary of the Independent Education Union of Australia Victoria Tasmania Branch, explained that students in regional areas often face significant challenges travelling to workplaces, particularly when placements begin early in the morning.¹² Anne Murphy, a representative from the Youth Affairs Council Victoria, added that some students travel several hours each day to attend TAFE.¹³

Several more Youth Associates cited similar concerns. Shanay Gao-Kuhlmann, from Geelong, noted that public transport services were often indirect and extended travel time dramatically.¹⁴ Matilda Ryan, from Warrnambool, stated that 'most of the Victorian rural young people that I spoke to identified the importance that transport

⁷ Infrastructure Victoria, *Victoria's infrastructure strategy 2025-2055*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 56.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Beyond the Bell Great South Coast and Neil Porter Legacy, *Submission 25*, p. 8.

¹⁰ Corangamite Shire Council, *Submission 92*, p. 1.

¹¹ Martina Johnson, Direct, Committee for Greater Shepparton, public hearing, Melbourne, 20 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 10.

¹² Kylie Busk, Deputy General Secretary, Independent Education Union of Australia Victoria Tasmania Branch, public hearing, Melbourne, 28 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 39.

¹³ Anne Murphy, Representative, Youth Affairs Council Victoria, public hearing, Warrnambool, 25 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 26-7.

¹⁴ Shanay Gao-Kuhlmann, Youth Associate, public hearing, Melbourne, 21 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 24.

has on our careers'.¹⁵ She further observed that in some regional communities 'public transport is nil', making a driver's licence essential for accessing education and work opportunities.¹⁶

In 2023, the Victorian Government launched an initiative to address transport issues for students accessing vocational and education training (VET). The program provides transport options for VET students in regional areas by funding 18 Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) who organise buses, taxis and carpool options to take students directly to VET courses.¹⁷ The Government referenced this program during the public hearings, stating that:

One of the particular challenges that regional and rural students face is access to VET because of distance. Distance has proved to be a really significant barrier, and that is why the VET transport program that the government has invested in has made a huge impact. Around 13,000 students have been supported to access VET that they otherwise would not have been able to get access to. These are transport options that take students to and from VET.¹⁸

Anne Murphy expressed her support for the VET Transport Program. She told the Committee that:

[O]ne of the things that has been really supportive in this space of late has been the transport fund. My LLEN is Glenelg and Southern Grampians. Last year \$180,000 was actually put into transport students who were unable to participate and do their TAFE course in our region.¹⁹

However, she added that even with this funding, there was more demand for transport than available services could meet.²⁰

The Committee recognises the importance of accessing public transport for regional students seeking to access education, training and employment opportunities in in-demand industries. Evidence to the Inquiry suggested two priorities to address this problem:

- improving transport access
- expanding online access to education and training opportunities to reduce reliance on travel.

¹⁵ Matilda Ryan, Youth Associate, public hearing, Melbourne, 21 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 21.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Victorian Local Learning and Employment Networks, *Road to success: enhancing VET access for Victorian students through place-based transport solutions*, 7 June 2023, <<https://www.vicllens.org.au/2023/06/07/vet-transport>> accessed 23 June 2026.

¹⁸ Scott Widmer, Deputy Secretary, Strategy and Secondary School Reform, Department of Education, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 4.

¹⁹ Anne Murphy, Representative, Youth Affairs Council Victoria, public hearing, Warrnambool, 25 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 26.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 26–7.

Improving transport access

Stakeholders suggested improving transport access through a range of measures. The Victorian TAFE Association recommended further investment in public transport, including dedicated TAFE bus services to help students access training.²¹ Similarly, the Neil Porter Legacy proposed community-based transport options to support students travelling to work placements in regional Victoria.²²

Other stakeholders focused on the financial cost of travel. Youth Associate Shanay Gao-Kuhlmann stated that transport subsidies ‘will help all students in general, but be life-changing for rural and regional students’,²³ while the Australian Manufacturing Workers’ Union recommended transport subsidies to assist regional and low-income students to access pathways into in-demand trades.²⁴

However, the Committee acknowledges that while transport subsidies may help reduce the financial costs of travel, they would not address the broader transport challenges faced in regional areas, including limited public transport availability, infrequent services, indirect routes and travel times that do not align with education, training or work schedules.

FINDING 31: In many parts of regional Victoria, public transport is a critical barrier to young people’s participation in education, training and employment, particularly for those working in industries that require non-standard working hours.

RECOMMENDATION 35: That the Victorian Government review the VET Transport Program to ensure it is meeting the transport needs of students and supporting equitable access to education and training opportunities across Victoria.

Improving digital access and access to online courses

Stakeholders suggested that improving digital connectivity and access to online learning could help overcome some of the transport barriers regional students face. However, stakeholders noted that reliable internet access remains inconsistent in some regional areas. Beyond the Bell Great South Coast and the Neil Porter Legacy explained that ‘access to reliable high-speed internet at home is still inconsistent across the region’, which is ‘especially problematic for students participating in remote learning, TAFE coursework, or job applications that require online submission.’²⁵

21 Lizzy O’Shea, Head of Policy Reform, Victorian TAFE Association, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 29.

22 Matt Porter, Co-founder and executive officer, Neil Porter Legacy, public hearing, Warrnambool, 25 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 11.

23 Shanay Gao-Kuhlmann, Youth Associate, public hearing, Melbourne, 21 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 6.

24 Australian Manufacturing Workers’ Union, *Submission 27*, p. 3.

25 Beyond the Bell Great South Coast and Neil Porter Legacy, *Submission 25*, p. 9.

Some Youth Associates also recommended increased online accessibility. Rowan Farren believed that support should include ‘further accessibility, ranging from flexibility in studies to complete regardless of geographic locations, time availability and online/in-person availability’.²⁶ Atharva Nerlikar emphasised that it would be important to ‘[have] lower barriers to unloading university degrees and completing qualifications in a more flexible way. For regional and rural people, having more access to online courses.’²⁷

The Committee supports the idea that greater access to online education and training could increase flexibility and reduce the need for travel for some students. While online delivery cannot fully replace in-person learning, particularly where practical training or work placements are required, it may improve access to pathways for regional students.

FINDING 32: Reliable digital infrastructure and online learning can help regional students access education and training where local options are limited, but cannot replace in-person training, practical learning and placement.

RECOMMENDATION 36: That the Victorian Government work with vocational and educational training providers to assess what course components can be completed online and what must be in person, in order to review accessibility issues for regional students.

4.1.2 Limited awareness, training opportunities and placements in regional Victoria

Several stakeholders told the Committee that regional students are not aware of the possible pathways to in-demand industries and that sometimes these pathways do not exist. The Australian Manufacturing Workers’ Union noted that, despite strong interest in trades, students in regional schools have fewer opportunities to access programs, facilities and industry connections.²⁸

Stakeholders also highlighted challenges in exposing regional students to the full range of education, training and career opportunities. Beyond the Bell Great South Coast and the Neil Porter Legacy’s submission stated that:

Students often lack exposure to the breadth of available careers, particularly in local growth industries ... While schools deliver careers content, this is often concentrated in the senior years and may not be enough to shift long-held beliefs about what futures are “realistic” or “attainable.”²⁹

²⁶ Rowan Farren, *Youth associate final report: Inquiry into student pathways to in-demand industries*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 4.

²⁷ Atharva Nerlikar, *Youth associate final report: Inquiry into student pathways to in-demand industries*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 4.

²⁸ Australian Manufacturing Workers’ Union, *Submission 27*, p. 7.

²⁹ Beyond the Bell Great South Coast and Neil Porter Legacy, *Submission 25*, p. 9.

The submission also noted that regional schools can face constraints in subject offerings, specialised training and access to VET programs, as well as limited access to ongoing guidance and mentoring.³⁰

In addition, stakeholders identified limited local education and training opportunities as a barrier for regional students. Evidence highlighted the absence of university campuses in some local government areas and limited regional TAFE infrastructure.³¹ The Bass Coast Shire Council noted that its nearest TAFE campus had remained largely inactive since COVID-19, forcing some students to travel long distances, relocate or give up on training altogether.³²

The Committee also heard that access to placements and work-based learning opportunities can be more limited in regional areas. The evidence suggested that industry placements, traineeships and work experience opportunities are less readily available in some regional communities, particularly in healthcare, disability services and engineering.³³

To improve access to pathways, stakeholders broadly suggested that the Government invest in training opportunities in the regions as to increase options for students. The Bass Coast Shire Council said that '[r]eactivating Wonthaggi TAFE and investing in local pathways is essential to addressing the regional divide'.³⁴ The Independent Tertiary Education Council of Australia stated that 'there is a real need for governments to step in and say, "We'll support you," whether or not it is a particular student, just so that they are connected to their community'.³⁵ They emphasised that '[i]n regional areas that is more important than anywhere else; it is really fundamental, because we want to keep people in regions.'³⁶ Youth Associate Shanay Gao-Kuhlmann also recommended that 'for regional or for rural students, developing facilities to host VET would be of immense help in allowing them to participate in a trade.'³⁷

FINDING 33: Students in regional Victoria face barriers accessing pathways to in-demand industries due to limited local course offerings, fewer training and placement opportunities and lower exposure to pathway options and industry connections.

³⁰ Beyond the Bell Great South Coast and Neil Porter Legacy, *Submission 25*, p. 9.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

³² Bass Coast Shire Council, *Submission 127*, p. 1.

³³ Alana Ginnivan, Acting Assistant Secretary, Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation, Victorian Branch, public hearing, Melbourne, 28 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 57; Jacqui Van de Velde, Education Consultant, Victorian Parents Council, public hearing, Melbourne, 26 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 10; Carlene Egan, Senior Sector Support and Policy Officer, National Disability Services, public hearing, Melbourne, 20 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 3.

³⁴ Bass Coast Shire Council, *Submission 127*, p. 3.

³⁵ Felix Pirie, Chief Executive Officer, Independent Tertiary Education Council Australia, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 70.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Shanay Gao-Kuhlmann, Youth Associate, public hearing, Melbourne, 21 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 6.

4.1.3 Financial barriers associated with relocation

Stakeholders highlighted the financial burden of relocating to access education and training pathways in regional Victoria, where household incomes are generally lower than in metropolitan areas. Beyond the Bell Great South Coast and the Neil Porter Legacy explained that low household income ‘significantly correlate[d] with lower educational engagement and long-term attainment’.³⁸ Greg Haynes, General Manager, Service Delivery, from Gforce Employment and Recruitment said some young people in regional Victoria are unable to ‘commit to one of the pathways’ because of financial constraints.³⁹

Youth Associate Rowan Farren discussed the financial pressures and challenges associated with his relocation from Shepparton to Melbourne for university:

One of the fundamental challenges was that accessibility from a financial perspective. I was not able to really get anything from Centrelink. Scholarships were obviously a support, but there is a limitation to how much that can actually alleviate at times. A number of the young people I talked to just could not financially sustain either living down here or making the commute.⁴⁰

Another Youth Associate, Shanay Gao-Kuhlmann, who relocated to Melbourne from Geelong to study, emphasised ‘the financial issues [associated with relocation]. I know I moved out the moment I turned 18 to go study and I moved to Melbourne. It took me eight months to claim independency just so I could get Centrelink aid. Without that I simply would not be able to study.’⁴¹

Andrew McGuckian, the CEO of You thrive Victoria, stated:

We find that many of the young people we work with in more remote communities, whether it be for work or further education, are needing to relocate, so the cost involved in so doing and the disconnect from their home communities is a significant challenge. We run several scholarship programs, and what we hear through the application process repeatedly is, yes, the financial barrier is significant.⁴²

Similarly, Karen Linford, a representative for the Committee for Greater Shepparton, explained:

There are a lot of costs incurred of course, so middle-income families ... are really struggling. They have got children finishing school and wishing to undertake those sorts of qualifications and are finding that the costs associated with moving away – the living

³⁸ Beyond the Bell Great South Coast and Neil Porter Legacy, *Submission 25*, p. 11.

³⁹ Greg Haynes, General Manager, Service Delivery, Gforce Employment and Recruitment, public hearing, Geelong, 26 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 11.

⁴⁰ Rowan Farren, Youth Associate, public hearing, Melbourne, 21 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 11.

⁴¹ Shanay Gao-Kuhlmann, Youth Associate, public hearing, Melbourne, 21 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 12.

⁴² Andrew McGuckian, Chief Executive Officer, You thrive Victoria, public hearing, Geelong, 26 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 14.

expenses, petrol obviously ... as well – are all really meaning that their family budgets are really under pressure and that young people in our region are actually missing out on pursuing their chosen profession because of the cost of living.⁴³

The Committee consistently heard how the cost of relocating to access education and training in in-demand industries can be a significant barrier for regional students. While scholarships and other support programs are available, stakeholders indicated that many students continue experiencing the financial pressures associated with relocation.

FINDING 34: Limited local education and training options force regional students to relocate, creating additional costs that may restrict participation in education and training opportunities.

RECOMMENDATION 37: That the Victorian Government work with industries, TAFEs and regional organisations to improve access to pathways into in-demand industries for regional students, including aiding students who need to relocate.

4.2 Girls and women face discrimination in male-dominated industries

During this Inquiry, evidence was presented to the Committee regarding the underrepresentation of women in male-dominated industries. Biases against girls and women can lead to discrimination, limiting opportunities for this cohort to enter specific industries, including in-demand jobs. This section explains the challenges faced by girls and women in entering male-dominated industries and recommends actions that work towards reducing discrimination and bias.

4.2.1 Girls and women remain significantly underrepresented in male-dominated industries

The Committee heard that, despite record levels of workforce participation among women in Australia, women remain significantly underrepresented in traditionally male-dominated industries.⁴⁴ The Victorian Government identified structural workplace barriers such as:

- gender discrimination
- sexism and sexual harassment
- gender stereotypes

⁴³ Karen Linford, Representative, Committee for Greater Shepparton, public hearing, Melbourne, 20 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 15.

⁴⁴ Victorian Government, *Promoting gender balance in male-dominated sectors*, 23 October 2023, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/promoting-gender-balance-male-dominated-sectors>> accessed 19 June 2026.

- inflexible working arrangements
- limited access to paid parental leave.⁴⁵

The Committee heard that limited exposure to trade and technical careers, gendered career guidance and subject selection, a lack of female role models and concerns about workplace culture and safety continue to shape girls' career aspirations.⁴⁶ As a result, women account for just 11.5% of all trade apprentices and around 3–4% of the national construction workforce.⁴⁷

Women's Health in the South East (WHISE), a not-for-profit prevention agency for the health and wellbeing of women in the southern metropolitan region of Melbourne, also noted that these barriers are often compounded for women from regional, low-income and culturally diverse backgrounds, who may face additional challenges entering, remaining in and progressing through training and employment.⁴⁸ WHISE stated:

Within VET settings, women face exclusion, scepticism, and tokenism. Classmates and instructors may question their legitimacy, assign them lower-value tasks, or perpetuate sexist jokes and behaviour[...] These experiences, combined with a lack of female role models and mentors, contribute to significantly higher attrition among women in gender-atypical VET courses [...]⁴⁹

Alex White, CEO of the Victorian TAFE Association, provided a similar perspective:

[A] lot of women, particularly, who want to get into these male-dominated trades talk about the culture and the structural barriers that exist. They are not flexible when it comes to caring arrangements, whether it is kids or elderly parents. It needs a cultural mindset shift happening more broadly to facilitate that or to accept people who have got different needs and people with a disability or other requirements.⁵⁰

Polly Britten, a 2023 Churchill Fellow whose research examined opportunities to improve female participation in trades, emphasised that increasing women's participation in male-dominated industries is critical to addressing workforce shortages. Her submission also highlighted that labour shortages in trades are exacerbated by a lack of workforce diversity and the persistence of misconceptions about these career pathways.⁵¹

⁴⁵ Victorian Government, *Promoting gender balance in male-dominated sectors*, 23 October 2023, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/promoting-gender-balance-male-dominated-sectors>> accessed 19 June 2026.

⁴⁶ Australian Government, Department of Industry, Innovation and Science, *Advancing women in STEM*, Canberra, 2019, p. 21; Western Australian Government, Women's Economic Outcomes Senior Officials Working Group, *Workforce gender segregation in Australia: key findings from the expert consultations held in June and July 2023, Background paper*, Perth, 2024, pp. 3–5; Australian Human Rights Commission, *Women in male-dominated industries: a toolkit of strategies*, Sydney, 2013, p. 57.

⁴⁷ Jobs and Skills Australia, *Construction industry profile*, 7 April 2026, <<https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/data/occupation-and-industry-profiles/industries/construction>> accessed 20 June 2026; Department of Jobs and Skills, Industry and Regions, *Apprenticeships and traineeships pathways*, 15 December 2025, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/victorian-skills-plan-2023-publication/apprenticeships-traineeships-pathways>> accessed 19 June 2026.

⁴⁸ Women's Health in the South East, *Submission 104*, p. 4.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Alex White, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian TAFE Association, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 27.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 1.

FINDING 35: Women are underrepresented in traditionally male-dominated industries because girls are discouraged from pursuing careers in these industries and they have limited exposure to these careers. Other factors include the lack of visible female role models and concerns about gender discrimination and workplace culture.

4.2.2 There are a range of initiatives to encourage women to enter male-dominated industries

There are currently a range of government initiatives aimed at increasing the participation of girls and women in male-dominated industries across school education, VET and employment settings.

At the school level, programs such as trade tasters, career expos and industry engagement activities aim to broaden awareness of non-traditional career pathways and challenge gender stereotypes. For example, the Victorian Government's Trade and Tech Fit career expo provides female and gender-diverse students with hands-on exposure to trade and technology careers.⁵²

The Victorian Government also introduced strategies to support women's participation in industries such as manufacturing, construction and transport through initiatives that promote training opportunities, mentoring, leadership development and more inclusive workplaces.⁵³

Youth Associate Bianca Baldwin, who consulted young women exploring careers in construction and other male-dominated industries, explained to the Committee that participants identified barriers including gender stereotypes, limited female role models and concerns about whether they would be supported to remain in these industries over the long term.⁵⁴

Stakeholders emphasised that increasing participation requires support across the pathway from school to employment. WHISE highlighted the need for coordinated action across education, training and employment systems.⁵⁵ Jane Hosking, CEO at North Central LLEN, noted that women are not always well supported once they enter male-dominated industries and emphasised the importance of education providers, industry and community organisations working together to improve participation and retention.⁵⁶

⁵² Victorian Government, *Trade & tech fit career expo*, 25 May 2026, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/trade-tech-fit>> accessed 19 June 2026.

⁵³ Victorian Government, *Making it equal: Victoria's women in manufacturing strategy*, 2 June 2026, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/about-making-it-equal-victorian-women-manufacturing-strategy>> accessed 22 June 2026.

⁵⁴ Bianca Baldwin, *Youth Associate final report: Inquiry into student pathways to in-demand industries*, Melbourne, p. 2.

⁵⁵ Women's Health in the South East, *Submission 104*, p. 9.

⁵⁶ Jane Hosking, Chief Executive Officer, North Central Local Learning and Employment Network, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 54.

The Committee heard evidence from education and training providers about the importance of targeted programs, mentoring, role models and coordinated support to help women enter and succeed in male-dominated industries.⁵⁷

The Gordon explained in its submission that women are underrepresented in apprenticeships and traineeships across traditional trades, many of which are in-demand industries. In response, The Gordon implemented a range of initiatives to encourage more female representation. These include the Girls Leading Advanced Manufacturing program, which introduces high school girls to careers in advanced manufacturing and Girls Big Day Out, which also provides girls with hands-on trade taster experiences. The Gordon, which also recruits female teachers in vocational trade programs, partners with regional organisations to promote women in trades and emphasises the importance of female mentors, peer support networks and inclusive learning environments.⁵⁸

Additionally, Skilling the Bay's Geelong Tertiary Futures Program, a regional Year 9 career preview program delivered by The Gordon in partnership with Deakin University and education partners in the Geelong region, developed a video featuring girls in non-traditional career taster programs. The video was shown at all 13 government schools participating in the program to encourage other girls to consider careers in traditionally male-dominated industries.⁵⁹

Similarly, genU Training, a registered training organisation (RTO), emphasised the importance of collaboration between training providers, community services, education providers and industry to support women to transition from training to employment.⁶⁰ RMIT University highlighted several programs that support women to enter vocational education pathways, while noting that broader barriers to participation still remain.⁶¹ Swinburne University of Technology reported increased female enrolments in its online VET programs and highlighted the important role of flexible learning in supporting women balancing study, work and caring responsibilities.⁶²

RMIT University emphasised the role of sustained support to improve outcomes for women and girls. Through initiatives such as the Athena Swan program, which aims to remove workplace gender barriers for staff and the Women in STEMM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics and medicine) program, extending vocational

⁵⁷ The Gordon Institute of TAFE, *Submission 81*, pp. 7–9; genU Training, *Submission 111*, p. 5; Darren Gray, Pro Vice-Chancellor VET and Pathways and Chief Executive Officer TAFE, Federation University, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 32; Mish Eastman, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Vocational Education and Vice-President, RMIT University, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 32; Victorian TAFE Association, *Submission 72*, pp. 21–5; Apprenticeship Employment Network, *Submission 20*, p. 7.

⁵⁸ The Gordon Institute of TAFE, *Submission 81*, pp. 7–9.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁶⁰ genU Training, *Submission 111*, p. 5.

⁶¹ Mish Eastman, Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive Vocational Education, Swinburne University of Technology, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 33–4.

⁶² Madelyn Bolch, Pro Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive Vocational Education, Swinburne University of Technology, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 33–4.

education for female students, RMIT University implemented a model involving more than 200 ambassadors to support women entering and progressing through training pathways.⁶³ Yet while rates of participation among girls and women in vocational education are improving, broader systemic barriers remain, including gendered employment models and learning environments.⁶⁴

Similarly, Swinburne University of Technology also reported an ‘uplift’ in female enrolments in its online VET programs, with some students continuing into higher education.⁶⁵ Madelyn Bolch, Pro Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive Vocational Education at Swinburne University of Technology stated flexible, online learning improves accessibility for women, especially those balancing work, study or care responsibilities. Furthermore, Chris Ronan, former CEO of the Country Universities Centre, stated:

There are ... trends that we see of [women] in their late 20s and early 30s, for example who have had an existing career, usually have kids and are now looking to transition or to change. Having a place where they can go that—we specifically do not allow children into the centre, and that is because it differentiates that place as a special place for study. So there are really small things that we can do and that the community can recognise that can support that transition as well.⁶⁶

FINDING 36: Coordinated support across education, training and employment pathways remains crucial to improve participation and retention of women in male-dominated industries. Other targeted initiatives such as trade tasters, mentoring, female role models and flexible learning can also improve participation.

4.2.3 Male-dominated workplaces need to be made safer and more inclusive for women

The Committee heard that workplace culture can affect whether women enter and remain in male-dominated industries. Youth Associate Bianca Baldwin told the Committee that young women exploring careers in construction reported barriers including having to constantly prove their capability, microaggressions, tokenism, limited access to female mentors and a lack of safe mechanisms to report discrimination.⁶⁷

⁶³ Mish Eastman, Deputy Vice-Chancellor Vocational Education, RMIT University, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 32.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Madelyn Bolch, Pro Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive Vocational Education, Swinburne University of Technology, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 33–4.

⁶⁶ Chris Ronan, Chief Executive Officer, County Universities Centre, public hearing, Melbourne, 26 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 13–14.

⁶⁷ Bianca Baldwin, Youth Associate, public hearing, Melbourne, 21 November 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 13.

She further explained how many young women felt that even though they enjoyed the work, workplace cultures made them question whether the industry ‘loved them back.’⁶⁸

This evidence was consistent with that presented by WHISE, which reported that more than 60% of Victorian women had experienced workplace violence. WHISE also found that approximately one in two staff and almost one in ten students in VET settings had experienced some form of violence at a training provider or workplace in the previous 12 months.⁶⁹ The organisation noted that harassment, bullying and exclusionary workplace cultures contribute to women leaving male-dominated industries.⁷⁰

WHISE recommended a range of measures to address the reasons why women leave male-dominated industries and to improve the culture in these industries, including:

- foster safe, respectful and inclusive workplace cultures through industry-wide standards, training and accountability
- strengthen gender-inclusive education, training and mentoring to support girls and women’s participation and retention
- improve employment practices and accountability by using government contracts to promote gender equality, support career progression and provide flexible work arrangements
- provide targeted support for regional and disadvantaged girls and women through outreach programs, mentoring, financial assistance and culturally responsive approaches.⁷¹

The Committee also notes the Victorian Government’s Safe Workplaces for Women initiative was announced in March 2025 in partnership with the Victorian Trades Hall Council, Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Working Women’s Centre Victoria. The initiative aims to address some of the barriers identified by stakeholders by improving workplace culture, increasing awareness of workplace rights and responsibilities and expanding support services for women experiencing harassment and discrimination.⁷²

FINDING 37: Unsafe and exclusionary workplace cultures, including harassment, discrimination and workplace violence, are barriers to attracting and retaining women in male-dominated industries.

⁶⁸ Bianca Baldwin, Youth Associate, public hearing, Melbourne, 21 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 13.

⁶⁹ Women’s Health in South East, *Submission 104*, p. 5.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., pp. 10–13.

⁷² Premier of Victoria, *Safe and fair workplaces for women*, media release, 7 March 2025.

RECOMMENDATION 38: That the Victorian Government review the work undertaken by Victorian Trades Hall Council, Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Working Women's Centre Victoria for the Safe Workplaces for Women initiative.

4.3 Culturally and linguistically diverse students face unique challenges and opportunities in accessing pathways to in-demand industries

CALD students speak a language other than English at their home or identify with a culture or religion that is not predominantly represented in Australia.⁷³ The Committee heard that many CALD students need targeted support to access pathways to in-demand industries including English language assistance, help navigating visa and qualification requirements and relief from financial pressures and family responsibilities.

4.3.1 Additional English support can help some students into careers in in-demand industries

Stakeholders highlighted the language barrier that some new migrants and arrivals to Australia face when pursuing education, training and employment pathways. Deng Mading Deng, board member for the Shepparton Ethnic Council, spoke about how low English levels can present a barrier, saying: 'Some employers fear that employing someone with low English language skills will be a liability.'⁷⁴

The Committee heard how a range of programs currently support CALD students and migrants to build their English language skills. Natalie Garcia de Heer, Acting Assistant Deputy Secretary, Senior Secondary Pathways Reform Taskforce, at the Department of Education, explained that 'Victoria has nine English language centres' for new arrivals and a comprehensive English as an additional language curriculum.⁷⁵ The Government also outlined language supports for adults, some of which are operated by TAFEs. David Miller, CEO of the Office of TAFE Coordination and Delivery, stated:

A lot of TAFEs are pretty significant providers of the adult migrant English program as well, which is federal government funded, but TAFEs, along with AIM and a range of other providers, provide that support in terms of fundamental language skills. It brings people onto sites and helps them and exposes them to the opportunities that TAFE can then provide.⁷⁶

⁷³ Victorian Government, *People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds*, 12 December 2025, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/diversity-victorian-government-board-guidelines/key-considerations-cohorts/people-culturally-and>> accessed 26 June 2026.

⁷⁴ Deng Mading Deng, Board Member, Shepparton Ethnic Council, public hearing, Melbourne, 20 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 9.

⁷⁵ Natalie Garcia de Heer, Acting Assistant Deputy Secretary, Senior Secondary Pathways Reform Taskforce, Department of Education, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 5.

⁷⁶ David Miller, Chief Executive Officer, Office of TAFE Coordination and Delivery, Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 8.

In addition, Ken Massari, Assistant Principal of Northern Bay College in Geelong, told the Committee that Victoria University delivers English classes through the Geelong Industry Trade Training Centre to support high school students progressing through their VET course.⁷⁷ Furthermore, Cultura Youth Council told the Committee how the Geelong English Language School provides intensive English training for newly arrived migrants or refugees who have limited English language skills.⁷⁸

Deng Mading Deng further explained that some employers addressed the issue of English levels by pairing individuals together, who spoke the same second language but with one holding stronger English skills. He emphasised this strategy could be helpful in the case of migrants who, for whatever reason, were not successful in the adult migrant English program.⁷⁹

FINDING 38: New migrants to Australia who speak English as a Second Language can experience barriers in accessing pathways to work, including in in-demand industries, due to employers' concerns around inadequate English levels.

4.3.2 Visas and employment qualifications can limit access to education, training and employment pathways to in-demand industries

Stakeholders discussed the logistical challenges that CALD students face, especially if they are new arrivals to Australia, migrants, or international students. These challenges centre around visa restrictions and transferring foreign employment qualifications.

Visa restrictions

Some CALD individuals, who would like to enter in-demand industries, residing in Australia hold temporary visas, such as student visas, short-term employment visas, or refugee visas. Many temporary visas have working or education restrictions, including limiting access to certain pathways. The Australian National University's (ANU) South Asian Research and Advocacy Hub (SARAH) argued that 'international students\ ... tend to pursue degrees in many in-demand industries like technology, healthcare, energy, engineering but visa constraints can limit their employment outcomes.'⁸⁰

SARAH discussed how certain visa categories, including student, temporary and training visas, are not always compatible with traditional apprenticeship structures. For example, student visa holders cannot begin employment prior to commencing their studies, which may prevent participation in apprenticeships that require work-based

⁷⁷ Ken Massari, Assistant Principal, Geelong Industry Trade Training Centre, Northern Bay College, public hearing, Geelong, 26 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 27.

⁷⁸ Erfan Rahimy, Member, Cultura Youth Council, public hearing, Geelong, 26 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 32.

⁷⁹ Deng Mading Deng, Board Member, Shepparton Ethnic Council, public hearing, Melbourne, 20 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 9.

⁸⁰ Australian National University South Asian Research and Advocacy Hub, *Submission 47*, p. 2.

components before formal training.⁸¹ The Committee acknowledges these barriers regarding the restrictions on visas, but also that these may be difficult to address as the responsibility lies with the Australian Government. In addition, SARA H noted that employers often prefer hiring Australian citizens and permanent residents when recruiting for internships and graduate programs, which can limit pathways into employment for those holding temporary visas.⁸²

The Committee also heard that asylum seekers face additional challenges navigating education and training pathways. The Asylum Seeker Resource Centre (ASRC) advised that career practitioners often have a limited understanding of how visa conditions affect education and employment opportunities for asylum seekers. ASRC advocate for greater awareness of visa-related pathway restrictions among career advisers supporting students transitioning from school.⁸³

Anastasia Magriplis, the Head of Humanitarian Operations and Resilience at ASRC, spoke about this gap in knowledge. She explained that career practitioners have less understanding around the temporary nature of visas and the subsequent restrictions in tertiary education programs available for asylum seeker students. She elaborated that '[i]t is a missed opportunity and that is something that we would definitely advocate for—being able to have a sort of careers adviser education program around the particular nuance of people seeking asylum through the school system, particularly as they are exiting the school system.'⁸⁴

The Victorian Government highlighted current initiatives to support asylum seekers to access vocational education and training. David Miller from the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions explained how the Asylum Seeker VET Program 'supports refugees and asylum seekers to enrol in Free TAFE and other Skills First courses' by exempting them from standard residency requirements.⁸⁵ The program exempts asylum seekers from the usual residency criteria required for Skills First-funded training in Victoria. Since December it has supported more than 800 individuals to study at TAFE.⁸⁶

FINDING 39: Visa conditions can restrict access to education, training and employment pathways in in-demand industries for some culturally and linguistically diverse students, including international students and asylum seekers.

⁸¹ Australian National University South Asian Research and Advocacy Hub, *Submission 47*, p. 2.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Anastasia Magriplis, Head, Humanitarian Operations and Resilience, Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, public hearing, Melbourne, 28 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ David Miller, Chief Executive Officer, Office of TAFE Coordination and Delivery, Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 5.

⁸⁶ Ibid.; Victorian Government, *Asylum seeker VET program*, 16 March 2026, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/asylum-seeker-vet-program>> accessed 30 June 2026.

Transferring foreign employment qualifications

The Committee heard that recognition of overseas qualifications can be a barrier for migrants seeking to enter in-demand industries. The Migrant Workers Centre's report, *Insecure by Design*, highlights that qualification recognition processes vary between industries, can be costly and often have requirements that are difficult for migrants to navigate. The report also noted that there is no centralised source of information about qualification recognition pathways and that some processes may be inaccessible to people without permanent residency.⁸⁷

ASRC explained in its submission that migrants are under-utilised across Australia because:

[O]verseas skills and qualification recognition is time-consuming, confusing, and expensive, with criteria, processes, and costs set by individual assessing authorities, with some requiring upfront payments of \$10,000 or more.⁸⁸

According to ASRC, Victoria is the state with the most to gain since a significant proportion of recent migrants move to Victoria.⁸⁹ For this reason, ASRC recommends that the Government 'streamline Australia's skills and qualifications recognition system ... harmonise recognition processes and set up a national online portal for all information on skills recognition.'⁹⁰

Stakeholders emphasised that the challenges in qualification and skills recognition are particularly significant in regulated industries experiencing workforce shortages. The ANU's SARA submission highlighted how qualification recognition requirements in professions such as healthcare, engineering and teaching can be complex and unclear, preventing some skilled migrants from working in their chosen fields.⁹¹

SARA further noted that migrants, who need to complete bridging courses or additional requirements to obtain recognition, may face substantial costs with some programs costing between \$10,000 and \$20,000. Temporary visa holders may be particularly affected because they are often ineligible for government loans and other forms of financial assistance.⁹²

FINDING 40: Skilled migrants do not always have clarity about whether their overseas qualifications will be recognised. Complex, costly and time-consuming qualification recognition processes can delay or prevent entry into some in-demand industries.

⁸⁷ The Migrant Workers Centre, *Insecure by design*, Melbourne, 2023, pp. 21–3.

⁸⁸ Asylum Seeker Research Centre, *Submission 118*, p. 4.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Australian National University South Asian Research and Advocacy Hub, *Submission 47*, pp. 5, 8.

⁹² Ibid., p. 9.

RECOMMENDATION 39: That the Victorian Government collaborate with the Australian Government and all the relevant authorities to streamline the recognition of qualifications for skilled migrants in in-demand industries facing workforce shortages.

4.3.3 Family expectations influence culturally and linguistically diverse students' pathway decisions

Participants to this Inquiry reported that some CALD students experience strong family and community expectations regarding education and career choices. Stakeholders told the Committee that parents in some CALD communities often encourage young people to pursue professions perceived as prestigious, stable or financially secure, such as medicine, law and engineering, rather than other occupations including in-demand industries.⁹³

Afnan Matti, School Support Officer from the Foundation House, told the Committee that refugee background families often pressure younger people into pursuing certain careers:

[Y]es, there is a lot of pressure from parents on kids in choosing certain career pathways, because our cohort who are refugee-background families, they all believe the successful careers are doctors, lawyers and engineers. Then kids are under pressure when they cannot get the right ATAR, or they might be even pushed away from doing VCE at some schools because it has been assumed they are not capable of doing VCE. Then that means they cannot become those and choose those kinds of careers.⁹⁴

Roqya Hussein, Deputy Chair of the Cultura Youth Council, presented similar evidence to the Committee suggesting that parental and community expectations play a crucial role when children need to decide what career to pursue or which university to attend.⁹⁵

SARAH's submission also discussed the community element, notably, that comparison between families (leading to pressure) was prevalent in South Asian communities:

Community comparison further amplifies pressure on South Asian students, as families often benchmark their children's academic achievements within South Asian networks ... This occurs because immigrant families often rely on their cultural communities as primary support networks, sharing common educational values and definitions of success. Within these close-knit networks, community gatherings are used to showcase positive accomplishments, preserve family reputation, and reinforce high educational standards through informal social surveillance.⁹⁶

⁹³ Australian National University South Asian Research and Advocacy Hub, *Submission 47*, p. 12.

⁹⁴ Afnan Matti, School Support Officer, Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture, Foundation House, public hearing, Melbourne, 28 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 6.

⁹⁵ Roqya Hussein, Deputy Chair, Cultura Youth Council, public hearing, Geelong, 26 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 35; Erfan Rahimy, Member, Cultura Youth Council, public hearing, Geelong, 26 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 35; Bianca Baldwin, Youth Associate, public hearing, Melbourne, 21 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 9; Atharva Nerlikar, Youth Associate, public hearing, Melbourne, 21 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 4.

⁹⁶ Australian National University South Asian Research and Advocacy Hub, *Submission 47*, pp. 12–13.

Youth Associate Shanay Gao-Kulhmann stated that her family initially opposed her decision to pursue teaching because it is perceived as less financially secure than other professions:

When I said I wanted to be a teacher, it was definitely like, ‘But you’re going to be poor.’ There was definitely the pushback there. It took a lot of fighting and standing up and making an entire PowerPoint presentation to tell my mum, ‘Look, I can do this and still be well-off.’⁹⁷

While the Committee acknowledges that parental and community pressure on CALD students is a multifaceted issue and one that is far beyond the scope of this Inquiry, the element around awareness can be addressed. Stakeholders recommended increasing parental education around the different kinds of careers and career pathways available to their children.

Yesha Khandel, a Youth Associate, told the Committee that ‘raising awareness within the communities through parent–teacher nights and informing them that there is not just one pathway to being an engineer, lawyer or doctor and there are alternate pathways could definitely be very helpful’.⁹⁸ Jacqui Van de Velde of the Victorian Parents Council suggested that for diverse families ‘there should be culturally appropriate resources that are translated so that parents can access them and give good advice and support to their children.’⁹⁹

The influential role that parents play and several recommendations about how to enhance parental perspectives on pathways into in-demand industries were discussed in detail in Chapter 2. As such, the Committee will not make further recommendations in this section.

FINDING 41: Family and community expectations can influence the education and career choices of some culturally and linguistically diverse students, including their participation in pathways to some in-demand industries.

4.4 First Nations students face barriers to accessing pathways into in-demand industries

The Committee heard that some First Nations students disengage from education before career education is commonly introduced in schools.¹⁰⁰ Stakeholders also

⁹⁷ Shanay Gao-Kulhmann, Youth Associate, public hearing, Melbourne, 21 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 9.

⁹⁸ Yesha Khandel, Youth Associate, public hearing, Melbourne, 21 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 10.

⁹⁹ Jacqui Van de Velde, Education Consultant, Victorian Parents Council, public hearing, Melbourne, 26 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 10.

¹⁰⁰ Cormach Evans, Founder and Directing Manager, Strong Brother Strong Sister, public hearing, Geelong, 26 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 23; Ngaweeyan Maar-oo, *Submission 132*, p. 6.

identified how low expectations, racism and cultural safety issues present barriers to educational engagement and pathway participation.¹⁰¹

Evidence suggests that First Nations people remain underrepresented in occupations requiring higher-level qualifications. For example, The University of Melbourne noted that in 2021 0.5% of Indigenous Australians held a university STEM qualification, compared with 4.9% of the general Australian population.¹⁰²

4.4.1 Early disengagement reduces access to career pathways

Stakeholders told the Committee that racism and low expectations contribute to some First Nations students disengaging from education. Witnesses explained that these experiences can affect students' confidence, aspirations and engagement with future education and employment opportunities.¹⁰³

As noted, some First Nations students can sometimes disengage from education before career education is commonly introduced in schools. Witnesses described disengagement occurring from late primary school and becoming more pronounced around Years 10 and 11.¹⁰⁴ As career education in Victorian schools typically begins in Years 9 and 10, some students may miss opportunities to explore pathways into in-demand industries.¹⁰⁵

Michelle Searle, Executive Manager of Corporate Services at the Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative, emphasised the importance of introducing pathway awareness early and ensuring students feel safe and supported throughout their education journey.¹⁰⁶

Regional First Nations students can face additional barriers to accessing education and employment pathways. Stakeholders, including Ngaweeyan Maar-oo and the Office of the Deputy Chancellor at The University of Melbourne, identified several challenges for regional First Nations students including travel, housing, financial pressures, connectivity issues and limited access to tailored supports.¹⁰⁷ Witnesses also

¹⁰¹ Emily Hocking, Manager, Strategic Policy and Reform, Ngaweeyan Maar-oo, public hearing, Melbourne, 28 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 20; Dr Tiriki Onus, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Indigenous), University of Melbourne, public hearing, Melbourne, 28 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 21; Australian Education Union, *Submission 123*, p. 6.

¹⁰² Office of the Deputy Chancellor (Indigenous), The University of Melbourne, *Submission 86*, p. 1.

¹⁰³ Emily Hocking, Manager, Strategic Policy and Reform, Ngaweeyan Maar-oo, public hearing, Melbourne, 28 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 20; Stephanie Kilpatrick, Executive Director, Policy, Advocacy and Communications, Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, public hearing, Melbourne, 28 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 21; Cormach Evans, Founder and Directing Manager, Strong Brother Strong Sister, public hearing, Geelong, 26 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 23.

¹⁰⁴ Cormach Evans, Founder and Directing Manager, Strong Brother Strong Sister, public hearing, Geelong, 26 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 23; Ngaweeyan Maar-oo, *Submission 132*, p. 6.

¹⁰⁵ Jim O'Shea, Chief Operating Officer, Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, public hearing, Melbourne, 28 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 21.

¹⁰⁶ Michelle Searle, Executive Manager, Corporate Services, Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative, public hearing, Geelong, 26 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 23.

¹⁰⁷ Ngaweeyan Maar-oo, *Submission 132*, p. 11; Office of the Deputy Chancellor (Indigenous), The University of Melbourne, *Submission 86*, p. 4.

highlighted a lack of culturally safe role models as well as limited exposure to career opportunities in some regional communities, both of which can affect awareness of available pathways and students' future aspirations.¹⁰⁸

Beyond the Bell Great South Coast and the Neil Porter Legacy relayed that regional students in the Great South Coast 'lack exposure to the breadth of available careers' and that this is:

[E]specially true for First Nations students, where a lack of culturally safe role models in the workforce, combined with experiences of racism or low expectations, can significantly impact aspirations and confidence.¹⁰⁹

Michelle Searle, Executive Manager at Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative, explained that it is crucial to engage with First Nations students early in their education journey to help them feel safe and supported throughout their journey.¹¹⁰ This journey also includes making their career choices.

FINDING 42: Some First Nations students disengage from education before career education is typically introduced, limiting awareness of and access to pathways into in-demand industries. Regional First Nations students can face additional barriers, including reduced exposure to career opportunities and culturally safe role models.

4.4.2 Cultural safety influences participation and retention in some in-demand industries

The Committee heard that experiences of racism and a general lack of cultural safety in workplaces and schools can discourage First Nations people from entering and remaining in some industries.

The Australian Education Union (AEU) wrote in its submission to the Committee about the prevalence of workplace racism towards Indigenous peoples:

More than one-quarter of the respondents to the national survey commissioned by AEU's Federal Office Yalukit Yulendj Committee identified culturally unsafe workplaces, often due to experiencing racism from colleagues, while slightly more than half reported experiencing racism at least yearly in the workplace.¹¹¹

While this was from a nationwide survey, the Victorian Public Sector Commission confirms that Aboriginal public sector employees in Victoria experience higher rates of negative behaviours than their non-Aboriginal colleagues. It reported that:

¹⁰⁸ Office of the Deputy Chancellor (Indigenous), The University of Melbourne, *Submission 86*, p. 2; Beyond the Bell Great South Coast and Neil Porter Legacy, *Submission 25*, p. 12.

¹⁰⁹ Beyond the Bell, Great South Coast and Neil Porter Legacy, *Submission 25*, p. 9.

¹¹⁰ Michelle Searle, Executive Manager, Corporate Services, Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative, public hearing, Geelong, 26 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 23.

¹¹¹ Australian Education Union, *Submission 123*, p. 6.

Some Aboriginal employees encounter frequent racism, discrimination and disrespect from co-workers, external clients and stakeholders.

This includes:

- casual to overt racism
- prejudice about Aboriginal people and their work practices
- physical assault
- derogatory name-calling
- unfair treatment and denial of opportunity based on race.¹¹²

Ngaweeyan Maar-oo wrote of the impacts of experiencing racism in its submission, stating that '[i]n the workplace, overt racism and microaggressions are compounded with the cultural load placed on Aboriginal workers, adding to emotional and psychological strain not experienced by their non- Aboriginal colleagues.'¹¹³ Jim O'Shea, the Chief Operating Officer of the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO), also spoke about the cultural load placed on Indigenous employees, noting that '[t]here is starting to be a bit of a shift in terms of recognition for that.'¹¹⁴

Bianca Baldwin, an Indigenous Youth Associate, told the Committee that:

Many Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and CALD young people reported modifying their communication, cultural expression and behaviour in order to avoid judgement or stereotypes ... Young people describe racism or banter that crossed the line, pressure to downplay accents or cultural identity, being the only woman or only Aboriginal person onsite and fear of judgement if they shared mental health struggles. Because of this, many interviewees told me that they just kept to themselves even when struggling. For Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander participants, this lack of cultural understanding intensified the mental load.¹¹⁵

In her report, she discussed the identity splitting that some individuals felt was necessary to do at work. She wrote that 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants spoke of the challenge of bringing their full identity into the workplace. Many felt unable to express culture openly and described an expectation to "leave it at the gate".'¹¹⁶ She elaborated on this during the hearings, stating that the 'feeling of needing to split yourself in two came up again and again and was described as not just uncomfortable but mentally exhausting.'¹¹⁷

¹¹² Victorian Public Sector Commission, *Acknowledging the lived experience of Aboriginal employees*, 12 June 2024, <<https://www.vpsc.vic.gov.au/public-sector-data/data-sets-and-reports/past-releases/2022-people-matter-survey-data-facts-and-visuals-state-public-sector/insights-and-special-editions/acknowledging-lived-experience-aboriginal-employees#racism-discrimination-and-disrespect>> accessed 3 July 2026.

¹¹³ Ngaweeyan Maar-oo, *Submission 132*, p. 6.

¹¹⁴ Jim O'Shea, Chief Operating Officer, Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, public hearing, Melbourne, 28 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 25.

¹¹⁵ Bianca Baldwin, Youth Associate, public hearing, Melbourne, 21 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 13.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

Stakeholders emphasised that these experiences affect recruitment and retention. The Australian College of Midwives noted that ‘Victoria urgently needs more First Nations midwives ... [it] has the lowest percentage in the country of First Nations midwives, at only 0.63%. This is completely inadequate given 4% of birthday women in Victoria are First Nations women.’¹¹⁸

FINDING 43: Experiences of racism and inadequate cultural safety can discourage First Nations people from entering and remaining in some industries, contributing to ongoing underrepresentation.

4.4.3 Strengthening culturally safe and supportive pathways for Indigenous students

Stakeholders identified several ways to improve First Nations students’ participation in education, training and employment pathways. Participation can be improved through:

1. strengthening cultural safety
2. re-examining recruitment processes
3. providing wrap-around supports
4. increasing the involvement of Aboriginal organisations.

These four areas will be discussed in the following sections.

Strengthening cultural safety

Stakeholders consistently identified cultural safety as critical to improving First Nations participation in education and employment pathways.¹¹⁹ Witnesses emphasised that cultural safety requires ongoing practice rather than one-off training and helps ensure First Nations students and employees feel supported and included. Youth Associate Bianca Baldwin told the Committee that cultural safety was often the most important factor influencing whether Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people felt they belonged in an industry and was essential to retention, confidence and performance.¹²⁰

Organisations may face financial and resourcing barriers to providing cultural safety training. Tiriki Onus discussed the costs and resourcing issues associated with providing cultural safety training. He explained that:

¹¹⁸ Australian College of Midwives, *Submission 124*, p. 5.

¹¹⁹ Erin Johnston, General Manager, Group Sales, ManpowerGroup Australia, public hearing, Melbourne, 26 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 4; Jim O’Shea, Chief Operating Officer, Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, public hearing, Melbourne, 28 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 25; Emily Hocking, Manager, Strategic Policy, Ngaweeyan Maar-oo, public hearing, Melbourne, 28 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 25; Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Indigenous), University of Melbourne, *Submission 86*, p. 3.

¹²⁰ Bianca Baldwin, Youth Associate, public hearing, Melbourne, 21 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 13.

The opportunity to provide greater training—cultural safety training, cultural awareness, anti-racism training and so on and so forth—is certainly an opportunity that we are seeing more and more in our space in the University of Melbourne ... There is a resourcing challenge out there for organisations to do this training work in addition to the core business that they are already performing. That is not to say that there is not an industry there that could support it, but the cost of setting up that space is not one that the organisations can bear necessarily.¹²¹

The Committee acknowledges the financial and resourcing limitations that some organisations may face when providing cultural safety training.

While all Victorian schools are supported through Child Safe Standard 1 and associated guidance on culturally safe environments, similar resources are not consistently available to employers and training providers.¹²²

Child Safe Standard 1 is to 'Establish a culturally safe environment in which the diverse and unique identities and experiences of Aboriginal children and young people are respected and valued.' The Government also provides an explanation as to how this Standard should be implemented and provides resources to do so.¹²³ However, the same guidance and resources are not available for all workplaces or training providers and the Committee believes there could be a role for the Victorian Government in supporting cultural safety training for organisations who wish to provide it.

FINDING 44: Cultural safety is a critical element of ensuring the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and employees and stakeholders encourage organisations to provide cultural safety training to their staff.

RECOMMENDATION 40: That the Victorian Government, in order to support cultural safety in in-demand industries, publish guidance on First Nations cultural safety training including information on the purpose and benefits of cultural safety training, key topics covered by training programs and a directory of accredited or recognised training providers. Cultural safety guidance should also be considered for CALD cohorts.

Wraparound supports to improve First Nations students' access to pathways to in-demand industries

Wraparound support and services were discussed in the introduction of this Chapter. The Committee heard that First Nations students often require tailored, culturally safe support to participate successfully in education, training and employment pathways. VACCHO noted that TAFEs employ Koorie Liaison Officers and Koorie Engagement

¹²¹ Tiriki Onus, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Indigenous), University of Melbourne, public hearing, Melbourne, 28 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 22.

¹²² Victorian Government, *Culturally safe environments*, 26 March 2026, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/schools-culturally-safe-environments-guidance#rpl-skip-links>> accessed 4 July 2026.

¹²³ Ibid.

Support Officers to support Aboriginal students throughout their vocational education, although these roles are largely limited to TAFEs and dual-sector institutions and primarily provide informational support.¹²⁴

Michelle Searle from the Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative told the Committee that successful pathways require support beyond course enrolment, including assistance with transport, work clothing, technology, workplace expectations and placements. She also emphasised the importance of mentoring, advocacy and culturally safe workplaces to improve engagement and long-term participation.¹²⁵

Similarly, the Australian College of Midwives recommended that the Victorian Government provide wraparound support service co-designed with and for First Nations midwifery students.¹²⁶

FINDING 45: First Nations students benefit in training and employment pathways when provided with wraparound supports and especially when the supports are designed with First Nations organisations or students.

Aboriginal Community Controlled Registered Training Organisations provide effective pathways into in-demand industries

Beyond the Bell Great South Coast and the Neil Porter Legacy told the Committee that educational pathways needed to be co-designed by First Nations communities or organisations:

Engaging First Nations students in meaningful and sustainable post-school pathways requires a deliberate focus on culturally safe practice, community-led design, and long-term relationship building.¹²⁷

An example of such initiatives is Aboriginal Community Controlled Registered Training Organisations (ACC-RTOs), which provide culturally safe education and training pathways for First Nations students. VACCHO explained that ACC-RTOs were established to deliver programs that respond to community needs but they face funding challenges. This is because they are classified as private providers and cannot access the same funding subsidies available to TAFEs.¹²⁸

VACCHO recommended establishing a new ACC-RTO classification within Victoria's training system to enable ACC-RTOs to access public funding.¹²⁹

¹²⁴ Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, *Submission 114*, p. 18; Premier of Victoria, *More support for Aboriginal learners at all TAFEs*, media release, 4 February 2021.

¹²⁵ Michelle Searle, Executive Manager, Corporate Services, Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative, public hearing, Geelong, 26 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 21.

¹²⁶ Australian College of Midwives, *Submission 124*, p. 6.

¹²⁷ Beyond the Bell Great South Coast and Neil Porter Legacy, *Submission 25*, p. 12.

¹²⁸ Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, *Submission 114*, pp. 11–12.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

The Committee also heard that ACC-RTOs achieve strong outcomes for First Nations learners. Ngaweeyan Maar-oo reported that ACC-RTOs have completion rates significantly higher than mainstream RTOs and TAFEs and provide direct pathways into industries including health care, community services and early childhood education.¹³⁰

Other stakeholders supported the idea that services are most effective when they are informed, designed and delivered by First Nations people and organisations. For example, the Victorian TAFE Association noted that support for First Nations learners should be facilitated by First Nations staff and highlighted research showing that Aboriginal engagement officers, mentors and specialised support services are associated with higher qualification completion rates and student satisfaction.¹³¹

FINDING 46: Aboriginal Community Controlled Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) provide culturally safe education and training pathways and achieve strong outcomes for First Nations students, including higher completion rates and direct pathways into in-demand industries.

RECOMMENDATION 41: That the Victorian Government advocate to the Australian Government to re-classify not-for-profit Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) such as Aboriginal Community Controlled RTOs, to enable eligible providers to access public training funding.

4.5 People with disability have difficulties accessing education, training and employment pathways

During this Inquiry, the Committee heard that barriers to accessing placements and work-based learning opportunities can be particularly significant for students with disability. National Disability Services (NDS) highlighted that factors such as placement shortages, limited supervision capacity and transport costs can further restrict opportunities for students with disability to gain practical industry experience. NDS emphasised that reduced access to placements can limit opportunities for students with disability to develop workplace skills, build employer connections and successfully transition into employment.¹³²

WISE Employment similarly emphasised the importance of exposing students with disability to employment pathways early, stating that career exploration and workplace preparation can help students make ‘informed and assured decisions that

¹³⁰ Ngaweeyan Maar-oo, *Submission 132*, pp. 16–17.

¹³¹ Victorian TAFE Association, *Submission 72*, p. 20.

¹³² National Disability Service, *Submission 51*, p. 2; Carlene Egan, Senior Sector Support and Policy Officer, National Disability Services, public hearing, Melbourne, 20 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 3.

their goals are attainable'.¹³³ It also noted that students with disability are more at risk of higher drop-off rates during transitions if appropriate supports are not available.¹³⁴

FINDING 47: Students with disability have fewer opportunities to access work-based learning and placements, limiting their ability to gain practical experience and transition into employment.

4.5.1 There is more to disability than just physical access

Evidence to this Inquiry showed that barriers faced by students with disability extend beyond physical barriers and include low expectations, inconsistent adjustments, inaccessible support systems, limited awareness of available pathways and a lack of tailored support when students transition from school into further education, training and employment.

Scott Widmer, Deputy Secretary, Strategy and Secondary School Reform, Department of Education and Training, told the Committee that the Government has significantly invested in disability inclusion reforms to provide support for students with disability in Victorian Government schools.¹³⁵

The Government has also invested \$7.3 million over four years to fund a Disability Transition Officer at every Victorian TAFE, providing advice, guidance, support and advocacy to help students with disability transition from school to TAFE while reducing the burden on students and their carers.¹³⁶

Further, the Government has also invested \$36 million to develop The Gordon Institute of TAFE's Centre of Excellence in Disability Inclusion training and support hub to:

- deliver inclusive education through innovation, policy advancement, knowledge sharing and capacity building
- improve access, inclusion and employment outcomes for students with disability across Victoria's TAFE network
- promote universally accessible learning environments
- build workforce capability and share good practice across TAFEs
- drive system-wide change through collaboration and lived experience.¹³⁷

¹³³ WISE Employment, *Submission 53*, p. 2.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Scott Widmer, Deputy Secretary, Strategy and Secondary School Reform, Department of Education and Training, public hearing, Melbourne, 17 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 4; Victorian Government, *Disability inclusion: support for students with disability*, 17 April 2026, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/disability-inclusion-extra-support-children-disability>> accessed 26 June 2026.

¹³⁶ Victorian Government, *Submission 136*, p. 54.

¹³⁷ The Gordon Institute of TAFE, *Centre of excellence in disability inclusion*, <<https://www.thegordon.edu.au/about/centre-of-excellence-in-disability-inclusion/our-vision>> accessed 26 June 2026.

While the Victorian Government invested millions of dollars to improve experiences for students with disability, the Committee also heard evidence from individuals that suggested these improvements have not been consistently felt in practice. Dylan McBurney, a Youth Associate, found that in-demand industries were ‘less of a consideration for some disabled young people’ when making career decisions, with greater emphasis placed on finding work that suited their individual needs and circumstances.¹³⁸ Dylan stated:

The current supports are quite lacking ... Obviously they are not consistent across universities, but from what I heard, there are ones that are quite easy to access, like extended due dates and physical accessibility. Those are good, but students with [a] more complex disability are being left behind. One young person acquired a brain injury during their studies at university. They wanted to start a conversation with the access worker at the university about the degradation of their disability. The person was just not trained to have that conversation, and eventually they did get removed from their course.¹³⁹

Dylan also shared the following example of a young person’s experience:

[TAFEs and Registered Training Organisations] really like to use ‘wellbeing’ and ‘accessibility’ as buzzwords to get people in the door, but there is not that care for each individual student once they are there and once they are paying the fees—for example, even with physical accessibility. It is great to have lift access, but for one young person when classes were starting the lifts would be full of people standing. There was no procedure and no etiquette for students to actually make room for someone in a wheelchair, and he would show up to class half an hour late because he had no way of getting to the building.¹⁴⁰

Charlie Davies from Swinburne Senior Secondary College noted recent cuts to supports under the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), an Australian Government initiative that provides funding and support to people with disability, have ‘made it significantly harder for people with disability ... to explore, pursue and maintain career pathways’.¹⁴¹ Students reliant on ‘holistic care to manage invisible and sensory disabilities’ are left with ‘fewer tools to stay stable and productive’.¹⁴² Charlie also stated the application process for jobs can be overwhelming without tailored support to write resumés, attend interviews, or manage workplace expectations and urged the Committee to ‘recommend a review of how NDIS cuts are impacting employment pathways, especially for young people’.¹⁴³

Neurodivergent participants highlighted the importance of pursuing ‘an engaging career that they could see themselves doing in the long-term’ to maintain attention

¹³⁸ Dylan McBurney, *Youth Associate final report: Inquiry into student pathways for in-demand industries*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 2.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ Charlie Davies, Swinburne Senior Secondary College, *Submission 4*, p. 1.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

and support ‘positive mental health.’¹⁴⁴ Similarly, young people with chronic illness and pain prioritise enjoyable work, as their ‘time and energy is limited’ and they require motivation to manage ‘pain and fatigue’ to complete tasks.¹⁴⁵

FINDING 48: Students with disability face systemic barriers to participating in education and training pathways and transitioning to employment, due to inconsistent adjustments, complex support processes and limited access to tailored pathway information and transition support.

4.5.2 Stakeholders call for clearer information, tailored supports and better coordination for students with disability

Evidence the Committee received indicates that addressing barriers for young people with disability requires changes being made across the entire pathway, including earlier career education, more tailored supports and stronger coordination between schools, TAFEs, support services and employers.

Coordinated pathway supports and transitions

Amaze, a peak body for autistic people and their families, submitted evidence suggesting that, while many autistic people have strengths aligned with in-demand industries, systemic barriers limit their participation and employment outcomes. Amaze recommended a more coordinated, end-to-end approach to pathways, including improved autism capability among educators and career advisers, particularly in TAFE and the VET sector. Amaze also called for course design and support systems to be co-designed with autistic people and for a more flexible and inclusive learning environment that recognises diverse learning needs.¹⁴⁶

Amaze further emphasised the need for consistent, tailored supports across the entire pathway, noting current systems are often fragmented and place the burden on students with disability to navigate supports independently. It recommended greater alignment between education providers, support services and employers to improve transitions from school into further education and employment.¹⁴⁷

Similarly, WISE Employment, a not-for-profit employment services provider, told the Committee that students with disability need clearer and more accessible information about available pathways and supports. In its submission it stated career guidance in schools does not consistently reflect the full range of supports available, including:

- Inclusive Employment Australia (formerly the Disability Employment Services program), which provides personalised support, access to specialist providers,

¹⁴⁴ Dylan McBurney, *Youth Associate final report: Inquiry into student pathways for in-demand industries*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 2.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Amaze, *Submission 43*, p. 2.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 2–5.

ongoing assistance to transition into and sustain employment and school-leaver transition support¹⁴⁸

- NDIS, which provides funded, individualised supports such as assistance to build daily living, communication and work-related skills, supports to participate in education and training and supports to assist movement into employment where this aligns with students' goals.¹⁴⁹

Flexible and strengths-based pathway approaches

Evidence from Dylan McBurney underscored the importance of giving students with disability greater choice over their education and career pathways. It emphasised how education providers should take a more flexible and responsive approach to disability and learning, recognising that students have different needs, learning styles and goals.¹⁵⁰

Associate Professor Matthew Harrison and Catherine Civelles emphasised that pathway supports should better reflect neurodivergent students' interests, motivations and learning styles. They argued that traditional career education and pathway planning approaches do not always engage young people and recommended more game-based approaches to career exploration. They mentioned Next Level Collaboration, a neurodivergent-led Victorian social enterprise, who deliver gaming-based programs to help neurodivergent children and young people. Associate Professor Matthew Harrison and Catherine Civelles noted that the program received national recognition for its role in 'building connection, confidence and collaboration skills' and could be expanded with enough policy support.¹⁵¹

FINDING 49: Students with disability experience challenges transitioning into TAFE, including difficulties accessing and navigating disability supports, inconsistent information about available assistance and fragmented connections between education, support services and employment pathways.

RECOMMENDATION 42: That the Victorian Government strengthen career pathway planning and transition support for students with disability by providing clear pathway information, tailored wraparound support and improved transitions into further education, training and employment, with a particular focus on in-demand industries.

¹⁴⁸ Australian Government, Department of Social Services, *Inclusive Employment Australia*, 29 June 2026, <<https://www.dss.gov.au/inclusive-employment-australia>> accessed 1 July 2026.

¹⁴⁹ WISE Employment, *Submission 53*, p. 2.

¹⁵⁰ Dylan McBurney, Youth Associate, public hearing, Melbourne, 21 November 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 15–16.

¹⁵¹ Associate Professor Matthew Harrison and Catherine Civelles, *Submission 88*, p. 2.

RECOMMENDATION 43: That the Victorian Government invest in local organisations to give wraparound support for students undertaking work in placement, apprenticeship and training to provide a central point and contact for students needing extra support in the community.

4.6 Conclusion

Providing tailored support and services to engage disadvantaged groups in education and training pathways remains a significant challenge in Victoria. As discussed throughout this Chapter, students face a range of barriers that limit their access to education and training opportunities. Geographic disadvantage, gender bias, language and cultural barriers and accessibility challenges for people with disability were identified as key areas requiring policy reform and service improvements to ensure equitable access across all cohorts.

In response, the Committee has made a number of recommendations to review, strengthen and develop existing supports and services. The Committee considers that improving tailored support for disadvantaged groups should be a priority for the Victorian Government to increase participation in education and training and encourage more people to pursue pathways into industries experiencing workforce shortages.

**Adopted by the Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee
Parliament of Victoria, East Melbourne
14 August 2026**

Appendix A

About the Inquiry

A.1 Submissions

Submission number	Individual or organisation	Date received
1	CFMEU Education & Training	20 August 2025
2	Professor Michael Brear	17 June 2025
3	Lachlan Stonehouse	23 June 2025
4	Charlie Davies	23 June 2025
5	Darcy Hutter	23 June 2025
6	Darwin Smith	23 June 2025
7	Meika Fenech	23 June 2025
8	Name withheld	23 June 2025
9	Name withheld	23 June 2025
10	Name withheld	23 June 2025
11	Jarvis Dullard	23 June 2025
12	Annelies De coninck	23 June 2025
13	Elizabeth Zaroni	24 June 2025
14	Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation	26 June 2025
15	Name withheld	27 June 2025
16	White Box Enterprises	30 June 2025
17	Professor Lindsay Falvey	14 July 2025
18	Confidential	14 July 2025
19	Primary Industries Education Foundation Australia	15 July 2025
20	Apprenticeship Employment Network	17 July 2025
21	Katie Kendall	17 July 2025
22	Western Chances	18 July 2025
23	Cameron Bowles	22 July 2025
24	VicLLENs	22 July 2025
25	Beyond the Bell Great South Coast and Neil Porter Legacy	22 July 2025
26	Australian International Academy of Education	22 July 2025
27	Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union	23 July 2025
28	Timboon Agriculture Project	24 July 2025
29	Westvic Staffing Solutions	24 July 2025

Submission number	Individual or organisation	Date received
30	Dementia Australia	25 July 2025
31	Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering	25 July 2025
32	Samjhana Uprety	25 July 2025
33	Professor Stephen Billett	26 July 2025
34	River Nile School	28 July 2025
35	Deakin University	28 July 2025
36	Merri-Bek City Council and Inner Northern LLEN	28 July 2025
37	Geelong Manufacturing Council	28 July 2025
38	Louise Devenyns and Andrew Van Gemert	29 July 2025
39	Geelong Chamber of Commerce	29 July 2025
40	Ourschool	29 July 2025
41	Sunraysia Institute of TAFE	29 July 2025
42	Victorian Student Representative Council	29 July 2025
43	Amaze	29 July 2025
44	Mitchell Mazzarella	30 July 2025
45	Aviation Australia	30 July 2025
46	Australian Catholic University	30 July 2025
47	Australian National University South Asian Research and Advocacy Hub	30 July 2025
48	Career Industry Council of Australia	30 July 2025
49	Name withheld	30 July 2025
50	Master Electricians Australia	31 July 2025
51	National Disability Services	31 July 2025
52	TAFE Gippsland	31 July 2025
52A	Supplementary submission	9 September 2025
53	WISE Employment	31 July 2025
54	Loddon Mallee LLEN	31 July 2025
55	Baw Baw Latrobe LLEN	31 July 2025
56	Launch Housing	31 July 2025
57	Advanced Pharmacy Australia	31 July 2025
58	DMTC	31 July 2025
59	Cross Border Commissioner Victoria	31 July 2025
60	Bendigo Association of Pharmacy Students	31 July 2025
61	Victorian Pharmacy Students' Association	31 July 2025
62	YouThrive	31 July 2025
63	Australian Association of Psychologists	31 July 2025

Submission number	Individual or organisation	Date received
64	Vacro	31 July 2025
65	Country Universities Centre	31 July 2025
66	Minerals Council of Australia, Victorian Division	31 July 2025
67	Adult and Community Education Victoria	31 July 2025
67A	Supplementary submission	27 November 2025
68	Swinburne University of Technology	31 July 2025
69	National Australian Pharmacy Students' Association	31 July 2025
70	Australian Chicken Meat Federation	1 August 2025
71	Master Builders Association of Victoria	1 August 2025
72	Victorian TAFE Association	1 August 2025
72A	Attachment A	1 August 2025
73	Monash University	1 August 2025
74	Jesuit Social Services	1 August 2025
75	Tricia O'Connor	1 August 2025
76	The Smith Family	1 August 2025
77	Western Integrated Family Violence Committee	1 August 2025
78	Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare	1 August 2025
79	Australian Logistics Council	1 August 2025
80	Independent Education Union Victoria Tasmania Branch	1 August 2025
81	The Gordon Institute of TAFE	1 August 2025
82	Victorian Allied Health Professionals Association	1 August 2025
83	Farm My School	1 August 2025
84	Murdoch Children's Research Institute	1 August 2025
85	Plumbing Industry Climate Action Centre	1 August 2025
86	Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Indigenous), University of Melbourne	1 August 2025
87	Victoria University	1 August 2025
88	Associate Professor Matthew Harrison and Catherine Civelles	1 August 2025
89	VICSEG New Futures	1 August 2025
90	Community Work Australia	1 August 2025
91	Engineers Australia	1 August 2025
92	Corangamite Shire Council	1 August 2025
93	Australian Centre for Career Education	1 August 2025
94	Youth Projects	1 August 2025
95	RMIT University	1 August 2025
96	Future Skills Organisation	1 August 2025
97	Youth Strategic Advocacy Group	1 August 2025

Submission number	Individual or organisation	Date received
98	Youth Affairs Council Victoria	1 August 2025
99	National Trust of Australia Victoria	1 August 2025
100	Federation University	1 August 2025
101	Young Workers Centre	1 August 2025
102	Victorian Trades Hall Council	1 August 2025
103	Monash Institute of Railway Technology	2 August 2025
104	Women's Health in the South East	2 August 2025
105	South West Institute of TAFE	4 August 2025
106	University of Melbourne	4 August 2025
106A	Supplementary submission	9 December 2025
107	Cloverdale Community Centre	4 August 2025
108	Independent Schools Victoria	5 August 2025
109	Civil Contractors Federation Victoria	5 August 2025
110	Australian Services Union, Victorian and Tasmanian Authorities and Services Branch	6 August 2025
111	genU Training	7 August 2025
112	Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture, Foundation House	7 August 2025
113	Housing Industry Association	7 August 2025
114	Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation	7 August 2025
115	Greater South East Melbourne	7 August 2025
116	Bass Coast Health	8 August 2025
117	NORTH Link	8 August 2025
118	Asylum Seeker Resource Centre	8 August 2025
119	La Trobe University	8 August 2025
120	Independent Tertiary Education Council	8 August 2025
121	Port of Melbourne	8 August 2025
122	Committee for Greater Shepparton	8 August 2025
123	Australian Education Union, Victorian Branch	8 August 2025
124	Australian College of Midwives	11 August 2025
125	Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry	11 August 2025
126	United Firefighters Union	11 August 2025
127	Bass Coast Shire Council	12 August 2025
128	The Pharmacy Guild of Australia, Victoria Branch	15 August 2025
129	Wyndham City Council	15 August 2025
130	Victorian Council of Social Service	15 August 2025
131	Uniting Vic.Tas	15 August 2025

Submission number	Individual or organisation	Date received
132	Ngaweeyan Maar-oo	22 August 2025
133	Claudine Evans	28 August 2025
134	Celester Pater	8 September 2025
135	Symal Group	15 September 2025
136	Victorian Government	22 September 2025
137	Polly Britten	29 September 2025
137A	Supplementary submission	28 November 2025
138	Dilan Jayasekara	2 October 2025
139	ManpowerGroup Australia	6 October 2025
140	Ben Jenkinson	8 December 2025
141	Epic Taste Experience	25 March 2026

A.2 Youth Associates' reports

Name	Title
Atharva Nerlikar	Youth Associate
Bianca Baldwin	Youth Associate
Dylan McBurney	Youth Associate
Elijah Lacey	Youth Associate
Harlequin Goodes	Youth Associate
Matilda Ryan	Youth Associate
Rowan Farren	Youth Associate
Shanay Gao-Kuhlmann (Jacobs)	Youth Associate
Sienna Seychell	Youth Associate
Yesha Khandel	Youth Associate

A.3 Public hearings

Monday 17 November 2025

Melbourne

Name	Title	Organisation
Tony Bates	Secretary	Department of Education
Scott Widmer	Deputy Secretary, Strategy and Secondary School Reform	Department of Education
Natalie Garcia de Heer	Acting Assistant Deputy Secretary, Senior Secondary Pathways Reform Taskforce, Strategy and Secondary Reform Group	Department of Education
Lee-Anne Fisher	Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Skills Authority	Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions
David Miller	Chief Executive Officer, Office of TAFE Coordination and Delivery	Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions
Penne Dawe	Chief Executive Officer	Australian Centre for Career Education
Trevor Black	ACCE President, Career Practitioner and Mathematics Teacher, Carey Baptist Grammar School	Australian Centre for Career Education
Alex White	Chief Executive Officer	Victorian TAFE Association
Lizzy O'Shea	Head of Policy Reform	Victorian TAFE Association
Pam Jonas	Senior Adviser	Victorian TAFE Association
Madelyn Bolch	Pro Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive – Vocational Education and Training	Swinburne University of Technology
Caryn Phillips	Executive Director – VET Operations	Swinburne University of Technology
Wayne Butson	Chief TAFE Officer and Chief Executive Officer of TAFE	Victoria University
Mish Eastman	Deputy Vice-Chancellor Vocational Education and Vice-President	RMIT University
Iain Lockie	Associate Director, Lifelong Learning	RMIT University
Darren Gray	Pro Vice-Chancellor VET and Pathways and Chief Executive Officer TAFE	Federation University
Iain Martin	Vice-Chancellor	Deakin University
Jessica Vanderlelie	Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic)	Deakin University
Julie Cogin	Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic)	Australian Catholic University
Sarah McDonald	Deputy Vice-Chancellor Student Experience	Monash University
Wayne Hodgson	Dean of Health Science, Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences	Monash University
Gregor Kennedy	Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education)	University of Melbourne

Name	Title	Organisation
Andrea O'Connor	Co-Director, Victorian Medtech Skills and Device Hub, Shanahan Chair in Frontier Medical Solutions	University of Melbourne
Sue Bennett	Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic)	La Trobe University
Emmaline Bexley	Academic Director, Widening Participation	La Trobe University
Fiona Purcell	Chair Chief Executive Officer	VicLLENs Outer Eastern LLEN
Dallian D'Cruz	Deputy Chair Chief Executive Officer	VicLLENs WynBay LLEN
David Kennedy	Executive Officer	Inner Northern LLEN
Nicky Leitch	Chief Executive Officer	Central Ranges LLEN
Jane Hosking	Chief Executive Officer	North Central LLEN
Lisa Price	Executive Officer	Baw Baw Latrobe LLEN
Michelle Anderson	Board Director	Baw Baw Latrobe LLEN
Ian Smythe	Chief Academic Officer	Aviation Australia
Daria Walczak	Program Director, GradWISE	WISE Employment
Nikki Noack	General Manager, genU Education & Training	genU Training
Lorna Mackie	Director of Strategy	genU Training
Gary Workman	Executive Director	Apprenticeship Employment Network
Felix Pirie	Chief Executive Officer	Independent Tertiary Education Council Australia
Sally Deane	State Policy Manager	Independent Tertiary Education Council Australia
Nina Bekker	Executive Officer	Adult and Community Education Victoria

Friday 21 November 2025

Melbourne

Name	Title
Atharva Nerlikar	Youth Associate
Bianca Baldwin	Youth Associate
Dylan McBurney	Youth Associate
Harlequin Goodes	Youth Associate
Matilda Ryan	Youth Associate
Rowan Farren	Youth Associate
Shanay Gao-Kuhlmann (Jacobs)	Youth Associate
Sienna Seychell	Youth Associate
Yesha Khandel	Youth Associate

Wednesday 26 November 2025

Melbourne

Name	Title	Organisation
Erin Johnston	General Manager, Group Sales	ManpowerGroup Australia
Rod Barton	Lead, Government Relations	ManpowerGroup Australia
Gail McHardy	Chief Executive Officer	Parents Victoria
Jacqui Van de Velde	VPC Education Consultant	Victorian Parents Council
Chris Ronan	Chief Executive Officer	Country Universities Centre
Dilan Jayasekara	Branch Executive Committee Member	Australian Computer Society
Manjusha Bhakta	Chair, Data and AI Special Interest Group	Australian Computer Society
Amanda Threlfall	Assistant Secretary	Victorian Trades Hall Council
Kit McMahon	Chief Executive Officer	Women's Health in the South East
Polly Britten	Founder	LinkUp Careers
Brad Davies	Strategic Advisor to the Chief Executive	Independent Schools Victoria
Samet Istar	Board Member	Australian International Academy of Education

Friday 28 November 2025

Melbourne

Name	Title	Organisation
Gregory Gow	General Manager Community and Sector Capacity Building	Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture, Foundation House
Afnan Matti	School Support Office	Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture, Foundation House
Anastasia Magriplis	Head of Humanitarian Operations and Resilience	Asylum Seeker Resource Centre
Moin Zafar	Manager, Vocational & Empowerment Pathways Program	Asylum Seeker Resource Centre
Charles Hertzog	Principal	River Nile School
Sarah Gray	Head of Partnerships and Development	River Nile School
Imogen	Student (VCE VM)	The Gordon
Hiwan	Student (VCE VM)	Gilson College
Yolanda Robson	Director	Young Workers Centre
Angus Leech	Outreach Organiser	Young Workers Centre
Jim O'Shea	Chief Operating Officer	Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO)

Name	Title	Organisation
Stephanie Kilpatrick	Executive Director, Policy Advocacy Communications Unit	Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO)
Emily Hocking	Manager, Strategic Policy and Reform	Ngaweeyan Maar-oo
Kayla Thomas	Policy Officer	Ngaweeyan Maar-oo
Tiriki Onus	Pro Vice-Chancellor	Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Indigenous), University of Melbourne
Michele Lonsdale	Acting Chief Executive Officer	Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare
Pearl Goodwin Burns	Senior Manager, Raising Expectations Program	Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare
Lauren Frost	Advocacy Manager (Policy and Communications)	Youth Affairs Council Victoria
Rob Auger	Operations Manager, Employment Services	Jesuit Social Services
Melanie Raymond OAM	Chair	Youth Projects
Trent Miller	Chief Executive Officer	Youth Projects
Kylie Busk	Deputy General Secretary	Independent Education Union Victoria Tasmania Branch
Sarah Collins	Organiser	Independent Education Union Victoria Tasmania Branch
Justin Mullaly	President	Australian Education Union, Victorian Branch
Briley Stokes	Deputy President	Australian Education Union, Victorian Branch
Caroline Smith	Executive Director, Centre for Education and Training	Australian Industry Group
Paolo Damante	Senior Policy Officer	Australian Industry Group
Carrie Williams	Chief of Public Affairs	Master Builders Association of Victoria
Bianca Florent	Outreach and Future Skills Manager	Master Builders Association of Victoria
Steven Wojtkiw	Deputy Executive Director, Victoria	Housing Industry Association
Jerry Yik	Head of Policy and Advocacy	Advanced Pharmacy Australia
Debbie Parker	Member, Technicians and Assistants Specialty Practice Group	Advanced Pharmacy Australia
Alex Leszczynski	Senior Industrial Officer	Advanced Pharmacy Australia
Emily de Wind	Member	Victorian Allied Health Professionals Association
	Physiotherapist	Austin Health
Alana Ginnivan	Acting Assistant Secretary	Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation, Victorian Branch
Mark Staaf	Professional Officer	Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation, Victorian Branch
Colin Axup	President	Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals

Name	Title	Organisation
Belinda Hudak	Member	Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals
	Principal	Mildura Senior Secondary College
Matthew Koutroubas	Member	Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals
	Principal	Rochester Secondary
Robert Boucher	Member	Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals
	Principal	Swifts Creek P-12

Friday 20 March 2026

Melbourne

Name	Title	Organisation
Sarah Fordyce	State Manager, Victoria	National Disability Services
Carlene Egan	Senior Sector Support and Policy Officer	National Disability Services
Marius Smith	Chief Executive Officer	Vacro
Deng Mading Deng	Board Member	Shepparton Ethnic Council
Linda Nieuwenhuizen	Chief Executive Officer	Committee for Greater Shepparton
Martina Johnson	General Manager HR and Compliance	Committee for Greater Shepparton
Karen Linford	Representative	Committee for Greater Shepparton

Wednesday 25 March 2026

Warrnambool

Name	Title	Organisation
Dr John Flett	Director Strategy, Research and Clean Energy	South West TAFE
Kathy Hall	Executive Manager Education	South West TAFE
Matt Porter	Co-founder and Executive Officer	Neil Porter Legacy
Greg McMeel	Executive Officer	South West LLEN
Mick Williams	Human Resource Manager	The Midfield Group
Zoe Damman	Rural Development Coordinator	Youth Affairs Council Victoria
Anne Murphy	Representative	Youth Affairs Council Victoria
Lyn Eales	Representative	Youth Affairs Council Victoria
Dean Luciani	Chief Executive Officer	Westvic Staffing Solutions
Matty Stewart	Program Coordinator	Standing Tall in Warrnambool
Andrea Vallance	Timboon Agriculture Project Coordinator	Timboon P-12 School

Thursday 26 March 2026

Geelong

Name	Title	Organisation
Carley Brennan	Director, Engagement and Partnerships	The Gordon Institute of TAFE
Peter McKinnon	Executive Director, Growth and Student Experience	The Gordon Institute of TAFE
Jeremy Crawford	Chief Executive Officer	Geelong Chamber of Commerce
Leanne Nelson	Program Manager	Geelong Manufacturing Council
Robyn Stevens	Chief Executive Officer	Gforce Employment and Recruitment
Greg Haynes	Service Delivery General Manager	Gforce Employment and Recruitment
Alison Laing	Chief People Officer	Symal Group
Ashleigh Nugent	Manager, Learning and Development	Symal Group
Jackie Taylor	Chief Executive Officer	Western Chances
Julie Noonan	Scholarships Program Manager	Western Chances
Andrew McGuckian	Chief Executive Officer	YouThrive
Charlotte Bracey	Program Manager	YouThrive
Cormach Evans	Founder and Directing Manager	Strong Brother Strong Sister
Michelle Searle	Executive Manager, Corporate Services	Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative
Ken Massari	Assistant Principal	Northern Bay College
Richard Ellson	Centre Manager, Geelong Industry Trade Training Centre	Northern Bay College
Roqya Hussein	Deputy Chair	Cultura Youth Council
Erfan Rahimy	Member	Cultura Youth Council
James McLennan	Chief Executive Officer	Farm My School
Liz Bonner	Chief Executive Officer	Cloverdale Community Centre
Margaret Reed	Community Volunteer	Cloverdale Community Centre

