



Inquiry into student pathways to in-demand industries

Shanay Gao-Kuhlmann (Jacobs)

09/11/25

Bio:

Shanay is an 18-year-old from Geelong, currently living in Melbourne for study. She is studying Education and wishes to be a teacher, with a future in politics. She engages in advocacy programs to further develop her voice, public speaking ability and awareness. Shanay comes from a multicultural family, from a regional area and identifies as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community. With an abundance of experience in different situations, she has knowledge to share pertaining to the aforementioned groups, and her other passions such as animal rights, artificial intelligence, global peace, fair education and diversity.

Summary of consultations:

The interview group consisted of 21 individual online interviews of a diverse group of Victorians. The majority of interviewees originate from the Geelong area, with the minority from Metropolitan Melbourne. These groups include individuals from Gordon TAFE, Deakin University, the Cultura Youth Group, local high school graduates, members of the 2025 Youth Parliament Program, Geelong Youth Council and general members of the public.

Gender	Age	Study/work Status	Diversity:
Female: 14	18: 11	University: 13	Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander: 1
Male: 4	19: 6	Tafe: 2	Culturally Diverse: 13
Other/non-binary: 2	20: 1	Working: 3	Living with a Disability: 3
Prefer not to say: 1	21: 1	Highschool: 3	Regional/Rural Victorian: 15
	22: 1		LGBTQIA+: 10
	24: 1		

Interview results:

1.1 What are the main factors considered when choosing what direction to take after leaving secondary school?

The most prominent answer was personal interest and passion though others include; future pathways, location, finances, family, opportunities, cost of living crisis and cultural values.

1.2 Who or what has a large influence on your future career choices when you are a student?

An overwhelming amount of respondents attributed family and friends as the largest influence on their career choices. Others included teachers, industry professionals, culture, the media and themselves.

2.1: To what extent did you consider in-demand industries when choosing your senior secondary pathway at school?

Most were aware of the shortages however, as they did not have an interest in the field, were more inclined to move into a profession of interest. However, few went into in-demand industries due to the knowledge that entering such would secure them a career, as well as the aid of government subsidies. Specifically, two cases are studying teaching and healthcare because they understand it is an opportunity to help those require aid.

2.2: What would make you more aware of in-demand industries and the job opportunities they offer?

General advocacy and awareness campaigns appeared to be the most desired method of receiving information about in-demand industries. These include flyers, school presentations, blogs, newsletters, guest speakers, television commercials. Additionally, large career expos, available for multiple schools to attend (e.g. Geelong Career Expo), so all students have the opportunity to witness a variety of different careers, are desired. Interviewees call for compensated degrees and paid placement, and increased advertisement for such, so they may be more aware of in-demand industries.

3.1: How effective was career development at your school in guiding you with what you chose to pursue after leaving secondary school?

The general consensus dictated that school career development was severely lacking. The majority of respondents noted very little help from their careers counsellors and some even found it to be more confusing in the long run. In some cases, career counsellors were noted to be disinterested, unhelpful, discriminatory and shutdown student desires immediately but did not offer support or appropriate alternatives

For example, this is the language one respondents career counsellor would use:

- “Maybe you should consider something else because I don't think you're going to get a good enough ATAR”
- “I don't think university/further study is going to be for you”
- “I don't think you're ever going to be able to get into that industry”

Another case noted that they were initially told the degree they wanted to do (mathematics) would not get them any jobs, but later, on their own found that it was in fact in-demand and had many opportunities and subsidised courses. Additionally, they were recommended a different degree that in turn, had very little opportunities, depicting career counsellors disconnect with current pathways.

3.2: How can school career development be improved?

- Having set sessions to discuss pathways
- Tie career conversations to their respective classes
- Promote comfortability to approach the career counsellor

- Increase mandatory meetings with a minimum of one per semester through years 10,11 and 12
- Promote imagination when discussing future pathways
- Advertise different fields, specifically those in-demand
- Create an online database for zoom meetings/presentations within schools, for each respective pathway
- Make career development an elective in Education studies, so career counsellors require a current degree in that field

4.1: Have you or others you know had experience with VET in school, and if so, how did you, or they, find it?

The general perspective of VET cannot be equated to good or bad as it is entirely subject dependent. Interviewees stated that some courses are incredible while others are severely lacking. VET within schools was often pushed as a last resort and many students were not provided the option as it was only recommended to students who aren't "smart enough for VCE". This is untrue as VET can be taken through both VCE and VCE vocational major and has merit in both circumstances. It is valuable in the sense that it allows students to "dip their toes into different industries without fully committing to it" and begin practicing industry related skills earlier in life.

4.2: How could VET in schools be improved?

- Reduce stigma (specifically from school staff)
- Provide more education discussing what VET is, the opportunities offered and alternative pathways
- Provide more resources and conversations about VET
- Mix practical and theory elements within the courses
- Develop facilities to host VETs in a variety of areas
- Make assessments more challenging as students tended to pass by doing the bare minimum, and was reported to not have learnt much

5.1: When you think of VET, who do you think it is best suited to?

In almost every interview, respondents used the term "hands-on" to describe who VET is best suited towards. This demonstrates the type of person who may benefit from VET however, respondents answered as such as to avoid stereotyping VET students. Most mentioned the overwhelming stigma that VET or Vocational Major (previously known as VCAL) students face, and while they understand it is for everyone, it is societally accepted to see those people as lesser than, or not smart enough for traditional schooling. The stigma pushes the notion that VET is for students who are "disengaged" or "more likely to consider dropping out of school" when in reality, it may be for those who already have an understanding of the path they wish to go down, and VET offers them hands-on/specific experience.

5.2: How do you compare the value of VET with university?

Much like a previous question, the quality of VET in comparison to university is also heavily course dependent. Some courses offer much more hands-on experience, such as a trade, than a university degree. Likewise, a hairdressing VET can easily open the pathway to hairdressing, however, it is limited to that specific pathway. Conversely, a Bachelor of Science can lead into hundreds of different job outcomes but may require additional effort to enter said professions as it is not a direct pathway. "It's about learning how to do something physical and apply it

elsewhere”, likely leading to a more guaranteed job than those doing purely theoretical degrees.

5.3: Where do students get most of their information about VET?

Interviewees attributed their knowledge of VET mostly to teachers, as well as family, friends and online resources.

6.1: How well are VET pathways and the types of jobs they can lead to understood?

Most respondents were aware but not pursuing VET pathways as they did not align with their interests.

6.2: What would help raise awareness about VET pathways among students?

- Have graduated VET alumnus come into school and discuss pathways
- Facilitate the discussion on a diverse range of VETs
- Provide readily accessible resources that don't involve talking to someone
- Promote more open discussions about it to break the stigma
- Talk about how VET can help you in/enter university
- Reduce the stigma and have a 50/50 information split (teachers typically push you into VCE and don't share alternate options)

7: What are some of the barriers that students face when pursuing further study?

- Accessibility (location wise, disability support)
- Financial burden (accommodation, fees, study and course materials, entrance fees [e.g. LANTITE, UCAT])
- Stigma
- Family
- Social inequality
- Health

8: What support could help disadvantaged students choose and complete qualifications that help them gain employment in in-demand industries?

- Financial support/travel subsidies
- Closer placement for regional students and online classes
- General First Nations support, from actual First Nations organisations
- Have professionals communicate directly with students
- Focus groups, social groups
- Have relevant alumnus share their story
- Role models/support persons/mentors
- Hire university/TAFE buses to combat issues with public transport
- Advertise women in male dominated industries to break the standard
- Increase social support (such as social groups)
- Provide more scholarships or promote those already existing
- Increase transport infrastructure, provide free driving lessons, create a data base to get a cheap car easily and initiate payment plans for students to get cars so students can physically get to further study facilities/placements
- Offer subjects or support that is culturally appropriate and tailored for First Nations students

- Young carers could receive child-care facility within their study location, like free day care
- Translators for those with language barriers/free English classes
- Scaffold the way for students to enter their desired industry
- Provide rural students with internet access

9.1: What are some reasons why students might not complete their qualifications?

- They need to source their own apprenticeship/placement
- Lack social connection/ bullying/mental health issues
- Financial issues
- Not enough course support/not enjoying the course
- Physical accessibility and location
- They need to leave to take care of a sick/aging family member
- Disabilities/disorders

9.2: What resources would help students to complete their qualifications?

- Scholarships
- Online opportunities where possible
- Closer placement
- Allow regional students opportunities to find their own placement that is close to them
- More social groups
- Seminars with those who underwent similar challenges and ended up in the desired professional field
- Industry connections

10: How does government subsidies influence you?

For some, subsidised courses are part of the reason they are able to study at all. Most mentioned that without HECS, they would most likely not be studying at all.

11: Any other comments

- There is so much pressure to get an ATAR, and it is a big reason for high school dropouts and student depression, but it is ultimately not that important because alternate pathways exist, though these are not greatly advertised
- Make financial support more accessible, specifically those who have moved out of home (Centrelink deems them still dependent until the age of 21, even if their parents won't support them)
- Advertisement of in-demand industries is important, but should not be done so much as to coerce students into an industry they do not desire to enter
- Most respondents did not know that VET proceeded past year 12
- "The issue is rooted in culture and the systematic failings of the education system", the interviewees are calling for change within the system in its entirety
- Getting into a career when you are older is harder due to lack of resources and financial strain