



Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee

Inquiry into student pathways to in-demand industries

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Bio:

Atharva Nerlikar is 22 years old and lives in Melbourne's eastern suburbs (Glen Waverley). He is currently completing his final year of a Bachelor of Arts, majoring in Psychology, at the University of Melbourne. Coming from an Indian background, Atharva values diversity and inclusion and brings a cross-cultural perspective to his academic work and community engagement. Alongside his studies, Atharva has combined work with active involvement in community initiatives. He has contributed to inclusive education programs, supporting children with diverse abilities through volunteering at a local school for children with disabilities. As well as being involved in local projects that encourage equal participation and opportunity through the local Indian community. These experiences have strengthened his commitment to creating environments where all people, regardless of background, feel represented and supported. This was explored further through an internship at the Department of Education within the Performance and Evaluation division. He is motivated by the opportunity to contribute to work that reflects the voices of diverse communities and helps shape a fairer and more inclusive Victoria.

Summary of consultations:

Twenty-one people were interviewed of which one was redacted. These interviews took place individually in-person, only two took place over zoom. Gender was split evenly between males and females. Nine participants were enrolled in university, three recent graduates, seven were working and one was in high school. All participants were in Glen Waverley. Fifteen participants identified as Culturally and Linguistically diverse. One participant identified as a person with disability, and one was from regional Victorian. Participants were friends, high school peers and Monash Youth Services members.

1. Choosing what to do after you leave school.

The main factors that were considered when choosing what direction to take after secondary school were typically related to career progression, employability, and interests. Many people prioritised interests and skills when choosing the general direction, followed by how these interests could be utilised in a career. Income was also a significant factor that people considered, choosing degrees that can lead to above average salary jobs (e.g., technology, medicine, engineering). Further, the people who influenced decisions most after school were, family, and specific teachers. Many people noted that they only had awareness of jobs that their parents and their

friends did. This was identified by people as somewhat of a limiting factor as certain professions were not considered at all due to a lack of awareness. Several people who attended selective or private secondary schools spoke about career expos and talks from industry leaders and alumni as a strong influence. However, public school educated individuals rarely spoke about career advice in school in a positive manner. Government led pushes for STEM is also an influence that was raised.

2. In-demand industries

There was a reasonably even split between people who considered in-demand industries when choosing their direction after secondary school, and those who did not. Of the three industries described in the question, healthcare was considered the most often. Those who pursued healthcare considered career progression and interests more than the demand in the industry. Overall, information about in-demand industries was noted as not reaching people while they were in high school.

Many people stated that measures to improve awareness would not have changed their decision as these industries did not interest them. However, many noted that more information in the form of seminars and career expos in school would have been an effective way not only to introduce the industries but to also make people aware of the jobs within them.

3. Quality of school career development/advice

Six people said career advice was not helpful, nine said somewhat helpful and five said helpful. It was noted that career advice in school was limited as it often only acted to reaffirm or discourage goals already detailed by students. This was seen as ineffective and instead it should aim to introduce career options and pathways to pursue these interests. Further, students wanted more insight from industry. Inviting industry experts and alumni was described as an insightful experience for those who had access to it, and those who did not, described it as something they wish they had. As well as this, several students noted that career advice was not structured well, often citing that there was just one session in which advice was given based of testing (e.g. Morrisby test). This was seen as insufficient and not productive. Better training and information access for career counsellors was raised and offering that same information to students would also be beneficial.

4. VET delivered to school students

Eleven people knew someone who participated in a VET program, four people participated, and five people did not participate nor know anyone who participated. The most common criticism of VET was that it was not encouraged by schools and managing timetables with VET subjects often meant missing school time in travel to attend VET classes in other locations.

Another concern was that even after scoring well in VET subjects, it scaled down significantly, thus it would discourage people from participating in more VET subjects as it negatively affected your final ATAR. As well as this, people studying VET subjects outside of their school found that there was little or no support given from the schools. Supports and considerations that would help improve VET were better integration with VCE subjects and raising awareness about VET subjects and options. Offering more subjects within the school was seen to reduce the problems raised above as well as ensuring criteria for grading and course structure was more defined. Overall, more involvement from the school was suggested most.

5. Perception of VET

The perception of VET was that it was best suited for people who preferred more hands-on learning with specific interests in careers that support this. Further, another commonly noted reason was that it was suited for people who did not want the pressure of VCE and did not see university as their next step after high school. Most people found it hard to compare university and VET as they were at different stages of education (tertiary and secondary), however, most people assumed that it was comparable in terms of quality of education and work experience but felt that job outcomes from VET subjects were more limited due to not having tertiary qualifications. Interestingly, people who studied VET had a more negative view on VET, citing that there was less clarity in the curriculum and teaching quality varied much more. This was exacerbated by not having the option for private tutoring for VET subjects.

6. VET pathways

Nine people felt that they did not understand VET pathways and the jobs they can lead to, ten did understand the pathway but did not pursue it. Advertising was seen to increase awareness of VET pathways amongst students. More information being communicated to students earlier on was also seen as critical to raise awareness, as well as introducing VET subjects to parents.

7. Barriers to further study

Barriers to VET: The most common barriers identified were that it was not accommodated by school timetables, it had a negative perception, accessibility, and not enough information about subjects.

Barriers to University: Access and transport were identified as the most common barriers. ATAR requirements were also a concern as it prohibited some degrees as well as feeling isolated in the university system.

Barriers to TAFE: Limited career options and access were raised as a barrier to pursuing TAFE. However, many people felt that there were no barriers to TAFE.

Barriers to Apprenticeship: Many people were unaware of the barriers and structure of apprenticeship programs. Some noted that a barrier to pursuing an apprenticeship would be not having the connections to find a supervisor. As well as this some people raised concerns that it would be difficult to manage full time work immediately after high school and wages can be too low.

8. Tailored support for certain cohorts

Some supports that were raised for these cohorts included, more scholarships and grants as well as more awareness of them. Introducing more support groups and systems to help these cohorts, such as having specific mentoring programs with people who have had similar lived experience. Subsidised housing and transport would allow these cohorts to attend tertiary education with lower financial pressure. Having lower barriers to underloading university degrees and completing qualifications in a more flexible way. For regional and rural people, having more access to online courses.

9. Completing qualifications

The reasons for not completing qualifications were losing interest in the topic, having personal reasons that prevent people from continuing or other responsibilities. Another reason was finding employment that offered better opportunity cost compared to what the qualifications offered. On losing interest, not many solutions were offered except for the option to return to study later. This was the same solution offered for having other responsibilities and personal reasons that prevented further study. Another point that was raised was, ensuring employability after completing qualifications. Many people felt that even after completing degrees, it was hard to find a job, even if the industry was in demand. Having clear connections to industry and support in applying for jobs may help people feel more optimistic about completing qualifications.

10. Influence of cost on course choice

Thirteen people said cost had some influence on their choice, four said strong and three said no influence. Most people said that it allowed them to pursue further education straight after secondary school without having to worry about paying off a loan. Other noted that it did not have an influence on whether they were going to study or not, instead it gave them the opportunity to study what they wanted and study longer degrees without immediate financial burden.

11. Any other comments (quotes directly from interviewees)

“As important as it is to help people in schools, it is also critically and equally important to encourage early school leavers or mature students to re-skill and migrate to in demand industries.”

“VCE system doesn’t prepare students for tertiary education, tertiary education doesn’t translate to job readiness. Both need to be more tailored and facilitating for employment after. Experiences are more important than rote learning. Example AI is the technology of the future and future jobs, yet it is prohibited in educational contexts.”

“Changing costing of degrees doesn’t fix anything- people still choose the degrees they want but can be worse off after, no guarantee of employment afterwards is not good, have more scholarships and more information, and access scholarships rather than academic,”

“The discrepancy between private and public schools, is further exacerbated by more funding for private schools.”

“VET should be seen as an option to prepare you for university.”