



Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee

Inquiry into student pathways to in-demand industries

Template for Youth Associate final report to Committee

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Date: 10/11/25

Bio:

Elijah Lacey is a 21-year-old Melbourne-based student and community volunteer. He has completed a **Diploma of Leadership** and is currently working towards a **Bachelor of Arts**, reflecting his commitment to personal and professional development. Elijah has practical experience with an **Indigenous-owned construction company** that focuses on social procurement, where he gained insight into innovative workforce practices, project management, and community-driven initiatives.

In addition to his professional experience, Elijah volunteers as a **youth worker**, supporting young people from **culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) and disadvantaged backgrounds**. In this role, he works closely with young people to provide guidance, mentorship, and opportunities for skill development, helping them navigate educational and vocational challenges.

Through his combined experience in leadership, community engagement, and practical work environments, Elijah has developed a strong understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing young people in Victoria. His diverse background allows him to contribute valuable perspectives on supporting students, enhancing pathways into in-demand industries, and promoting inclusive and equitable opportunities for all young people.

Summary of consultations:

A total of 30 young people aged 19–23 were consulted for this inquiry, consisting of 10 male and 20 female participants. All participants were based in Melbourne, Victoria, and were either current students (secondary, TAFE, or university) or recent graduates. Participants represented a mix of pathways, including engineering, IT/technology, health sciences, social assistance, construction/trade, and business/marketing/accounting.

Around five participants identified as female in male-dominated industries, highlighting gender-specific challenges, while a small number of participants had experience with VET programs or alternative pathways. The consultations

aimed to capture a broad diversity of experiences, including cultural and socio-economic perspectives.

The consultations were conducted one-on-one via informal interviews. Participants were connected through educational institutions, personal networks, and community groups, ensuring voluntary and anonymous participation. The focus was on gathering their insights regarding pathway decisions, career development support, awareness of in-demand industries, and barriers faced.

Interview results:

Interview Results

1. What experiences did your interviewees tell you about?

- Many students reported considering job security, parental guidance, and personal interests when choosing pathways after school.
- Awareness of in-demand industries such as health care, IT, social assistance, and construction was often limited, and most participants only learned about industry shortages late in senior secondary school.
- Several participants, particularly in technical or trade fields, felt that school limited opportunities for creative thinking or problem-solving.
- Career guidance at school was inconsistent, with some students receiving helpful mentorship while others relied on peers, family, or external research.
- Experiences with VET were mixed: some found it valuable for practical skills, others perceived it as less prestigious or under-promoted.
- Barriers such as financial constraints, lack of placements, gender biases, and limited mentorship were commonly reported.

2. What did your interviewees say is currently working well?

- Family, peers, and mentors were valuable in helping students make decisions.
 - Some schools offered career fairs, counseling, and work placement programs that provided guidance and insight into future pathways.
 - VET programs, when accessed, gave students hands-on experience and exposure to industry practices.
 - Government initiatives such as Free TAFE and HECS subsidies were useful in reducing financial barriers for some students.
 - Industry exposure through internships, part-time work, or community engagement helped students better understand real-world career options.
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3. What problems or issues did your interviewees tell you about?

- Career guidance was often generic, superficial, or focused on university pathways, leaving students underprepared for alternative or vocational careers.
 - Awareness of in-demand industries and job opportunities was limited, particularly for students in regional areas or underrepresented cohorts.
 - Many students felt constrained in exploring creative ideas or alternative pathways, especially in structured or technical subjects.
 - Financial pressures, lack of mentoring, gender biases, and cultural or socio-economic barriers made it harder for some students to pursue or complete qualifications.
 - VET pathways were sometimes perceived as less prestigious, and information about career outcomes or progression was insufficient.
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4. What solutions or recommendations did they have?

- Expand tailored career guidance to include VET, apprenticeships, and emerging industry opportunities.
- Increase awareness campaigns and exposure to in-demand industries, including internships, workplace visits, and industry guest speakers.
- Provide mentorship, peer networks, and targeted support for underrepresented groups (e.g., female students in trades, regional students, culturally diverse students).
- Encourage hands-on, project-based, and creative learning opportunities to develop problem-solving skills and innovative thinking.
- Improve communication about financial support, scholarships, and cost-effective pathways like Free TAFE.
- Develop inclusive and flexible programs to help students complete qualifications successfully, with wrap-around support where needed.

AI Declaration - AI was used to help summarise data and to edit my writing.