

Shifts and flows in learning and work

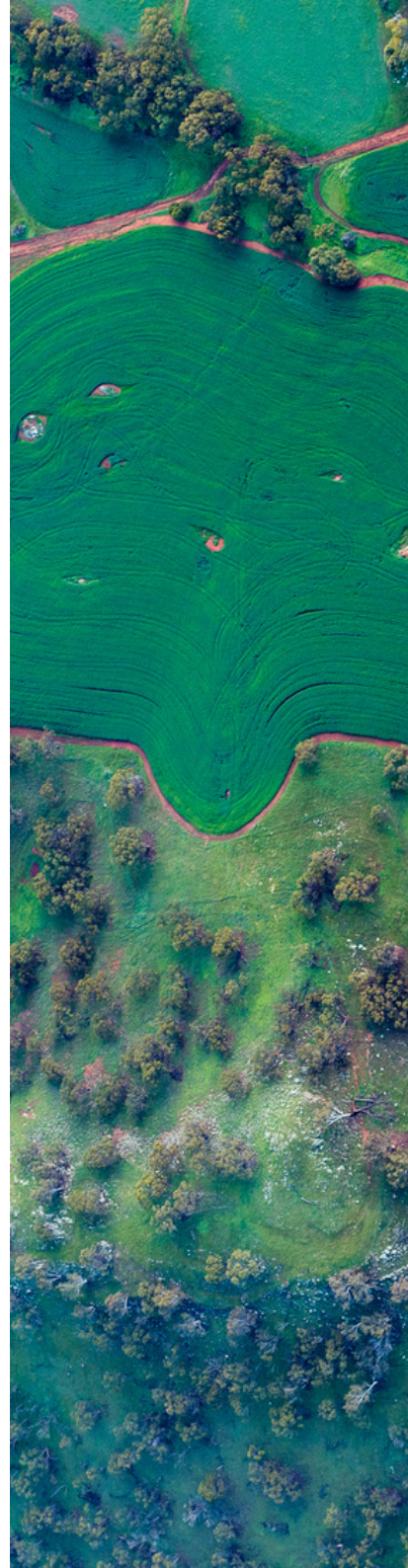
A discussion paper with new perspectives to support the changing relationship between employers and young people



Acknowledgement

Learning Creates Australia acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land throughout Australia who have been learning and educating on Country for over a thousand generations.

We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging for they hold the memories, traditions, cultures and hopes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia. We acknowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue to live in spiritual and sacred relationships with Australia.



About Learning Creates Australia

Learning Creates Australia is a growing alliance of people and organisations who are committed to lifting Australia through a new era of learning.

Our first project, *The Learner's Journey*, is focused on increasing opportunities for 15 to 19 year-olds to successfully transition through education and into work and life beyond school by developing alternatives to the current recognition and certification systems that limit the life chances of young people.

Our aim is to create a more extensive range of pathways for young people that are trusted and valued by recruiters and selectors, and more inclusive of the needs of students disadvantaged by the current dominant system.

Insights drawn from:

- The Learning Creates Industry Pathways Team
- Employer Panel sessions
- Engagement with young people
- The teams involved in developing new prototypes for recognition of valued learning
- Employers and educators who have shown interest in the themes of recognition.

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Small scale, large impact: The growing interest in new approaches to learning success

In pre-pandemic times, the relationship between employers and young people was largely contextualised by a familiar suite of themes: employment or underemployment levels; the need for and/or lack of skills and capabilities or the importance of shared values.

The link between learning and work has long been discussed, but recently Learning Creates Australia has been engaged with young people, educators, intermediaries and employers about the imperative behind a major reset in how formal schooling and experiences outside of school prepare young people for work.

Learning Creates launched its first initiative *The Learner's Journey* at the start of 2020, when COVID-19 was emerging as a significant disruption to how we interact – socially, in learning and with work. While many have been privileged with continued work from home, others have not been so fortunate. Thousands of Australians have not only lost the job they once had, but entire industries and sectors, many that engage high numbers of young people, have been put on ice.

The complete picture of the impact on young people is yet to be revealed but we do know that almost one-third of Gen Z lost a job during the crisis, compared to 19% of Millennials, 18% of Gen X and 13% of Baby Boomers. This is due to 15 - 24 year olds disproportionate representation in industries such as hospitality and retail.¹

During the pandemic thousands of young people around Australia have been studying or engaging in education from their bedrooms and living rooms, and many have finished school and entered the workforce without being able to interact with a workplace and its people in real life at all. In many instances, screens and chat channels have replaced the experience gained from interacting with others in less structured ways – bumping into someone at a café, in the lift at the office or on the train on the way home.

This is also true for schools, universities and technical colleges – where so much of the most interactive and stimulating ways we learn – from and with each other in person – has been taken from us. All five generations that are engaged in work have been impacted in some way.

The *Working from home* research paper commissioned by The Australian Government Productivity Commission states '*...attitudes and norms have changed. Workers and firms are now embarking on a second wave of experimentation — negotiating, trialling and adjusting — to see what best works for them.*'

It continues:

*'The COVID-19 pandemic forced many workers and firms...to experiment with working from home...Census data from 2016 shows that approximately 35% of workers had jobs that were amenable to working from home. This potential to work from home is associated with higher levels of education and higher incomes, and full-time jobs.'*²

Recent Australian Institute of Family Studies data reveals COVID-19 forced many to work from home as we saw 67% sometimes or always working from home compared to 42% pre-pandemic.³

As Learning Creates begins testing and implementing new prototypes developed through *The Learner's Journey* Social Lab, the relationship between young people and employers and the way we think about learning and work is rapidly changing. What might constitute a good job, success in work or the right conditions for work? How can a deeper understanding and engagement with intermediary organisations help us create more equitable employment pathways and opportunities for young people in vulnerable communities?

Simultaneously, the idea of 'success' in learning is changing as new ways for young people to showcase and demonstrate their true potential are increasingly valued by employers who know they need to engage with young people but don't always know how to go about it.



We have discovered barriers and challenges for employers to engage more deeply with young people, but they are not insurmountable and the benefits that flow from diverse teams are part of many stories of success in business.

McKinsey's almost 10 year study of 1,000 large organisations in 15 countries has found that greater diversity in executive teams led to above-average profitability (Diversity Wins: How Inclusion Matters).⁴

A Harvard Business School analysis found that they could discern clear financial returns on investment when Venture Capital firms (often very small teams) had less homogeneity in staff. Higher financial returns for more diverse teams occurred when those firms supported the projects with strategy, recruitment and other critical start up operational activities. In short you need creativity and diversity of thinking to help a start up project thrive in an uncertain market.⁵

While diversity is a core part of many organisational strategies for success, how young people fit into and are represented in different workplaces is not consistent. What drives them and motivates them to work can't be captured in one simple statement.

Discussion at a recent Learning Creates round-table suggested that a fixation with the 'war for talent' in the current labour market might be neither useful nor relevant. Perhaps stepping back from 'war' and thinking instead of different ways to nurture and gain shared access to talent and skills that flow across sectors and industries might make more sense.

Learning Creates teams have been developing a number of prototypes through a collaborative Social Lab to explore, design and test how we might re-think success and recognition in learning. The Industry Pathways Team has been focusing on a prototype for a national approach to work-ready learning that can be applied in any local context to strengthen the relationship between employers and young people. The process ensures it is valued and trusted by employers, young people, their schools and communities - as a trustmark - reflecting more of what young people know and can do.

The trustmark aims to open up better pathways into employment for young people through better recognition of learning by:

- Embedding employers into the solution as co-creators and authorisers;
- Supporting young people to provide evidence of the learning, aspirations and capabilities that employers want to see;
- Making it easier for employers to find and recruit work-ready young people.

This approach is an invitation to business and school communities to work together, perhaps with the support of intermediaries, to re-think how we prepare young people for their working life, and in a way that is of value to employers.

The first draft of this paper was shared with a Round-table of 34 employers who are part of the Learning Creates Australia Employer Panel.

The round-table, research and broader ecosystem have all provided further insights and two overarching themes have emerged from these discussions:

Material shifts in the system of work

These shifts are characterised by different expectations from different groups, including: a new emphasis on the role of intermediaries; stackable work experiences and portable skills as a new norm; and, a shift in trust and power dynamics between people and organisations.

Learning in the flow of work

Learning is being integrated within work as an increasing demand for a broader and deeper conception of learning is embedded before, during and throughout our working life. It can happen through a fluid mix of facilitated experiences, within a work environment but also digitally, growing skills, capabilities and confidence through new forms of recognition and credentialing.

Our aim is for this paper, *Shifts and flows in learning and work* to remain open to further discussion, input, examples and ideas as we track the changing work landscape, particularly for young people marginalised from employment and employers looking for new ways to engage a diverse, next generation workforce.

'By far the largest generation in the mix, Millennials have been at the center of the evolution of the employee experience in recent years. This is important to note at such a pivotal time, because as we adjust to what's commonly called a "new normal" in post pandemic life, it's this generation that is going to play a big part in shaping it. About 25% of younger Millennials (25-30) reported to Deloitte last year that they had been laid off or placed on unpaid leave from their jobs. Another 27% reported they were working fewer hours.'

While this paper is not the end of the discovery, it is timely as Australia opens up its economy, its borders and our workplaces. We hope the variety of perspectives on this topic outlined and explored in this paper demonstrate there are already small-scale large-impact interventions being embraced by employers - with multiple benefits – that are ready for dissemination and application by others.

Footnotes:

1. Brotherhood of St Laurence. (2020). COVID the great disruptor: Another blow to youth employment. Retrieved from https://library.bsl.org.au/jspui/bitstream/1/12338/1/BSL_COVID_the_great_disruptor_youth_unemployment_Dec2020.pdf.
2. Productivity Commission. (2021). Working from home. Retrieved from <https://www.pc.gov.au/research/completed/working-from-home/working-from-home.pdf>
3. Employment & work family balance in 2020 (2021). Australian Institute of Family Studies. Retrieved from: https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/publication-documents/2105_2_fias_employment_and_work_family_balance_in_2020.pdf
4. McKinsey. (2021). Diversity Wins: How Inclusion Matters. Retrieved from <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/diversity-wins-how-inclusion-matters>
5. Gompers, P. & Kovali, S. (2018). The Other Diversity Dividend. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2018/07/the-other-diversity-dividend>
6. Deloitte (2020). The Deloitte Global Millennial 2020 Survey. Retrieved from <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/global/Documents/About-Deloitte/deloitte-2020-millennial-survey.pdf>



The pulse of change in
learning and work

Themes and insights around learning and work

This section of the discussion paper presents themes and insights from a short research project exploring the changing nature of the relationship between employers and young people in Australia.

Its purpose is to support discussions between those working in and around transitions to employment – with a focus on young people as they move from learning into the workplace.

The dynamic between employers and young people has regularly featured in research and policy discussions and it will continue to do so. Our goal is to take another step towards understanding the current barriers and opportunities as employers consider how to gain the most from their engagement and process of employing young people. What are their concerns, expectations and ideas about the nature of work in relation to what young people know or don't know?

To inform this paper, three pieces of work were conducted and have formed the basis of the narrative that follows.

A survey of eight questions was circulated to a employers, covering different industries, regions and size.

The responses provided valuable insights about different aspects of contemporary employers attitudes and experiences when it came to the relationship with young people.

As well as the survey responses, this project involved conducting ten interviews with a range of employers (large, small and medium businesses and organisations) to explore in more depth and detail how they were currently approaching the challenge, and opportunity of employing young people.

And thirdly, while the research field about the relationship between employers and young people and about the changing position of young people in the labour market is wide, this project reviewed 17 reports and research studies.

The headline from the research is that the role employers play in how young people make a successful transition from learning to work is vital. Regular and visible contact with employers and accessing the world of work is central to the confidence with which those transitions are made. Active engagement in this process by employers brings distinct and measurable benefits.

Discussion topic



While we know engagement with young people is vital, do we know enough about the benefits? And who can benefit?

What is the role that employers should play? And how does this differ or compare to the role of schools, universities and young people themselves?

How employers determine their role and contribution will vary. There is no single group of employers – industries and businesses differ in scale, discipline and intent. In any given context, different approaches will emerge from a trade-off between what's necessary, what's possible and what's realistic.

For some, the issue is about the distance that exists between the still highly structured environment of school or university and the much less structured, contingent and flexible nature of the work place.

Importantly, this discussion paper and the first phase of findings has reinforced there are choices available to employers, from complete disengagement to a collaborative and rewarding process of co-design. Collaborative design of improved learning to work transitions that are more systematic and equally available to all young people is a choice employers can make. But we also know that some employers face more stubborn barriers than others.

This discussion paper will evolve as we engage further on the topics outlined below.

Discussion topic

There are many points of view but what are the common themes we see emerging in Australia, particularly in light of the impact of the Pandemic?

Different views about what employers could and should be doing with and for young people are to be expected, but identifying common themes will enable us to characterise a consistent employer perspective to help shape and inform how we approach making improvements for young people as they move through their learning pathways.

Where do we have clear alignment on the role and voice of business in young people's transition to work?

Employers have always been in the discussion about young people's transition into work, but with some inconsistency about their voice and position. In a rapidly changing world it's not clear what their role should be as we weigh the wider economic and social obligations.



The insights collected through this process reveal that employers are describing a balance between aspiration and pragmatism. What constitutes the attitudes and behaviour of a responsible employer in relation to young people is defined as a contest between wanting to do the right thing and being hostage to operating conditions. But it's also more than this.

We know that there are barriers getting in the way of employers as they navigate the paths to employing and training young people:

- Many describe the frustration around young people not being equipped with the skills and capabilities they need;
- Small businesses find it challenging to resource innovative recruitment methods and training and they struggle to present a workplace culture that will attract young people;
- When businesses do invest the time and effort to find young people who have the mindset or approach they believe will be a good fit, retaining new talent is challenging;
- Young people remain at higher risk of marginalisation from the labour market through a mixture of structural and systemic changes and the more recent impact of COVID-19 as well as the rise of part time, casual and gig economy work.

On the flip side, we know that there is clear evidence that choosing to engage and to assume some larger responsibility for improving their relationship with all employees, but especially young people, is directly linked to better business and organisational results. The active engagement of employers, as part of the mix of support and advice for young people, is crucial to effective transitions from learning to work.

The context for change

'We need a different level of engagement and leadership...

The single biggest challenge in building the kinds of career pathways systems we are advocating is engaging employers. ...the role of employers and their associations is absolutely central in the strongest vocational systems around the world.

In such systems, employers are at the table from the very beginning of the process of pathway design to assure that the standards and curriculum are aligned with industry requirements, and they partner with educators in program implementation, especially in the provision of extended workplace learning opportunities that complement the in-school instructional program...

We need a different level of engagement and leadership from employers, one based on a recognition that it is in their long-term economic self-interest to invest early in building their future workforce rather than sitting back and waiting to see what the education institutions send them. In a word, we need to transition from a CTE [career & technical education] system that is supply-driven to one that is demand-driven and much more responsive to the changing requirements of a dynamic economy.'

Robert B Schwartz, Professor of Practice, Emeritus
Harvard Graduate School of Education



The employer-employee relationship is often under strain and young people have a lot to win or lose from how we collectively respond.

The strain we are seeing now is partly a function of the pandemic-infused temper of the times. But it's also a function of deeper and longer-standing economic, social and technology shifts whose combined effects have for some time been testing many of the assumptions and expectations on which that relationship is based.

What emerged through our interviews was that employers who were experiencing significant structural and policy change, explained that these changes required lean business models which often left little organisational or leadership room for development opportunities, especially for younger employees. That tends to breed a limited view of the employer's responsibility, tempered only by the pragmatism fueled by the implacable requirements of the market.

The disruption around us, due to so many factors, presents a choice.

One is, broadly, resist and defend to hold onto familiar patterns and recognised rhythms. The other is engage and invest, tapping into momentum for change.

Those at the front-line of the employer-employee relationship, especially as it impacts young people, are facing such a choice. That's clear from the survey responses and the case study interviews. And it's certainly clear from the research and literature review as well.



Most people who work in and around education pathways are aware of the pieces of the puzzle that need to come together to make transitions from learning to work for young people successful and sustained.

The problem is that the puzzle comes together in fragmented and disconnected ways and relies too much on the variable quality of engagement by schools, employers, young people and families. Becoming more systematic at the way we put those pieces together and making sure it can then properly support all young people is clearly a way to address many of the challenges.

In a few of the interviews conducted for this paper, it emerged that taking a deliberate and planned approach to better engagement with younger employees reflected a determination to be a leading organisation in that sector. In other words, the relationship they were developing with young people was part of a larger vision for the development and competitive positioning of their business or organisation.

Discussion topic



From resist and defend – to engage and invest. What other approaches could we be describing beyond the two choices many employers feel restricted to?

Case study

This summary from a 2014 research summary from The Smith Family indicates that even before the Pandemic, this significant issue was being explored.

‘Employers also need to be able to recognise the benefits and opportunities associated with developing a long term employment relationship with young and entry level employees.

As a representative of a national employer organisation notes, the need for employers to employ and commit to the skill development of young people is an essential precondition for young people’s positive transitions to work. “In the current environment there is little doubt that businesses are operating on much leaner budgets, and there is immense pressure to compete.

This can sometimes create a perception amongst employers that young people represent a greater risk because there are too many unknowns and their skills and abilities are not always easy to verify from the outset...The provision of sustainable employment opportunities for young people is possible, but the problem at the moment is that there is no real sense of what works and no shared evidence base from which to draw.”

A CEO of a national employment services organisation highlights that there is immense good will amongst employers and a desire to employ more young people, but limited knowledge about how best to achieve this operationally, administratively and in human resource terms.

There has never been a shortage of employers who are willing to give a young person a go when they can. I’ve seen so many employers over the years try to find a spot for a young person, because they see the value in developing the next generation, but what they need is support or a ‘go to’ person when things don’t go as planned. Employers need knowledge and resources in navigating the challenges of employment as well.’

There are a number of emerging themes and insights which may influence the way the employer-employee relationship, especially with young people, could change in Australia over the next few years. Many of these themes command a growing debate or discussion in their own right. But for the purposes of this report, we will focus on two global surveys that illustrate how businesses are thinking about the relationship between young people and the world of work.

At a high level, this quote from Deloitte presents a clue around the global pattern in employment more broadly, and what this means for young people is a topic worth discussing as part of our focus:

*'Perhaps then it's no surprise that we find ourselves in a moment of reflection. Workers are reconsidering everything from who they want to work for – with 40% of the global workforce considering leaving their employer this year – to the role they expect employers to play in supporting their purpose and values. Likewise, organizations are contemplating their role in society and their relationship with their workers – with some leaning in and others backing away.'*¹

Deloitte 2021 Human Capital Trends Report July 2021

1. Deloitte survey excerpt: Global human capital trends

Deloitte produces a major survey of human resource management professionals across the globe from which they report global human capital trends. The focus of the 2021 report couldn't be more timely.

Titled *The worker-employer relationship disrupted*, the report opens with this proposition:

*'The pandemic strained and tested the worker-employer relationship beyond anyone's anticipation. Going forward, thriving in an uncertain future depends on having a compelling vision for where that relationship should go.'*¹

The report maps four potential futures:

Work as fashion: In a “work as fashion” future, employers are in constant motion as they chase worker sentiments, competitor actions, and marketplace dynamics. The worker-employer relationship is reactive: Employers feel compelled to respond in the moment to workers' expressed preferences, and to competitor moves, without connecting those actions to a sustainable workforce strategy.

The “work as fashion” future is transitory and constantly changing. It's akin to how brands introduce new clothing collections seasonally and cyclically, moving them rapidly from runway to retail to capture consumers' fleeting attention and desires. It's a self-perpetuating cycle in which the latest trends substitute for a sustained strategy.

War between talent: In a “war between talent” future, workers compete for limited jobs due to an oversupply of talent. The worker-employer relationship is impersonal: Employers view workers as interchangeable and easily replaceable, and workers are more concerned with competing with each other for jobs than with the quality of their relationship with their employer.

Work is work: In a “work is work” future, workers and employers view organizational responsibility and personal and social fulfillment as largely separate domains. The worker-employer relationship is professional: Each depends on the other to fulfill work-related needs, but both expect that workers will find meaning and purpose largely outside of work.

Purpose unleashed: In a “purpose unleashed” future, purpose is the dominant force driving the relationship between workers and employers. The worker-employer relationship is communal: Both workers and employers see shared purpose as the foundation of their relationship, viewing it as the most important tie that binds them together.¹

Discussion topic



How do these themes relate to the context in Australia, if at all? While they describe the employment landscape more broadly, how do they impact young people?

1. Deloitte (2021). Global Human Capital Trends 2021: Special report. Retrieved from <https://www2.deloitte.com/au/en/pages/human-capital/articles/human-capital-trends.html>

2. McKinsey report summary: Work, workplace and skills

Another factor shaping the conditions in which Australian employers face some important choices about their relationship with young people is the analysis of the changing nature of work, of skills and of workplaces.

Those choices are directly affected by the kind of workplace, and the kind of work and work skills, those young people and their employers are going to need to engage effectively to thrive.

A 2019 report from McKinsey stands as a useful pointer to the kind of research that attempts to map an emerging work and skills landscape. The report infers the type of high-level skills that will become increasingly important. It is a trajectory that reinforces 'the need for manual and physical skills, as well as basic cognitive ones, will decline, but demand for technological, social and emotional, and higher cognitive skills will grow.'²

The research identifies a set of 56 foundational skills, which are dubbed DELTAs or 'distinct elements of talent' that will benefit all citizens. It shows that higher proficiency in these DELTAs 'is already associated with a higher likelihood of employment, higher incomes, and job satisfaction.'²

The research recognises that some work will always be specialised. But it points out that, 'in a labor market that is more automated, digital, and dynamic, all citizens will benefit from having a set of foundational skills that help them fulfill the following three criteria, no matter the sector in which they work or their occupation:

- Add value beyond what can be done by automated systems and intelligent machines
- Operate in a digital environment
- Continually adapt to new ways of working and new occupations.'²

2. McKinsey (2021). Defining the skills citizens will need in the future world of work. Retrieved from <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/our-insights/defining-the-skills-citizens-will-need-in-the-future-world-of-work>

The McKinsey research also notes that holding all variables constant – including demographic variables and proficiency in all other elements – employment was most strongly associated with proficiency in several DELTAs within the self-leadership category, namely “adaptability,” “coping with uncertainty,” “synthesizing messages,” and “achievement orientation”. These are many of the attributes that the employers in this study suggested they looked for in potential employees, including young people.

The charts within this report summarise the DELTAs and provide an illustration of the way new work skills can be broken down in more detail to make them more practical as a guide to what these skill areas imply by specific capabilities.²

56 DELTAs¹ across 13 skill groups and four categories

Cognitive		Interpersonal	
Critical thinking <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Structured problem solving ● Logical reasoning ● Understanding biases ● Seeking relevant information 	Planning and ways of working <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Work-plan development ● Time management and prioritization ● Agile thinking 	Mobilizing systems <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Role modeling ● Win-win negotiations ● Crafting an inspiring vision ● Organizational awareness 	Developing relationships <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Empathy ● Inspiring trust ● Humility ● Sociability
Communication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Storytelling and public speaking ● Asking the right questions ● Synthesizing messages ● Active listening 	Mental flexibility <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Creativity and imagination ● Translating knowledge to different contexts ● Adopting a different perspective ● Adaptability ● Ability to learn 	Teamwork effectiveness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fostering inclusiveness ● Motivating different personalities ● Resolving conflicts ● Collaboration ● Coaching ● Empowering 	
Self-leadership		Digital	
Self-awareness and self-management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Understanding own emotions and triggers ● Self-control and regulation ● Understanding own strengths ● Integrity ● Self-motivation and wellness ● Self-confidence 		Digital fluency and citizenship <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Digital literacy ● Digital learning ● Digital collaboration ● Digital ethics 	
Entrepreneurship <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Courage and risk-taking ● Driving change and innovation ● Energy, passion, and optimism ● Breaking orthodoxies 		Software use and development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Programming literacy ● Data analysis and statistics ● Computational and algorithmic thinking 	
Goals achievement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ownership and decisiveness ● Achievement orientation ● Grit and persistence ● Coping with uncertainty ● Self-development 		Understanding digital systems <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Data literacy ● Smart systems ● Cybersecurity literacy ● Tech translation and enablement 	

¹Distinct elements of talent.

Challenges and opportunities

Employers, educators and intermediaries have been exploring and prototyping new approaches to engaging with young people around the gaps and opportunities. Whilst a range of exciting initiatives are emerging, they are inconsistent and fragmented across the country, with little coordination of efforts. There's inevitably a spectrum of attitudes, that present themselves when talking to employers.

From this:

'I love employing young people; they see the way society is heading; we need to give young people a good start and basic skills. But the truth is that sometimes we need someone quicker and other approaches take more time.'

'They are open to learning...not being prescriptive around what is expected in a role .. flexible and willing to shape a role to realise its potential through experience and trying things out.'

'Don't let them get bored ... test them out .. give them room to move and prove themselves .. they have a different view of the world than others ... they bring a fresh set of eyes to problem and challenges ... use that to test new approaches ... don't close them down; you have to harness the energy and passion and enthusiasm and "I can do anything" without closing it down or missing the opportunity.'



To this:

'Bluntly, [the enterprises we invest in] don't feel a responsibility to develop younger people; they are responsible to their mission and their workforce and they need to hire the very best people they can find to meet their mission and their goals. Individually they might care but they are not going to hire someone with lesser ability because of some wider social responsibility. It's not lack of interest or empathy, it's recognising the pressure of being successful in business.'

'After 20 years of learning, why are they not ready to work straight away? Surely that's their job (schools and universities) to make sure students are productive, even if they need a bit more knowledge and experience and training ... often they are miles away from being work ready ... personal ,emotional ,professional... just not there.' And similarly – "there is a growing divide between things we need from them in the workforce compared to what they are coming out with.'

The following captures a sense of what employers are thinking and feeling about the employment landscape in Australia – taken from our survey and interviews. These notes will inform discussions between Learning Creates and others as we map a full spectrum of emerging themes beyond the extremes indicated above.

Comments on what employers want to be able to find, access, recognise:

- Attitude or motivation was the most consistent response mentioned in recruiting young people.
- Many listed demonstrable experiences outside of academia as important in making an assessment about younger people.
- The three highest “scores” for attributes for assessing young people as part of the recruitment process were personal attributes, things they have done outside of education and formal qualifications.
- Although there are variations on the theme, the characteristics of “basic work skills” or “employability skills” for young people that employers need and look for are well known and widely rehearsed. They are a mix of dispositions including reliability, a positive attitude, willingness to try and readiness to learn as well as good communication, problem solving and the willingness to work in teams.

Opportunities, ideas and a sense of the change ahead:

- The most consistent opportunity was young people’s ability to learn; respondents also highly rated the opportunity young people bring with new ideas and perspectives. Many respondents identified energy, passion, enthusiasm as opportunities provided by young staff.
- The three most common reasons selected as the reasons an employer might choose to employ a young person over someone older and more experienced were ability to train them rapidly, their willingness to learn and it was an important part of my role as an employer.
- Where the employee-employer relationship is purposeful, it reflects a commitment to finding ways to make the organisation more attractive to young people through a combination of early engagement and recruitment, support, learning and mentoring and a willingness to give younger workers room to add their value and contribution. The whole point of the approach is to retain the young people they recruit to maximise their longer term value to the business (which includes recognising their value and attraction to other employers).

- In one organisation, half the employees are under 30 and there is a clear sense the organisation is “building the next generation of leaders” through mentoring and as an act of “building pollen across the sector.”
- There is a range of different approaches to using specific techniques, often including the expertise of third party specialist organisations, to improve the rate and success with which organisation employ young people who have experienced adversity or been disadvantaged by the current systems
- There was some reflection on the “forces of capitalism” driving a new interest in connection and community, in ethics and a sense of larger purpose, a set of priorities that could play out in where younger people want to work, how they want to work and what kind of work environment they might be seeking.
- Getting the most from younger employers reflected an attitude and mindset that was clear about the long term value to the organisation; bringing younger people on with a sense of development and purpose can be more rewarding than working with “older people set in their ways.”



The challenges, barriers, problems and frustrations:

- The most common challenge listed was the difficulty in creating both the right role fit for young people and the career growth for them within their organisation
- Several respondents went into a fair bit of detail around the reliability of young people at work or to work consistently.
- Another group of respondents identified a lack of basic skills as a challenge and the cost of developing those skills as burdensome.
- The most common response to the key challenge for employing young people from diverse background was the need for dedicated investment in recruitment, professional development and organisational culture to ensure diverse young people are welcomed and setup for success.
- Many responses also identified the resourcing required for work placements was high and didn't often make sense to invest in. Several responses went into a lot of detail around the significant administrative burden and lack of a coordinated approach to work placements across sectors and within their own organisations
- In some cases, the relationship remains hostage to the dominant concern with business and commercial requirements which often don't leave much room for the time and effort required to recruit, train and support younger workers.
- The "basic work skills" dimension of younger workers – or, more particularly, their perceived absence – was a constant refrain from many of the employers, and it covers issues like reliability, punctuality, communication, the ability to solve problems they won't have encountered before and getting on in a team environment.
- Some of the interviews touched – negatively – on the state of careers advice and counseling in schools. It too should be more closely aligned with, and exposed to, current and evolving conditions for employers to get a better "line of sight" from work conditions and opportunities to the way schools prepare young people for the transition into work.

Two final discussion points:

Not all managers in an organisation have the knowledge, skills or confidence to know how to make the most of having a young person in their teams. They often need coaching and support to fulfill that role. That point was broadened by some who noted that too often employers are left to their own devices, without access to knowledge about how to put effective programs together to help integrate younger people into the work place.

Could there be merit in common platforms of advice and assistance for businesses and organisations to accelerate and strengthen the development of effective employment pathways for young people? This could enable more effective ways to identify skills, recruit and develop capabilities.



PwC: Using Traits To Broaden How To Recognise More When Employing Young People With Different Experiences In Learning

Learning Creates spoke with Jessica Tucci, National Employer Brand Leader at PwC in the People and Culture division.

Jessica describes the PwC approach to employing young people as changing in the last few years to ensure the company's methods of recruitment and selection enables a broader and deeper pool of talent while also providing better matches between people and roles.

Jessica describes the main difference (from old ways to new ways of employment) as being about trying to create 'a more equitable and fair playing field by combating unconscious biases'. Recognising more about a person is key to a collaborative, capable and productive workforce, but it's also key to realising a young person's potential.

Rather than continuing to follow the model where a young person submits their CV and is assessed on what school, education institution they attended, a specific qualification or ATAR score, each person is asked to complete a trait analysis as the first touchpoint in the recruitment process. This approach opens up more people to a level playing field from the get-go. *'We can better understand a person's fit for different types of jobs, as the system we use is a live demonstration of how a person responds in situations, rather than a self-report of personality.'*

The system Jessica describes is not an exam or test, but a way to capture who a person is and what they have been able to learn from the experiences they have had. For many young people it can be illuminating for them to understand their preferences and traits and how they can add value in different work environments.

Jessica describes the reliance on a CV, marks and scores or degrees as limiting – as it doesn't really reflect or reveal what kind of person will fit or perform well into a particular position.

It also cuts out a whole cohort of young people who may not have a lot of experience putting a resume together or know what is worthy of including to indicate they are the perfect person for a job, regardless of their background.

'One way to describe this is to say we automate it – at the front end – to give everyone the same opportunity. We do a trait analysis to interpret and understand a person's traits – and then that is assessed against areas of the firm so we can see what kinds of matches we can make between people and the kinds of roles we have.'

The traits Jessica refers to include assessing things like effort, emotion, risk tolerance, attention, focus, fairness, aptitude for learning, decision making, or even how generous someone is. They are very hard to identify when looking at a more formal CV with a list of achievements and are often a key part of what will enable a young person to thrive in a role.

Most young people can learn the things they need to learn once they have the job, but most traits are deep seated and underpin how a person performs in different situations. For example, how well they work in a team or alone, or whether they prefer a cautious approach to addressing a problem or are quick to respond.

Some roles require a particular type of person and in other instances it can help to see how a young person could grow into or be challenged by a role. It is also beneficial for people, as when they are in a role that matches their trait styles, they are happier, more comfortable and able to leverage their innate strengths.

'One young person may have had a lot of help from their parents, or tutors to complete their homework or had access to more extra curricular experiences. That person may score well academically as a result. Others may not have had as much support and perhaps don't score as well, but they may have developed traits such as resourcefulness and a hard work ethic from having to do a lot by themselves, which are traits that are also very relevant for many roles.'

Therefore the academic results alone are not enough to understand job role performance or job suitability, rather the traits people develop due to their life experiences are important in helping determine suitability and potential for different types of jobs. The high scoring person's traits may also mean they are considered for the role – it is about making judgments on a range of things that we can recognise.'

The model that PwC uses incorporates a way to analyse things like a person's quantitative reasoning to their motivation levels right through to their numerical agility.

It's a broader and deeper way of understanding how someone works, understanding what someone knows and can do and who they are, and in Jessica's words 'it's certainly giving us a broader spectrum of access to different people, so we are not making an upfront biased decision on a school or one-off mark. 'We have a method that means we can also talk about a person's potential in a role – and the unique qualities they can bring.'

The trust factor is also important, with the traits tool being underpinned by empirical research and backed by neuroscience and administered by a qualified learning team so that they can interpret the report as a first entry point for students. It's not the only tool PwC use but it gives people access to jobs they may not otherwise put themselves forward for.



Hatch: Killing the CV to recognise more without bias creeping in

Learning Creates spoke with Adam Jacobs, Co-founder of Hatch on learning pathways to employment - how recognising more can enable more young people to thrive.

Hatch is a business that matches young people with junior roles. Their website states 'We look beyond the CV to provide a shortlist of the best-fit candidates, saving you time and managing bias.' Hatch makes it clear that a formal CV is not the most reliable or fairest way to judge whether a young person is the right person for a particular job.

Adam explains this further by indicating that conventional markers are seemingly reliable but they actually often mask many of the deeper skills and attributes a young person carries which are often more relevant to a job or position than what gets captured on a CV.

'Knowing someone's education background – the school they went to, the marks they received - is one form of information. But it also means biases creep in – even if they are unconscious biases.' Adam explains.

And the Hatch website puts it nicely too: Hatch's matching science finds the best candidates and brings their profiles to life with engaging video interviews and candidate summaries, so you can get a real sense of the person before meeting them.

Employers often know from experience that the traits a person has, their ability to focus or to manage time or to ask questions to get the information they need are more valuable to assess in some way than what school a person went to.

Employers find many of the real things they want to know about a person very hard to interpret from using a conventional CV. But we all know and trust the CV format, because we know it. So we keep using it. But not Hatch.

'It's important to meet people where they are' says Adam and by this he means whether they went to a great school or not much school at all. Hatch prefers to describe everyone's attributes because everyone has a way to represent what they know and can do and once we can see those things more clearly, we can identify what kind of job may be a good fit.

And after school, if some young people have stopped Uni or delayed going to Uni for a while, this should not be seen as the end of their employability. 'We are seeing a much faster rate of skill renewal – skills may not have changed for a job 20 years ago but are changing rapidly now.' We don't all have to follow the same linear path – we can go in and out of learning at different times as we move through our working life doing different things. More and more employers are saying 'that's all OK!'. Hatch is embracing this opportunity.

If a system of work has been designed with one archetype in mind and is based on the person with good grades and who went to university we are not really reflecting all the skills and qualities we need in diverse teams.

'If someone can describe different experiences, we use that data and make a way for it to work for them. We find a way to represent everyone in a way that is much richer and more relevant than just scanning a piece of paper.'

So, in answer to the question: If someone has the capabilities that make them a great performer but they can't be captured in a CV format, does that mean they should not be considered for a role?

Hatch says 'We believe that should not matter. What matters is who they are. Our reliance on formal methods of assessment is often the problem – not the person.'

In a nutshell, Hatch makes more of what different people have learnt. They make these things easier to rate by making them more visible and valued.

'Absolutely we would be able to employ more young people with different life experiences into different jobs if recognition was broader. By looking beyond a person's CV and not relying on conventional markers we can present values and things that are very important ways of identifying if someone is going to be a high performer in a job. We can see their capabilities, their values, their qualities – and these things really matter in the world of work.'

An aerial photograph of a river delta, showing intricate patterns of water and land. The water is a mix of teal and light pinkish-brown, creating a complex, organic shape. The land is a darker, brownish-green color, interspersed with the water channels. The overall effect is a rich, textured landscape.

Stories about now:
Shifts and flows in learning and work

The intervention of intermediaries: who are they and how are they working?

The word *intermediary* is not a particularly inviting term but the idea of 'an entity or facilitator that sits in the middle' is becoming core to how young people and employers can meet each other through a new pattern of engagement. Both have hopes and dreams about working together and both need the relationship to be pragmatic and flexible.

The relationship intermediaries are fostering between young people and employers is scaffolded by a mutual acknowledgement also shared by many educators and recruiters - that the best learning experiences don't need to rely on one entity (the school, the young person or the employer alone) to do the heavy lifting while the others tag along.

Learning can be considered (and is being described) as a series of interconnected parts or moments. These moments can be joined together to become an intentional pathway. Young people gain a lot from fine-grain experiences while employers are spared the resource intensive infrastructure that is often hard to maintain. Graduate and other education programs that take years to build abound, and are fundamentally important but many sit forever in a separate sphere of learning and actually limit the idea that learning can happen in the flow of work. Not every young person is able to access a formal program and not all employers can set them up.

This idea of building touchstones for learning at work, is one that Beacon Foundation have been involved in for decades, as an intermediary organisation working to bring better relationships between young people and employers to life.

Kath McCann, Chief Operating Officer of Beacon Foundation, based in Tasmania puts it like this:

'Appropriately resourced intermediaries can work between industry, business, schools and students to create meaningful work-based learning opportunities for young people. The types of activities that can be put in place can create great information, engagement and inspiration opportunities for young people, as well as opportunities for industry to consider the skills, talents and attributes of the young people in a manner other than a formal recruitment process.'

While simple, there are many highly effective methods including Q+A sessions, mock interviews, well designed mentoring sessions that can lead to a better understanding of what a learning pathway could be and play a major part in raising young people's work readiness skills as well as their aspirations to join that pathway.

For employers, it can be part of their learning journey as well - creating more meaningful connections with young people and being able to identify talent or who could be a good fit with the workplace culture - all while committing to small scale but large impact interactions.

Kath goes on to say:

'As an intermediary we encourage young people to be aware of what a pathway might look like - even if it's hard to see. We curate and facilitate that journey - as the connector, by working with the employer as well. We develop programs and services that allow us to take industry into the classroom or we can flip the classrooms into the workplace.'

Many employers Learning Creates spoke to about the spaces where learning happens in the flow of work described informal experiences and yet they also recognised that it's time for these moments, interactions and observations to become more intentional or widespread - like a new norm for learning.

During the insights gathered through this paper, one of the most common challenges mentioned was the difficulty in creating both the right role fit for young people and the career growth for them within an organisation. Many respondents valued the collaborations they built with intermediaries and the recognised the potential behind new opportunities to engage with young people directly.

One commented: 'It can build relationships with schools and training providers... potential to be future employees and general introduction to the workforce.'

A few respondents went into a fair amount of detail around the opportunity in building a positive and sustainable work culture and workforce by investing in young people. Comments included:

'The approach to early careers is to build a future leader pipeline.'

'Grow and foster talent early on rather than always bringing in experienced people.'

'Responds to an industry challenge to an aging workforce with lots of retirement on the horizon.'

Some respondents also valued the networks diverse young people bring to their business.

'On occasion we will employ someone with a lived experience of disability, as that can be a real asset to a disability support worker. The lived experience of the staff member can often help them to connect with their client.'

'Our Aboriginal youngster can reach and help our Aboriginal elders better and faster.'

Several employers wondered why individual employers were pretty much left on their own to figure out how best to develop effective programs to identify, recruit and develop young people into their organisations. Would there be merit in common platforms of advice and assistance for other organisations to speed up, and strengthen, the development of better ways to improve engagement with younger workers?

Kath from Beacon relates this feedback to how an intermediary can help:

'Evidence shows that four or more meaningful workforce engagements will lead to an increase in likelihood of a meaningful pathway outcome for a young person. A site tour, mentoring, work readiness activities, work experience - or combination of multiple methods create great work-based learning touchpoints for young people. These types of activities help raise work readiness skills to make young people more confident and more attractive to an employer. The role of an intermediary is to assist in building, facilitating and delivering these connections and experiences for young people and industry.'

It's fair to acknowledge that it's not possible to expect every school to offer these interactions. They often don't have the capacity to catalyse new relationships on their own. Employers also struggle to access schools. The role of the intermediary is to materially shift that gap in a way that can create multiple meaningful, tangible engagement for both.

Dave Burton from LLEN agrees: *'There is a significant opportunity for the expanded role of intermediaries bridging schools and employers across Australia. The expert intermediary in the middle can go further to create positive outcomes for young people in a way that reflects the current employment landscape. We need to understand the elements that an intermediary can work with and make them part of how we recognise what is happening when a young person makes a connection with a workplace. Too many of these interactions get lost in translation.'*

Annette Cairnduff from Learning Creates further explains:

'We know that young people bring a range of skills and talents with them into different work environments - but the challenge for employers is packaging the opportunities for learning in a way that is accessible to young people. If employers don't have time to think about that, an intermediary can provide those connections - turning the informal into valuable and measurable instances of learning that can lead to a job that benefits both parties. Bringing a recognition lens to make these interactions part of our system of learning is key to ensuring we all get to experience relationships with employers, not just those who have a network or can find a formally recognised program.'

Structured and unstructured: learning in the flow of work

Turning chance or random moments into more formal excursions in work is an exciting idea that many employers and intermediaries naturally describe. Employers often don't know what young people can't yet know or what they need to know. They are so close to their own workplace culture and protocols - it's hard to take a big picture view on things.

Kath from Beacon Foundation has found:

'Young people want meaningful and authentic work exposure opportunities. Sometimes it's as simple as sparking an interest through a 'behind the scenes' moment, or young person having the opportunity to engage with someone who has a relatable story that they connect with. The role of the intermediary is to support both industry and the young person in finding those connections.'

The intermediaries and facilitators can be the joiners, the connectors - the people that have the time and head-space to work with several players - to discover where the material shifts need to be, and who can operate them in a structured way.

By allowing these instances of learning - small impact and high impact - to be more celebrated, navigable and intentional means more young people can see what is possible through what Jacyl Shaw from GHD describes as signals and symbols.

'When you intentionally send out the right messages, with actions, young people can see that they could have a role, and that their lived experience is valued. We need more employers to make it easier for young people to step into their businesses, to see inside the culture, the diversity of people, the values - beyond telling stories on our websites. That's how we can build great teams - teams that are well poised to innovate in the most effective way.'

Intermediaries and facilitators are increasingly providing a role that sits outside of the HR area and more directly addresses the gaps and potential new links between multiple players. TAFE, Universities, Colleges, Schools, young people, and businesses all have a lot to gain from the idea that learning can happen in the flow of work. It can actually enable better learning pathways to emerge that are more visible, valued and by all.

Dave Burton is the Executive officer at Goldfields LLEN - an organisation with a 20 year history. Wearing the hat of an intermediary, Local Learning & Employment Networks (LLENs) partner with schools and industry to maximise pathways to work and training for young people around Victoria - particularly in regional areas where workforce transformations are needed due to manufacturing, industrial or technology disruptions.

The key program managed by LLENs is Structured Workplace Learning, or SWL, which Dave Burton (Director) describes as having many different characteristics when compared to the well known work experience programs students explore in year 10.

'SWL is more hands on than traditional work experience which has an observational focus rather than a doing angle. With SWL young people are working alongside professionals in different work environments - mirroring, modeling, and reflecting what they do as they work in an industry that is aligned with school subjects the young person is doing. This means they can link their classroom learning to a workplace situation to make it more real, tangible and exciting.'

During the engagement for this paper, one employer noted that at least one consequence of the search for authenticity and knowing "how things worked" was a willingness as an employer to let younger people "interrogate and learn for themselves," including how the business or the organisation works.

Dave describes the value diversity brings to the employment space. He is able to relate that feedback from employers on the contribution of a young person through the SWL model has been powerful.

'In the immediate term, one of the key pieces of feedback that our SWL coordinator tells us is that when a placement student is in an organisation (in person or even virtually), they see a lift in the culture of the workplace – motivation and inspiration is lifted in the team. Some people have been in their roles for a long time or have smaller teams, and a fresh lens from a young mind is inspiring. They ask interesting and curious questions and help people see things they didn't see previously.'

While formal work experience programs have role for students in year 10, direct pathways also exist. But as programs are incubated and scaled, they can sometimes struggle to reflect current workplace practices that shift and adapt in response to changing conditions.

'As an intermediary, we are working on the actual landscape or environment - the system that holds and surrounds these different programs and ideas to better connect and integrate what young people and employers want to find out - often in real time.'

Learning Creates consultations have revealed that many people are acting as intermediaries of a sort - like lone rangers in a new space between HR and a program or an organisation.

Intermediaries can take a placed based approach with really targeted opportunities that reflect the jobs of tomorrow and jobs of the future because the intermediary can be more flexible and responsive. As Dave notes:

'One of the key things is formal recognition from the education system and industry in this approach. LLENs can be engaged as a skilled partner. That is important. We acknowledge and understand traditional recruitment methods are not as functional as they once were. The intermediary role will be a more effective mechanism into the future.'

Kath from Beacon Foundation shares the fact that:

'We work with HR and recruitment but we also work across an organisation to connect businesses with young people. We know that industry is finding the traditional mechanisms to attract young people into entry jobs is not hitting the mark for industry or the young people they are trying to attract. Industry are looking for more innovative ways to access and meet new talent, with the role of an intermediary providing extremely valuable in opening up those innovative opportunities.'

On a similar note, a career coach executive with years of experience providing coaching and development to executives offers:

'At the end of the day what we are doing at the moment isn't working because most employment pathways are missing so much of the richness. We are blocking out creativity and ideas, momentum and the social capital that can come from exchanges in learning with people embracing that idea that both employers and young people have so much to gain from more dynamic or flowing engagements.'

It's not just about employers doing the right thing, it's actually about the things that young people bring to the table. We should not try to put rules around this before they have even started. Young people can develop their value proposition to the employer if they know more about what that workplace culture is, or what that workplace needs from them.'

As an intermediary organisation, Learning Creates has provided young people with a central role in the development of the work around new ways to recognise learning. Many have stated that their learning sits outside of what can be captured by a score, credential or test.

Lorraine Ngwenya, coach and facilitator with YLab comments:

'One of the biggest skills I have developed through this project, is learning to be agile and let go of my plan and re-prioritise without getting flustered. I tap into what is happening now and ask myself, how do we shift? Sometimes we have to react quickly, I have to throw my plan for the day out the window. I don't think I would have chosen to do a course in how to do this - I just had to be immersed in it.'

From Pandemic interruptions to new digital excursions

The waves and patterns of COVID-19 around the world have not always been in-sync, making economic, social and health comparisons challenging - here and globally. The experiences of Australians during the pandemic's trajectory have been vastly different between states, territories, cities, towns and even suburbs. But regardless of where we live or what we do in Australia, movements and interactions have been restricted for nearly two years making it difficult to plan and map real life experiences, as opposed to digital or virtual ones.

Young people have been significantly impacted by the pandemic globally, and in Australia we are seeing that despite many positive stories of resilience, we must look into the fact that thousands of young people have finished school or started work by moving from their bedroom to their living room at best.

One young student comments: *'I like experiencing things physically, and if I learn something through a physical action, I remember more. I can write about it more and remember it better if it's something I've actually done.'*

While personal sacrifices have been made by everyone regardless of their age or work situation, the learning and working environments that have been lucky to adapt have seen major shifts and pivots. It's not only the tools we use for communication and connection that have changed, but our behaviours and the ability for young people to access new experiences - beyond the screen.

Learning Creates talked to Dave from Goldfields LLEN (an intermediary organisation that partners in programs facilitating young people's pathways to the workforce) about COVID-19's impact on activities that largely rely on young people being physically present in a school or work environment.

'Employers have had to shut their doors during lockdown but many will continue to do so due to the risks and needing to have a COVID-safe plan. What is being mandated and not in schools and workplaces is being revealed. New barriers are real.'

As one young person notes, living outside of a city has its limitations: *'In the city, you've got more courses and like apprenticeships, traineeships, there's so many more different, uni courses and actual job opportunities that you didn't know existed. Whereas back home in the country, there's limited spaces for people to be given those opportunities.'*

The pros and cons of digital experiences are everywhere. Our frustrations are real, but even in areas where collaboration and innovation is the main focus of the activity, new connections are still being celebrated.

Another young person notes:

'It's important to give us an idea of what a workplace is like and not throw us into the workplace without a clue of what lies ahead.'

Dave described virtual models of workplaces where tours are still possible employing a 'choose your own adventure' premise through a digital mock-up of a building. This digital dolls house is mapped with markers that invite the student or the teacher to ask a question, meet an employee or CEO or see inside an area or activity and engage with an object or a room. Interviews, curriculum resources for teachers and employment pathway maps support different age groups - from 12-18.

'We can unlock a pathway through these tools and bring that to life, not just for the young person but for the employer as well..'

Having young people in the room, on your zoom, or in your workplace is vital. On this topic, Jacyl Shaw, Global Innovation Director at GHD - (a global professional engineering company) comments:

'It is an amazing time where we have 4 or even 5 generations working together and now with Covid, under a global digital roof. While people are not retiring from work as early, they are also coming in younger, particularly now that we are talking about bringing more young people of a school age into our workplaces in a way that means they are really there with a voice, to see and touch and change things.'

The good side to this is that young people can now see where and how we work from any city or region. They can have global experiences from home.'

While GHD have a range of programs, Jacyl's role includes a mentoring and facilitation aspect that provides young people within and outside the company to have a better understanding of potential pathways in different areas of innovation and engineering - within the company but also for their workplace learning.

'Before Covid, learning at work was often a multi sensory experience. Young people were surrounded by people interacting. They overhear conversations, observe body language and learn from their boss about what really happened in the meeting as they walk back to the office.'

Now we are realising those moments that are hard to measure and quantify are a vital part of learning on a daily basis and yet not easy to translate into a digital format. After a virtual meeting, people are in their living rooms or bedrooms, usually alone and not getting the buzz or excitement from being with a team after the presentation. We know that students at university learn so much between classes, and that is also true in work contexts with the conversations between meetings.'

Inviting young people to shadow you on a zoom call is one way that Jacyl describes keeping those connections going and using digital tools to chat in a less formal way - to replicate the water cooler moments - can help.

Essentially, digital tools are opening up new ideas that we can use to create more instances where learning is happening and can grow further in the flow of work.

*As the productivity report states, another benefit is 'Avoiding the commute reduces the 'cost' of working, and this is expected to induce an increase in labour supply. This may include more work opportunities for people who face barriers to labour force participation. This includes carers, parents of young children, some people with disabilities, as well as people living in remote or regional areas where there are often fewer job opportunities in close physical proximity. Working from home policies can also promote a more gender-balanced workforce.'*¹

The idea that a simple and now ubiquitous virtual meeting can open up new relationships between young people and employers is very much of its time. Many business leaders light up at the thought they can help by making a direct connection through a workplace show and tell set up - it is sometimes a first foray for a young person who has no other way in.

While digital connections can't replace human connections, they can become a bridge between a young person on the outside and a potential employer working on the inside.

As a student doing the equivalent of year 10 via home schooling, Sulia told Learning Creates that 'Some home schoolers were writing articles to help parents through the pandemic with their teaching. I am used to setting my own routine. I know its been hard for lots of people as they have shifted online. They have to learn new patterns. I have to work out how much time to spend on something and separate things in my own way. I am very self directed. My parents don't have to tell me to do it. I am self motivated.'

As Learning Creates communities are realising, working from home or remotely can also bring about a renewed sense of the relationship between work – and life.

1. Productivity Commission. (2021). Working from home. Retrieved from <https://www.pc.gov.au/research/completed/working-from-home/working-from-home.pdf>

Hire Opportunity Coalition

In the course of the research for this project, a few illustrations emerged of different dimensions of the way the employer-young people relationship are being addressed. This is one of them.

'In 2012, Measure of America published the first comprehensive report on opportunity youth – young people ages 16-24 who were disconnected from school or work. It revealed that, nationwide, 5.8 million – or 1 in 7 – teenagers and young adults in this age group found themselves “adrift at society’s margins, unmoored from the systems and structures that confer knowledge, skills, identity, and purpose.'

This problem is costly both for the young people themselves, whose disconnection results in extensive consequences to their earnings, self-sufficiency, and health – and for society, where greater need for public assistance, crime, incarceration, health issues, and a continuation of the cycle of intergenerational poverty results in a heavy burden to communities and taxpayers alike.

In 2015, Howard Schultz, then CEO of Starbucks, committed to making opportunity youth a corporate priority. Upon realizing that there were roughly 7 million unfilled entry-level jobs in the U.S. and simultaneously over 5 million opportunity youth sitting on the sidelines of mainstream economic America – in most cases champing at the bit for an opportunity, he concluded that this was a matter of connecting the dots and mobilizing employers to include opportunity youth in their hiring efforts.

With 50+ U.S. companies in alliance around this mission, the 100,000 Opportunities Initiative was born – with a bold goal of placing 100,000 opportunity youth in jobs with companies committed to their success and advancement.

Catalytic hiring events in cities around the country followed, including the establishment of National Youth Hiring Day in 2018. Members shared best practices, focused on the development of support systems and pathways to advancement tailored to opportunity youth, and exceeded the original goal of 100,000 placements while increasing awareness of the value in this untapped talent pipeline.

In 2020, with the original goal surpassed and a new sense of urgency driven by both the economic devastation of the pandemic and social unrest that has heightened the focus on historic and systemic inequities, the 100,000 Opportunities Initiative was relaunched as The Hire Opportunity Coalition.

Researchers estimate that 1 in 4 youth ages 16-24 will be disconnected from school or work as a result of the pandemic. This represents a staggering 9 million young people whose disconnection has significant ripple effects on their futures and those of their communities, and whose potential to contribute to American companies is being wasted. At the same time, private enterprise is being called upon to lead the effort toward an economic recovery that ensures equity and justice are central to workforce development.

The Hire Opportunity Coalition exists to build the capacity of companies to hire, retain and professionally develop opportunity youth, and in doing provides an essential lever to a more prosperous, inclusive and equitable workforce.³

3. The Hire Opportunity Coalition (2021). Our History.

Retrieved from: <https://www.hireopportunitycoalition.org/about/history/#:~:text=In%202012%2C%20Measure%20of%20America,disconnected%20from%20school%20or%20work.>

A photograph of two young men sitting outdoors, possibly on a porch or patio. The man on the left is wearing a red and black plaid shirt and has a grey face mask pulled down to his chin. He is looking down at something in his hands. The man on the right is wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt and a black face mask. He is also looking down at something in his hands. In the background, another person is visible sitting on a bench. The overall lighting is soft and slightly dim, suggesting an evening or overcast day. The text "Bridging the divide between learning and work" is overlaid in the center of the image in a light blue color.

Bridging the divide
between learning and work

What's missing, who is missing out and what can we make more visible?

'There's a lack of visibility of a whole workforce available to employers. We need a way to make young people more visible to them.'

During many different opportunities to engage with employers, schools, young people, parents and intermediary organisations, the discussions around who may be missing out on what have resulted in a number of observations through our online activities and in-person interactions. Every group benefits from knowing more about the others perceptions, grievances, frustrations as well as their hopes and dreams.

As a whole, employers are missing out on what young people can bring to their workplaces. Now that so many older workers are demonstrating they want to keep working from home to save commuting and be more available to their families, perhaps there is an even greater need to infuse the workplace with more young people who want to mingle and connect.

As documented in the working from home report Tim Cook, Apple's CEO, said:

I know I'm not alone in missing the hum of activity, the energy, creativity and collaboration of our in-person meetings and the sense of community we've all built. (Miller 2021)⁴

Andrea De Almeida, from A.D.A Advisory and convener for the Learning Creates industry prototyping team, reflects:

'We heard that regional employers are struggling to fill vacancies and that having to recruit and relocate people has its own set of risks. We also heard that a lot of young people feel the need to leave their town or community for more employment options in the city. Our role is to better connect these two groups in a more effective way. We've been talking to employers about the value these young people can bring, like local knowledge or local relationships and showcasing our prototype as a way to harness this missed opportunity and build a pipeline with the young people in front of them.'

Learning Creates also spoke to Sek-loong Tan, a Director and Partner at BCG, who acknowledged that:

'More diverse teams are more productive and bring more diverse perspectives. We are stronger as a business by being more diverse, but it's also a responsibility to be more representative. It's not always easy to build relationships with young people as our style of consulting is built on experience and high intensity. It would have to be in niches.'

The idea of niches in learning, or stackable learning experiences - both inside and outside of the classroom has been explored through *The Learners Journey*.

While many young people are missing out on the experience of some form of work, often because they are so deep in their final exams and studies, others are missing out on school because they have to work to make ends meet. And yet the skills acquired through these interactions with work rarely count for anything. Many young people don't have what they need to identify and showcase what they have learned from their interaction with a workplace.

A parent from one of Learning Creates forums comments:

'My daughter doesn't know the value in the skills she has that an employer would want to see. Her school doesn't recognise them so she doesn't see them as valuable.'

During the engagement for the paper, some of the interviews touched – negatively – on the state of careers advice and counseling in schools. It was said that it too should be more closely aligned with, and exposed to, current and evolving conditions for employers to get a better line of sight from work conditions and opportunities to the way schools prepare young people for the transition into work.

4. Business Insider Australia (2021). Tim Cook asks Apple employees to come back to the office 3 days a week from September. Retrieved from <https://www.businessinsider.com.au/apple-tim-cook-return-office-working-from-home-three-days-2021-6>

Learning Creates spoke to a student currently home schooling, Sulia who says:

'I think the curriculum isn't bad as an idea but we all live in different situations and have different communities and when I think about learning being more adaptive to different lived experiences it becomes more empowering. As a student through home schooling, I get to choose a lot of my teachers and decide when I can work, and design my own work schedule. I think every student would benefit from doing this at least for 6 months to give it a try and discover a renewed sense for what learning is.'

As well as needing to work, a vast number of young people want to work to gain experience or because they want to make a contribution, rather than the financial gains. Many describe navigating a network or peer group is getting increasingly difficult, particularly now that many workplaces are likely to continue with a level working from home or online, due to the pandemic.

Sulia describes her volunteer work, engaging with different groups around climate change issues and notes:

'When I am looking for the employment pathways, it has been hard to find them. I talk to people and follow a lead, but it would help if unis, institutions and workplaces make alternate pathways more visible. If people saw there are many ways to go to uni or work, they would see what skills and experiences would help support what they are trying to do.'

On top of this, many of the mechanisms and instruments employers need, to recognise and see more of what young people have done or what they are passionate about, are missing.

One employer commented through the Social Lab engagement process:

'A lot of our young people do casual work - how can we show that too? We currently have a siloed approach. The skills young people are learning in casual work, part time work and volunteering aren't being embedded or recognised in their education.'

As one teacher noted in a Learning Creates forum: *'We need better communication between teachers and those running apprenticeships or work experiences - they're probably learning all these things but they're not captured because as teachers we can't see them.'*

Sulia comments: *'It would be great to see more into the different employment markets – to see what you need in the job, the skills you need rather than the qualification. It would also be good to meet people in the industry and be a part of it when you are younger, to make some connections for the future. Employers might want to know what young people think about their industry, what might be putting them off. Why they think they would be good there.'*

Jacyl Shaw from GHD describes how important networks are - but notes they need to be present in a more intentional way, for everyone, regardless of whether a young person's parents have connections or not.

'There is a perception in some contexts where the idea of networking is tainted somehow - almost transactional. It's seen as a privilege. But it can and should be something all young people are encouraged to do while they are learning, not something they start thinking about when they finish school. For innovation, networks are about finding people who are different to you, or people who can test your ideas. Networks can flow both ways and benefit business and young people if we start the conversations earlier.'

But not all employers are able to embrace the idea of bringing more young people into their workplaces with ease. There are challenges with some forms of work, including in consulting.

Sek from BCG concludes:

'It is hard to recruit a 15-18 year old into the core of our business. There are a lack of tools to differentiate people in a scalable way. But the idea of an intermediary could help us find that young person who has had substantial experience solving a complex problem or building a startup.'

Perhaps there are different pathways we could manage, new programs we could think about, with the role of an intermediary helping to stream capabilities in a scalable way, with the right record and transcripts of what this person has been able to do.'

A trustmark for work-ready learning: The bridge where we meet

'Young people often can't articulate or recognise they have these work-ready skills because they don't always see them as valuable as what is being recognised in formal learning settings.'

Learning Creates has tasked a team exploring new employment pathways with prototyping new and better ways to recognise what young people know and can do to open up pathways into the workforce for young people. A recent presentation from the Industry Pathways Team states:

'We know that employers want to attract young people with the right skills, capabilities and dispositions. They are looking for more than what they can see through a school transcript, ATAR, resume or job interview. They need new credentials, that show them more of who a young person is, that are easy to use and they can trust.'

Young people are learning work-ready skills and building attributes in many different ways that are relevant to employers but have no clear way to see what employers require as a form of evidence. They also don't know what employers will trust as a form of proof.

In response, the team is prototyping a trustmark for a national approach for work-ready learning that can be applied in any local context, enabling employers and young people to meet each other on a bridge - in a way that adds value to existing workplace programs and initiatives.

As well expressed by a participant in a Learning Creates forum:
'Technical skills can be developed. The knowledge skills come easily but the life and work-ready skills need to be developed and that happens over time.'

Andrea De Almeida, Learning Creates convenor explains:

'A young person's potential employability cannot be determined from an ATAR or score. Many young people already possess some of the skills and attributes that directly transfer to a work setting.'

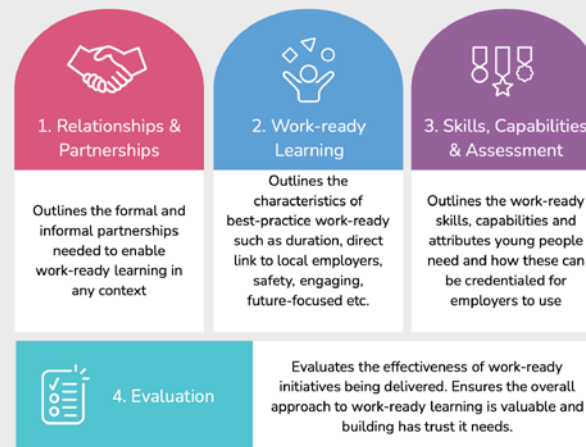
Many have learned these skills in extracurricular activities like sport, art, music or social media and many others have part time work or even family care. Employers tell us these experiences are often relevant, but we need to translate this experience into evidence that employers understand and can trust.'

The team is not trying to reinvent the wheel, there are lots of work ready programs around the country. The goal is to develop a national approach that any school community or local employer can reference.

While still in development and being tested in two communities - Bendigo and Tasmania - the trustmark presents a guide to how work ready learning can be captured and reflected in a way that has utility and value for businesses, young people and the school community.

Each region is focusing on their own priority areas - community enterprise in the construction, manufacturing and allied health industries in Bendigo and pathways for young people experiencing disadvantage into the renew-ables sector in Tasmania. We will be providing updates on this prototype as the work evolves!

The features of the national approach:



Thank you!

If you would like to contribute through a short interview to support our new series *Shifts and flows in learning and work* please get in touch and we will endeavor to respond. Stories will become part of a shared resource, with updates to the paper, interviews and insights presented through the Learning Creates community, events, communications and blog.

Stay in touch with us as we develop a series of prototypes to be further tested, shared and implemented with the goal of expanding the important work of recognising learning success for all young people, in a way that is trusted and valued by employers, school communities and young people themselves.

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