

How work works:

getting young people employment in our growing industries



Youth-led research into jobs in our region, how to get them, and
how governments can help

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Other reports in this series

This is the fifth report in this series:

Pope J, *How Work Works: getting young people employment in our growing industries*.

- Loddon Campaspe (2020). NCLLEN, CCLLEN, CRLLEN <http://www.ncllen.org.au/hww.html>
- North East. (2021) NELLEN <https://www.nellen.org.au/the-how-work-works-project/>
- Greater Shepparton (2021) GMLLEN <https://www.gmlen.com.au/how-work-works/>

Pope J (2021) *How Work Works: getting young women into trades* NCLLEN, CCLLEN, CRLLEN, Goldfields LLEN https://lnkd.in/ggz9_yCi

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How work works

Young people are worried about their futures as COVID-19 has disrupted their schooling and has had devastating impacts on the industries where they find their early work experiences.

And yet, when we sent six interns out to interview employers in growing industries in our region, everyone—both employers and interns—came out hopeful.

Our interns were surprised by the number of opportunities available in the region. Many industries are experiencing skill shortages, have entry-level jobs, want young people, and are willing to train them. Young people have more to offer than they think, even when they have not had their first job.

Young people can build strong foundations in Murrindindi Shire that will hold them in good stead for whatever they want to do next, wherever they want to do it. Those opportunities are not just in hospitality, and they are not just associated with university pathways. This research found the urgent need to promote vocational education pathways – that suit many students – and still lead to the high paying, in-demand jobs that match young people’s interests.

To get to the jobs in our region, young people need more contact with employers earlier in school and more opportunities to get vital work experience (and that might not be what you think). This research was also done at a time when young people were coming out of two years of disrupted schooling and the interns felt more could be done to improve young people’s wellbeing and hope for the future in these extraordinary times.

This report outlines our interns’ road map for how to do that.

Our research

Our six interns aged 17 to 25:

- » **Interviewed 19 employers** in our growing industries ¹, and
- » **Surveyed 52 young people** about their interests. ²

This report outlines what they found in three sections:

- » **4 good news stories we all need to hear**
- » **4 things young people can do**
- » **4 things we should do next to help (recommendations to schools, government and other policy makers)**



The good news

The good news is **there is entry-level work in our region** in a wide range of industries, and despite COVID-19, many industries are growing. **All our employers want to hire young people** to ensure the future of their businesses, and to bring in new skills, perspectives, and a fresh energy.

¹ See employers Appendix A and survey in Appendix B

² Modified for rural areas from avatars from LLEN developed *Find Their Feet Careers* events: Pope J (2019) Draft Find their Feet evaluation (unpublished). To explore Find Their Feet go to the website: www.findtheirfeet.org

We also discovered **young people have interests that match the growing jobs**, and employers are willing to train them. Furthermore, 1 in 5 of the young people surveyed want a job or more work.

“I was really surprised how many careers want young people. I thought it was just hospitality, but there are lots of options. I’m not looking at jobs and thinking I couldn’t even try for them now.” (Intern)

We also heard that being **work ready** for your first job, might not be what you think. Employers are less worried about skills and are more interested in your attitude and fit with their team. In the job application process, they are wanting to find out who you are and what you are like.

What young people can do

In the second part of this report, we outline all the things employers said that make a good job application and interview. They want to see a **personalised job application written specifically for the job** (throw out the template letter!). In the interview, they want to see you have researched and are interested in their company.

We also heard **experience is vital on your CV, but it does not have to be a job. There are other ways young people can get experience**. Employers are looking for community involvement, organising events, participating in sport – anything that shows you can commit to something.

Finally, we heard that no one knows what they are doing at first, but they work it out by talking to people. Our young interns felt reassured having spoken to these employers.



What we should do next

While the opportunities are out there, young people do not know about them because:

- » they are not hearing about pathways in school
- » have little chance to meet employers, and
- » are faced with a complex process to find work that is difficult to navigate if you do not know how it operates.

They have also faced significant disruption that has impacted their ability to move out into the world over the past two years.

These are all things we can fix.

The last part of this report outlines our young interns’ recommendations for what we should do next:

1. **Work with young people to create wellbeing programs in schools**
2. **Increase capacity for a rural careers education so young people meet more employers earlier in school**
3. **Support vocational pathways and ensure every young person leaves school ‘work ready’**
4. **Develop alternative forms of work experience**

Preparing young people for the future – whilst building a robust regional economy – depends on it.

4 bits of good news we need to hear...

1. There are entry-level jobs in a wide range of industries
2. Employers want young employees
3. Young people's interests match what employers are looking for and they want more work
4. Your first job will not be your best job, but you can work it out from there

1. There are entry-level jobs in a wide range of industries

- » **All our growing industries reported having entry-level work.** These include: specialist roles where you need a qualification, hands-on trade apprentice/traineeships where you learn on the job, and administrative roles (the business support needed across all industries). Industries include: health and community services (e.g. aged care), education, defence, tourism/accommodation, manufacturing, agriculture, horticulture and business support/professional services. See our region's growing industries in Figures 1 and 2.

"There are 40 farms here that have plenty of opportunities, even if you have zero skills and qualifications. You can train on the job. You don't need to know anything about farming, just be willing to work and have a driver's licence."

"There is always work in health and aged care. You can progress around the industry and do the job anywhere."

"There are entry-level jobs in outdoor education in our kitchens, maintenance, warehouse, and we have camp leader traineeships. We offer work experience and have a partnership degree."

"We have tutoring opportunities for young people, education support staff in classrooms, and some COVID cleaning."

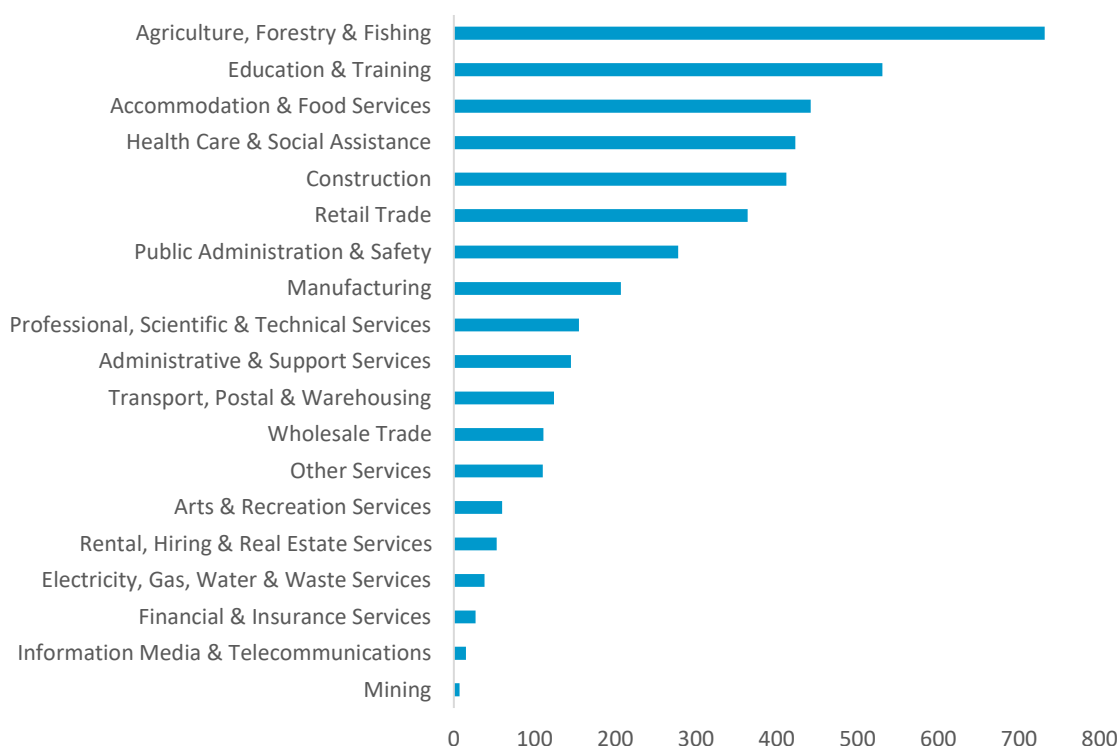
"Entry-level work at Parks Victoria includes roles as a project firefighter or seasonal ranger. You don't have to have environmental background, but chainsaw and chemical certificates help."



- » **There is strong demand for workers across industries.** Opportunities for young people in the region are growing as skilled migration has slowed, older workers retire, and more people take a break from the city, increasing the demand for services in our region. There is increasing competition for workers across the board, which means there are a lot of opportunities for young people to get experience.

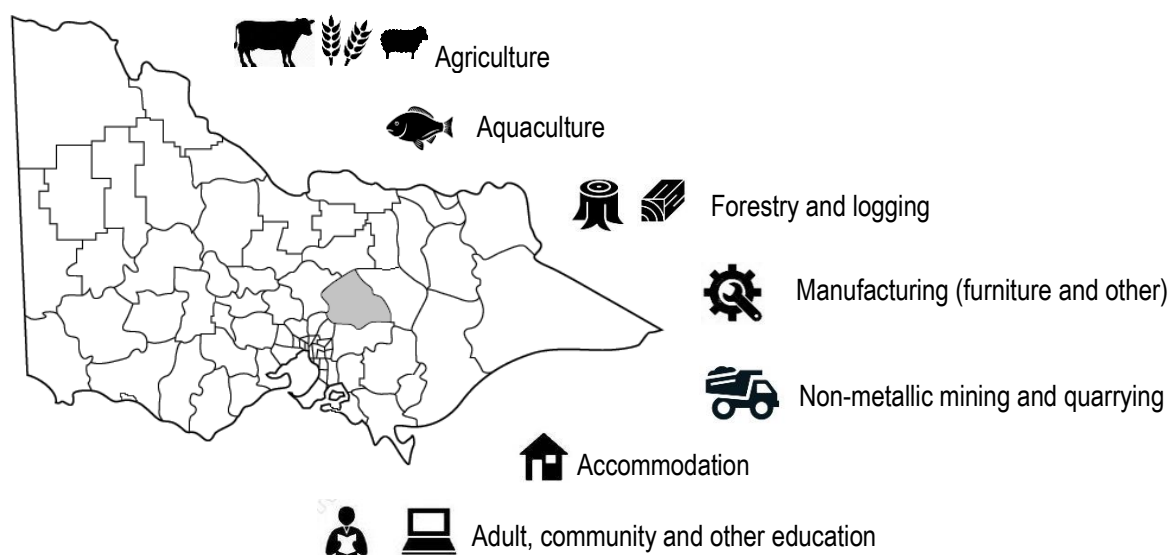
"There are plenty of jobs around for young people right now. If you are interested in something, talk to a business that has the sort of work you'd like to do. Ask, even if they are not advertising."

Figure 1. Where are the jobs in Murrindindi?



Source: Department of Jobs and Small Business (2018) *Employment Projections, five years to May 2024*. Available at <http://lmip.gov.au/default.aspx?LMIP/GainInsights/EmploymentProjections> Accessed 28 October 2019

Figure 2. Our region has some “comparative advantages” over other regions (things we do better than other regions)



Source: Infrastructure Victoria Industry Profile 2019 and the RDV Regional Partnership Road Maps 2019

2. Employers want young employees

» **Young people have advantages, and you can use these to sell yourself.**

Our employers reported young workers are desirable because they can:

- Be more comfortable with **technology, social media, etc.**, and are quick to pick up new technologies in workplaces and adapt to change.
- Bring **contemporary thinking, new ideas, up-to-date knowledge, fresh perspectives**, and can show older staff new things.
- Be more **open to learning new things – they are not stuck in old ways and traditions.**
- Bring **energy, fitness, a fresh set of eyes, and enthusiasm** to the workplace. They can make a workplace more enjoyable and expose it to lifestyles and cultures that give it currency and help it find new customers.

“Young people bring ‘fresh legs’, experience in social media, new knowledge, and their own point of view, which makes the industry fresh and up-to-date. The world of work is changing and we have to keep up with it. Young people help us do this.”

“Having that diversity of age, gender, and others, makes for a really good workplace.”

“I love that young people ask questions to make you stop and think why things are done the way they are.”

» **Employers are willing to train the right people.** It is a surprise to many young people that most employers are willing to train new employees, and some have systems to help young people advance.

“In the banking industry there is a lot of training but it’s all on the job learning. If you show capability and desire to work, you will do well in the industry. You could start as a bank teller, and make your way up through the onsite training we provide.”



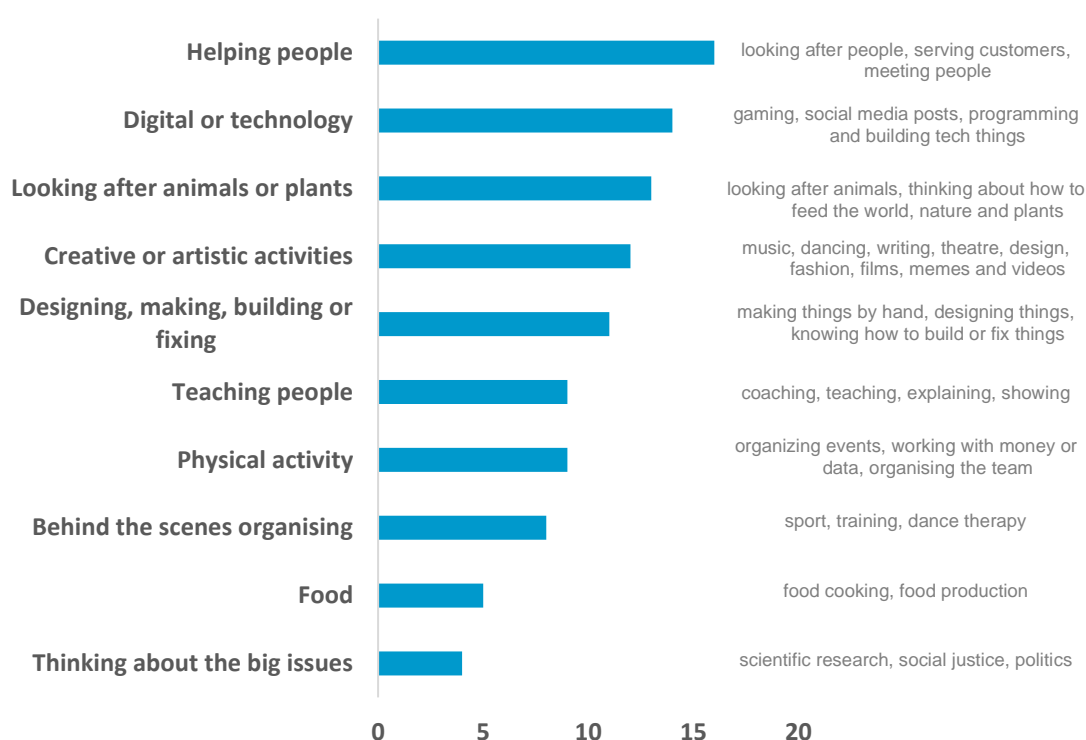
“We prefer young people with less experience because they can be easier to train. It’s like a clean slate to teach them the way we want. You just need to be enthusiastic and with a willingness to learn.”

“I started out in administration, which helped me learn about this industry. I said I wanted to move forward within the role and they enrolled me in a course.”

3. Young people's interests match what employers are looking for and they want more work

- » **Young people's career interests match current opportunities.** While only a small sample (52), our survey of young people shows their interests match the jobs on offer, and that 1 in 5 of these young people (18%) would like a job or more work (Figure 3). Careers education is needed to help young people explore opportunities that will suit their interests, particularly in places they may not expect. This includes the industries in Figure 1 that are projected to grow and the areas of competitive advantage in Figure 2, for which the best opportunities are in our region and might keep young people in the area.

Figure 3. Young people's interests match the region's opportunities ³



- » **Young people do not hear about the opportunities.** Our interns reported it was hard for young people to find out about the jobs, and employers reported they found it hard to find/communicate with young people. Not all of the employment channels currently in use work for engaging young people (see next section: *Do not know where the jobs are? You are not alone*).

“We have great difficulty getting young workers. We are at a loss as to why. We’ve done lots of advertising but it hasn’t worked.”

“We need to do a bit more in trying to reach young people.”

³ Survey of 52 young people aged 15 to 25 who were variously in: in secondary school (87%), university or TAFE (19%), not in school (8%), an apprentice or trainee (6%). Some respondents selected more than one interest.

4. Your first job will not be your best job, but you can work it out from there

- » **Your first job will not be your best job.** Our CEOs and business owners did not start in the best jobs, but they were important for getting the experience and work readiness that makes it easier to find that next, better job. At the moment, there are a lot of opportunities in the regions for that first step.

“Your first job doesn’t have to be great. It will give you a pathway to the next job and set you off on your trajectory. The main thing is to be exposed to the world of work.”

“My first job gave me confidence. You get your first job, you meet people, you learn how to talk to the boss, you have the confidence to get a better job.”

“There is nothing wrong with coming into an entry-level job and working your way up. You don’t need a university degree to get a high-level job. Find an entry-level job in the industry you want to work in and work your way up!”

Figure 4. Our employers first jobs



» **You do not need to know ‘what you are going to be’, but work out what you like doing.**

“If you have an interest, follow it. Don’t get disheartened by rejection. But also, don’t be afraid to say ‘no’ if something’s not right for you. There’s no point committing your life to something you don’t enjoy doing. Keep at it, you’ll find something that works.”

“If you think you might be interested in something, go and talk to someone in the job.”

“I had a very zig-zag journey trying lots of different things but I eventually found what I loved.”

"The more that you can learn and the more that you can experience, the better"



“Just get out there and go for it!”

4 things young people need to know ...

1. Employers are trying to work out what you are like in your application – throw out the template letter!
2. Being 'work ready' might be easier than you think
3. Work experience is vital, but it can be many things
4. Do not know where the opportunities are? You are not alone

1. Employers are trying to work out what you are like in your application – throw out the template letter!

- » **Write a personalised job application that is specific for the job.** The best way to make your job application letter, CV, and interview stand out is to be authentic and say something genuine about you. It is your personality and interests they are looking for. Our employers said the biggest 'red flag' is an application that was not written specifically for the job (a generic template letter), was written by someone else, or if your parent did the approach for you. Never send a standard application.

Make sure your application letter and CV:

- **Are easy to read.** Use a clean simple layout and use bullet points. Proof read it! Your CV only needs to be 1 or 2 pages at entry-level.
- **Get straight to the point: why should they consider you for this job?** So that they get a feel for you, tell them in one or two sentences up-front about who you are and what you are interested in (hobbies, interests, ideas), why you care about the role, and your career objective.
- **Outline your experience.** Think about what you are good at, and what things you have done that you could include (look at the list on page 15).
- **Match your skills to the job.** Think about the skills your experiences have given you. Work on cars? That gives you mechanical aptitude and an engineering thought process. Babysitting? That makes you responsible, reliable and good with people.
- **Have good referees.** Relevant referees are essential – they will contact them. For some employers, it is the first thing they look for. Do not use family. Ask a teacher, work experience supervisor, coach, someone you volunteered for, etc.



“Your CV doesn’t have to be perfect, as long as it describes what you’ve done, who you are, and why you want to work for us. I really want to know who you are. What your personality is like.”

“I don’t have an issue with you having no work experience. I can train you. I wouldn’t turn you away if your CV is empty, as long as you’re interested in giving it a go.”

“I would look at community activities like sports or anything exciting that you’ve done in school. Any experience in handling cash, people skills and interests. I want to know what you enjoy doing outside of work, do you like reading or cooking, I want to know about who you are as a person.”

- » **Do your research to understand what they are looking for.** It is important that you read the job description and selection criteria, understand what they are looking for, and match your application to those things (but only by about 70% - if you cannot meet one of the criteria, they may still consider you if you have other strengths). Use your experience to demonstrate you meet each of the criteria and give examples. If you do not have experience, tell them why you would be good at the job.



“Research it, convince me that you care about the sector. Love for the work is number one thing we look for.”

“You need to know about us and what our company stands for, do your research before applying.”

- » **In an interview (formal or informal), employers are looking to see how you will fit with the team.** They know you will be nervous and are sympathetic to that. They only want to talk to you and find out whether you are a good fit for them. Present well (like you are serious about the job) and show up prepared. Make sure you:
- » **Know something about the organisation**
 - » **Show you want to work with them** (attitude) – prepare an answer for why you want the job and give it even if they do not ask
 - » **Give real-world examples** to illustrate your experiences
 - » **Always have a question up your sleeve to ask them at the end**

“We are not expecting experience in a young person. In your interview, we are looking how you describe the skills you have got from the things you have done.”

“Don’t worry about your nerves – they show you want the job.”

“Just keep trying. Don’t be afraid to go into a business with your resume. Come in and say ‘hi’, it makes a huge impression to me if you come in and introduce yourself.”

2. Being 'work ready' might be easier than you think

» **It is not just skills that make you 'work ready'**. Employers are often willing to teach technical skills, however, attitude or people skills they cannot. Our employers unanimously reported a 'work ready' young person has (in order):

- A good attitude/work ethic
- An interest in the industry
- Willingness to learn, and
- Reliability – the ability to commit and turn up on time

Some employers also mentioned other general capabilities and competencies, most notably:

- Communication skills
- Organising and problem-solving skills
- Teamwork and relationship skills
- Basic maths and finance to handle money



“It’s mainly about a person’s qualities, personality, character, rather than specific experience or skills they should have.”

“We can teach skills, but attitude and interest in our work matter most.”

“The world would be better if there were more entrepreneurs, setting up businesses to solve our problems. To do this you need problem-solving, business and financial management skills. The earlier you get these the further you are going to go.”

3. Work experience is vital, but it can be many things

» **There are alternatives to work experience that employers value.** While work experience is vital, our employers told us it can be a lot of different things. Over and above part-time jobs, they reported they will look for anything that shows a young person can commit to something. They are also looking to see if a young person is responsible, has initiative, and has teamwork, people/customer service, communication, and organisation skills. Examples of experience employers said they would look on favourably on a CV included:

- **Volunteering** or community work, including in school
- **A long-term commitment to a sport** (particularly a team sport) or other activity, and any leadership role undertaken (captaining, umpiring, coaching, setting up events, involvement in the club)
- **Project work or extra-curricular activities** in a school setting, additional work at university, or helping out at school
- **Working on a farm**, even if it is the family farm

- **Tutoring or involvement in school holiday programs** (for example, with disability groups or music programs)
- **Aged or child care** (babysitting)
- **Organising** an event, group, or competition (for example, a gaming event)
- **Involvement in an interest, hobby or youth club**
- **Awards**
- **Certificates:** White Card, First Aid, Responsible Service of Alcohol, or other certificates.

“Work experience is super important. Have the courage to come and ask, and ask for yourself rather than getting your parents to do it.”

“Work experience is great but honestly volunteering through community organisations and being involved in community groups is just as great.”

“If you haven’t had work experience, volunteering would impress me because it shows a level of willingness to work. Short online courses, even if they’re free, or experience in a family friend’s business, helping out on a farm, extra-curricular activities, could all replace work experience.”

“Actually, don’t forget a lot of what you do at school prepares you for work. Teamwork, Maths for handling money, and English for communication”

- » **Academic skills are important but are not a deal breaker.** None of our employers said they were looking for your academic record first on your CV.

““The VCE score is not the be all and end all. Keenness and willingness to learn and work is more important than your school scores.”

“We just hired someone. His desire and attitude, and the fact he had found work experience, were more important than how he’d done in education.”



4. Do not know where the opportunities are? You are not alone

- » **There is no one place in our region where jobs are advertised.** Employers reported using (in order of mentions):
 - Seek (10)
 - Word of mouth (8)
 - Through school/uni/TAFE talks or industry tours (5)
 - Facebook (6)
 - Other social media (5)
 - Newspapers (3)
 - Own website (2)
 - Backpackers/hostels noticeboards (1)

- Recruitment agency (not successful for finding young people) (1)
- careers.gov (1)

Many of the places employers look for young employees are problematic: the online platform job agencies are likely to filter out applicants with no experience, newspapers and enterprise social media pages are not read by young people, and young people are less likely to have Linked In profiles (which recruiters use).

It is important young people build their networks and events where employers and young people can meet in communities.

*“We don’t do this very well. We don’t get many young people applying.
We need more direct approach, I think.”*

“We once advertised through Seek and got a very broad range of applicants from all over Melbourne but didn’t really find any good candidates.”

“Word of mouth is our go-to. We look for recommendations from other people we know in the industry.”



4 things schools and communities can do to help (recommendations)...

1. Find mechanisms for communities to build young people's wellbeing
2. Increase capacity for a rural careers education so young people meet more employers earlier in school
3. Support vocational pathways and ensure every young person leaves school 'work ready'
4. Develop alternative forms of work experience

1. Fund mechanisms for communities to build young people's wellbeing

- » **Wellbeing is a significant issue for young people.** Across this project interns have given very moving accounts of the impact of COVID-19 on their schooling and transitions from school. While hugely resilient, they have also reported that the lack of social contact across their education has had an impact on their confidence, social skills, anxiety, and links to places they could get support. Local Government has suggested partnerships could be built to connect resources available in communities to create a more systematic support for the wellbeing of young people in Murrindindi Shire. Other regional LLEN and local governments, for example in Loddon Campaspe, are currently working on a model to connect and enhance existing community resources to schools through local government-funded community brokers, and this work could be used as a guide for Murrindindi Shire.

Recommendation: Develop a local mechanism (for example, a community-based EFT position) to connect and enhance existing wellbeing services and activities for young people.



"For two years I've been on a computer." (Intern)

2. Increase capacity for a rural careers education so young people meet more employers earlier in school

- » **Job opportunities exist in the region but young people do not know about them.** Young people need early opportunities to talk to employers, so they can

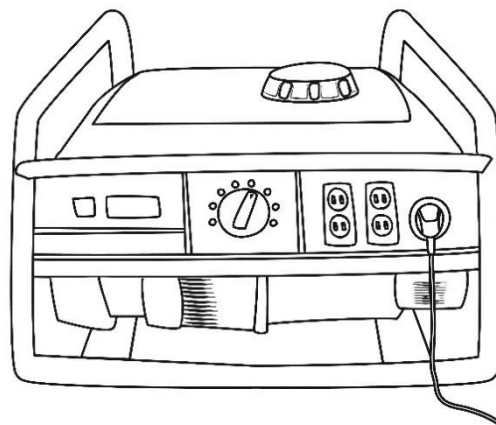
match their interests to growing industries. Rural young people need all schools to have the capacity to provide innovative ways across secondary schooling for:

- » **Continuous conversations with employers** including those in non-traditional professions and the region's competitive advantages. Employers acknowledge it is hard for schools to showcase all the options and new virtual experiences could be explored.
- » **Teacher development** to ensure subject teachers are up-to-date with modern workplace practices and non-traditional professions related to their field.
- » **One-on-one contact with careers counsellors early in secondary school** to support students in figuring out what they like and are good at, match their interests to growing industries and pathways, and writing individualised CVs.
- » **Development of three basic work competencies** reported by employers: communication, organising, and team work skills (see work experience recommendation 3).

Recommendation: Increase capacity to allow schools to continue to develop partnerships that create more networking for secondary students and allow them to explore regional industries.

“Schools need to expose young people to jobs – more conversation with different types of employers, more workplaces, more work experiences – so they can see where they fit in.”

“Schools are doing a very good job with employment. The only improvement would be having more opportunities for communication with employers and to have a work skills program.”



3. Support vocational pathways and ensure every young person leaves school ‘work ready’

- » **Our employers and interns felt the emphasis is still on university pathways.** Vocational pathways, however, can lead to higher incomes and faster employment (as they are where the skills shortages are). Young people suggested eight simple things that – alongside large opportunities like school-based apprenticeships – could be promoted more widely in schools and the community to help them be ‘work ready’ on vocational pathways.

Recommendation: Partner with community organisations to ensure every young person leaves school with (in order of the number of young people surveyed who would like school assistance):

1. An understanding of work finance (Tax File Number, Superannuation, etc) (33)
2. An understanding of how to find jobs (32)
3. A driver's licence (28)
4. A good quality work experience (or community volunteering project) (26)

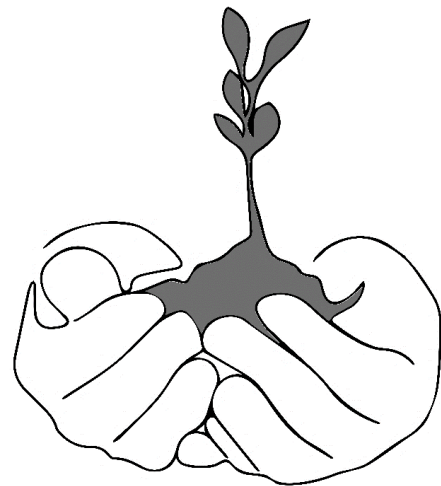
5. Opportunities to meet employers (industry tours, etc) (25)
6. Safety training of some kind: Responsible Service of Alcohol (RSA), White Card, First Aid Certificate, Working with Children Check, Life Saving Medallion (23)
7. Learning about the types of jobs that are out there (23)
8. Information about how to write a job application and ace an interview (21) Interns felt learning how to write-up the skills they gained from activities on their resumes would be useful

4. Develop alternative forms of work experience

» **Early work experiences are a critical foundation for successful careers.**

Work experience builds aspiration, job readiness, and contacts, but it is difficult for employers in rural areas to provide these opportunities, particularly since COVID-19. We need new and innovative ways to ensure all young people get these important employability experiences at school. Alternatives include:

- **Community internships (with a stipend):** as teams, young people could undertake meaningful short work projects that solve community and business challenges (a website for a community group, an online shop for a sole trader, a community engagement panel for local government, etc.).
- **Virtual Reality experiences:** where young people could experience a range of workplaces and undertake typical work activities to get exposure to a much broader field of industries and roles (including exposing young women to higher paying trades). VicLLENs are at the forefront of the development of such a platform.



Recommendation: That a funded program of youth internships and Virtual Reality experiences be created for schools in the region.

“The schools should allow work experience and offer parts of the curriculum vocational training relating to work as placements help gain experience and for schools to help youth find something they love.”

Appendix A. The employers

Health and other care services

Naomi McNamara, CEO

Linda Dover, Consultant

Education and training

Brian D'Arcy, Assistant Principal

Richard Thorton, CEO

Employment programs

Faye D'Helin, Support Officer

Kyle Medley, Workplace Support Consultant

Tourism, food & beverage, accommodation

Lisa Harding, Owner

Sanjaya Karunathilake, General Manager

Caolan O'Connor, Owner

Sue Hendy, Manager

Agricultural food production

Ian Elgin, Farm Manager

Alison Rouget, Administration Manager

Horticulture and conservation

Matt Reed, Co-owner

Charlotte Bisset, District Manager

Finance, professional services

Amani Fanous, Supervisor

Tony Pammer, Business Advisor

William Verhagen, Owner

Defence

Brett Kelly, Manager

Local Government

Nerissa Carter, Recreation and Youth

Menzies Support Services

Kellock Lodge

Yea High School

Outdoor Education Group

Local Jobs Program Goulburn Murray

Personnel Group

Grant St. Grocer

Peppers Hotel Marysville

Alexandra Events Corp. & Regional Business Toolkit

Lake Mountain Alpine Resort

Various Farms

Koala Cherries

Antique Perennials Nursery

Parks Victoria

Bendigo Bank

Pammer Advisory

Integrity Real Estate

Ventia, Puckapunyal

Murrindindi Shire Council

Appendix B. The interview questions

We'd like to start by asking you a couple of questions about you and your industry....

1. Firstly, can you tell us about your first ever job and your first career job?
2. Can you think of any specific things that really helped you get from your first job to where you are today, that might help us starting out?
3. Are there entry-level jobs in your industry that young people should look in to?
4. How do you find young workers? Where do you look or advertise?

Now we'd like to ask you a few questions about getting work in your industry.

5. What are the most important things you look for on a CV or job application?
6. How important is it that we have work experience? And what would impress you, if we hadn't had a job yet?
7. Do young people bring any benefits to your industry?

Finally, we'd like to ask you about what schools could do to help make sure we have the foundations for good careers ...

8. Are there extra things schools could do to ensure we are prepared for work – particularly for those not wanting to go on to university? Either big or small things ...
9. Finally, is there any other advice you would give us about getting our first job?

