**Brief**

Year13 is to run a quantitative survey to find out how young students view VET, how they choose their post-school education pathway by better understanding their decision-making processes, and ultimately what can be done to change perceptions around VET. This data is to support the Government of South Australia’s research.

**Data Collection** - Quantitative research

Survey data was collected through Year13’s social media and digital channels, targeting Australian males and females aged 15 - 21 living in South Australia between 7th June 2019 to 4th July 2019.

Online with \( n_T = 1319 \) (total responses)
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The respondents in this study are aged between 15 and 21 and just from South Australia. Respondents are predominantly from major cities (58%), however a strong voice also comes from regional (34%) and rural (8%) youth. The majority of respondents are either currently in high school or have recently left with 88% of respondents in their teenage years.

The results of the survey show that students who study VET in school are mainly doing so to learn new skills and to get a taste of a potential career path they could, but won’t definitely, pursue after school. It’s been found to be more a stage of learning than the first planned step of a desired career path for when they leave school. It also holds importance to high school students who are not engaged by traditional school subjects.

The focus changes when students research their post-school education decision making. The survey found that career outcomes are by far the most important factor that influence young people’s choices. Course content and lifestyle while studying are the two other main factors which drive students in their post-school education choices. These three factors provide an interesting mix of priorities for young people - they’re thinking about their future work aspirations, their level of engagement in their study as well as their enjoyment in their personal lives.

Perhaps the most interesting finding of the survey is that young people are not concerned about the status or prestige of post-school education pathways. It is often said that one of VET’s problems is that it is seen as a second-rate option, but the data in this report does not align with that. While it might be important to parents, it does not seem to be a motivating factor in what pathway today’s young people ultimately take.

Passion is what most motivates young people in choosing their career. They’ve also been shown to be very pragmatic with wanting to be able to use their skills and earn good money in the process. Of far less importance are what their parents think, opportunities to work internationally and work culture. Career reputation also rarely comes into the equation, similar to how it doesn’t with their education choices as mentioned above.

In-school events and better informing parents about VET are the keys to increasing awareness and changing perceptions about VET. Despite spending so much of their time online young people still very much value someone coming and explaining to them the ins and outs of VET. They also felt their parents need to be better informed about VET, with online video content and physical brochures both ways of achieving this.

In terms of making young people more likely to choose VET, knowing that they are more likely to land a job than their university counterparts as well as that they can earn as much money as them are the two most compelling reasons. The top changes which would make young people more likely to choose VET are to be more aware of the benefits of VET, cheaper course costs and more job opportunities in local industries.

The results ahead in this report present a host of insights into the way the VET sector can better position itself in the eyes of young people. The data shows a suite of actionable changes which can be implemented to help raise awareness and change perceptions about VET.
Q1: How old are you?

How old are you?

Q2: What gender do you identify as?

What gender do you identify as?
Q3: What state do you live in?

South Australia 100%

Q4: Where do you live in SA?

Metropolitan 58%, Regional 34%, Rural 8%
Q5: Are you still in high school?

Yes 59%, No 41%

Q6: What post-school pathway are you currently pursuing?

University 56%, Working 22%, TAFE 10%, Apprenticeship or traineeship 6%, Other VET providers 1%, Other 4%
Q7: What post-school pathway are you planning on pursuing?

University 69%, TAFE 10%, Apprenticeship or traineeship 8%, Working 7%, Other VET providers 1%, Other 4%
The following questions will help establish the degree to which various factors influence a young person’s decisions to do VET.

Q8: If you study/studied VET at school, what were your reasons? (Tick all that apply)

With 62% of respondents answering that they haven’t studied VET in school it means 38% of respondents have studied or are currently studying VET. Below we have filtered out the responses of those who haven’t studied VET in school, and therefore the percentages in the following paragraph will be reflective of this filtering.

The number one response for why the respondents’ chose to study VET in school was to ‘Try out a skill/potential career path’ (73%). This shows VET’s practical purpose of arming students with skills and allowing them to get a taste of a potential career path they could pursue after school. ‘Learn a new skill’ (63%) was next, showing that VET is often the doorway to young people gaining new skills they don’t already have. VET therefore is attractive to students for how it broadens their skillset.

‘Good post-school job prospects’ (43%), ‘Sounds fun’ (41%) and ‘Direct link to a desired career’ (38%) were chosen by a smaller number of respondents and fell in the mid-range of reasons for why young people chose to study VET in school. These responses in comparison to the top responses show that in school the choice of VET is more a stage of learning than the first planned step of a career path. ‘Disengaged from other/traditional school subjects’ (26%) shows
VET’s ability to engage a sizable number of students who feel disconnected from the traditional school curriculum. This shouldn’t be seen in a negative light, that VET is for “failures”, but rather than it inspires passion and curiosity in those who have different interests. ‘To earn good money after graduation’ (24%) was the least chosen response showing that the majority of students who study VET in school aren’t motivated by money. This fits inline with the top responses where in school VET is more about the student’s present experience, rather than being done with a long-term financial goal in mind.
Q9: Which of the following did/would most influence your post-school choices? (Tick up to 3)

This question asks respondents to identify their three biggest influences when it comes to choosing their post-school pathway. More than half (56%) selected parents, positioning them as the most influential figures in young people’s decision-making. Next are teachers (39%) and friends (38%), closely followed by the internet (37%). At the bottom of the list are career expos (26%), careers advisors (24%), open days (20%) and workshops in schools (13%).

The top three choices are individuals whom the student has a personal connection with, highlighting their position of trust and authority, as well as the importance of face-to-face communication in young people’s decision-making process. This also signifies the need for these ‘influencers’ to themselves be well informed about all post-school pathways so that they may pass on unbiased advice to young people. Interestingly, career advisors have ranked low here despite also being an individual-based influencer.

The significance of the internet can’t be downplayed here, especially as our past data identifies web searches to be the most popular source of unbiased career advice. Events such as expos, open days and workshops are less influential, however the responses to Q12 show young people believe these are the best ways to increase awareness and perception of VET. This suggests that the current offerings have been ineffective either due to their frequency or delivery, yet there remains an opportunity for them to drive success in the future.
Q10: When researching your post-school education options (e.g. uni, apprenticeships, TAFE etc.), what are the most important factors that influence your decision? (Tick up to 3)

The most important factor influencing post-school education decisions was ‘Career outcomes’ (77%). This is an expected result as for most young people their post-school education is done with an eye to what comes afterwards, which generally is a career. ‘Course content’ (47%) was the next most common response, showing that while what comes afterwards is most important, the learning itself too has to be engaging to get them to that desired outcome. ‘Lifestyle while studying/training’ (30%) came next rounding out the top three responses. In such a social and formative stage of life when young people have just become free of the structure or school and have entered adult life, lifestyle is a key point in attracting a significant amount of young people into their post-school education.

‘Course fees’ (28%) interestingly shows that the financial burden from education is an important factor in over a quarter of young people’s decisions. ‘Ability to work in the area you’re studying while studying it’ (25%) is an advantageous result for apprenticeships and traineeships, showing that a quarter of young people value this education and work combination which they provide. ‘Quality of education facilities’ (23%) shows the importance of the learning environment for a sizable number of students as well.
‘Connections to employers’ (14%), ‘Education institution reputation’ (13%) and ‘Perceived prestige/status of the pathway’ (11%) were the three least most chosen responses. While employer connections present a practical benefit for young people, they are apparently not top of list when they are making their decisions. Interestingly the two abstract responses of ‘reputation’ and ‘status’ were the least important factors for young people choosing their pathway. While these are often sighted as perceived deterrents for young people choosing or not choosing a pathway, the numbers here say that isn’t so. Overall, it’s clear here that what job a student can get is the main priority when they are researching their post-school education options. With the exception of ‘course content’, all the other responses were spread thin in their level of priority.
Q11: When deciding your career, what are the most important factors that influence your decision? (Tick up to 3)

This question identifies the top three factors that are essential to young people when making decisions about their future careers. The most commonly chosen factor was ‘Career matches my passions’ (64%) followed by ‘Money’ (50%) and ‘Career matches my skills’ (30%). Next is ‘Career lifestyle’ (22%). ‘Personal career growth potential’ (21%), ‘Growth of the industry’ (21%), ‘Opportunity to work internationally’ (15%), ‘Ethical positives/negatives of industry’ (12%), ‘Opportunity to run my own business’ (11%), ‘Local work opportunities’ (11%), ‘Job duties & responsibilities’ (10%), ‘Work culture’ (8%), ‘Career reputation’ (8%) and ‘My parents approve of it’ (4%).

Gen Z are proven to be much more pragmatic than their Gen Y counterparts and this is reinforced by the emphasis placed on money and matching their skills to their career. Meanwhile, the importance of intrinsic passion and motivation cannot be understated with this response being chosen by the largest portion of respondents by a wide margin. It is interesting however that despite their pragmatic nature, young people are not widely considering the growth of their desired industry with just 21% of respondents choosing this option. This is an area that we have previously identified as needing more discussion amongst young people and their career influencers.
Q12: What more needs to be done to increase awareness and change perceptions about VET and vocational careers? (Tick up to 3)

‘In-school workshops/talks/seminars about VET’ (60%) was the number one response for how to increase awareness and change perceptions about VET. It’s apparent that today’s students despite spending so much of their time online still very much value someone coming and explaining to them the ins and outs of VET. This also has the benefit of being a proactive move on the part of educators to reach young people in their place of learning, rather than relying on them seeking out the information themselves when they’re online and potentially distracted by their personal interests.

‘Inform parents better about VET’ (50%) as the second most chosen response reaffirms a lot of Year13’s previous research about the importance of parents in their child’s post-school education decision making process. An informed parent has the benefit of being able to encourage their child in the direction of VET if they see it as aligning with their passions and skills. As well it makes them less likely to discourage their child from pursuing a VET pathway due to any negative perceptions they may have about it, especially in comparison to university.
‘School visits to career expos’ (35%) reflects how students value getting a real life, first-hand look into potential careers. ‘More informative online content about VET’ (31%) came up just slightly above ‘Giving away informative VET brochures in schools for students/parents/teachers’ (30%). Although secondary in importance to the aforementioned informative events, it shows the benefits for both physical and online informative material in helping increase awareness around VET. ‘VET institution open days’ (29%) didn’t attract as much interest from young people as in-school talks and career expos. This helps to inform how to prioritise an events strategy from most to least effective. ‘Inform career advisors about VET’ (22%) and ‘Partnering with brands/events that are relevant to me’ (17%) were the least selected options.
Q13: Has your school/VET training provider given you information about new and emerging industries (e.g. defence, space and cyber security) and how you can prepare yourself to work in them through VET?

At the surface level, this question identifies whether schools and VET training providers are informing students about key emerging industries accessible through VET. Unsurprisingly, the majority (64%) said ‘No’ and just 37% said ‘Yes’.

It is also useful to compare the rest of the answers of ‘Yes’ respondents to the answers of ‘No’ respondents to identify how this information has affected the scope of their decision-making.
Just 51% of those that chose ‘Yes’ for Q13 are currently enrolled in university, compared to 63% who did not receive this information from their school/VET provider. Additionally, 17% of ‘Yes’ respondents are currently enrolled in TAFE compared to just 9% of ‘No’ respondents and 8% of ‘Yes’ respondents are pursuing apprenticeships/traineeships compared to just 4% of ‘No’ respondents. This shows a positive link between schools providing practical information about VET and students pursuing VET pathways in the future.

When asked which were/would most influence their post-school choices (Q9), just 29% of ‘Yes’ respondents selected ‘Internet’ compared to 42% of ‘No’ respondents. This shows that young people are much more reliant on their own online research in lieu of useful information provided by schools about VET.

For ‘No’ respondents, the information that would most likely make them choose a VET pathway (Q15) was ‘Knowing that I can get the same job from VET as if I’d studied at university (51%). Comparatively, 36% of ‘Yes’ respondents thought this would be persuasive information. While this is still a significant portion, clearly it is more effective for those without any information from their school/VET provider and therefore an important fact to improve VET consideration at early stages.
Q14: In the first year after graduation, who do you believe earns more money?

The responses here cut an even split down the middle. 50% thought that uni and VET graduates can earn the same, 25% that uni graduates earn more and 25% that VET graduates earn more. When we did a cross-comparison of this question with Q6, which asked them what post-school education pathway they’d studied, the results found 23% of university students thought VET graduates earnt more, 22% thought uni graduates earnt more, while 55% thought they earnt the same. Of TAFE students, 35% thought uni graduates earnt more, 14% thought VET graduates earnt more while 52% thought they earnt the same. It’s apparent then that of students who’ve studied post-school education, they were more likely to think the other pathway earnt more money after graduation than their own.

When comparing with Q7, which asked them what post-school education pathway they planned on doing, of those interested in going to university 29% thought uni graduates earnt more, 25% thought TAFE graduates earnt more, while 47% thought they earnt the same. Of those interested in going to TAFE 21% thought uni graduates earnt more, 34% thought TAFE graduates earnt more and 45% thought they earnt the same. It’s apparent then that for those who are yet to enter into post-school education that they think the pathway they are interested in earns more money, the opposite for those who’ve done post-school education as mentioned above.
Q15: What information do you think would make you more likely to choose a VET pathway? (Tick up to 3)

This question is key in identifying the facts that would make a young person more likely to choose a VET pathway and as such, these top responses should ideally comprise the key messaging of a VET marketing campaign, both online and in schools (expos, talks, open days).

The most persuasive information was ‘Knowing VET graduates are more likely than university graduates to land a job after completing their studies’ with 49% selecting this option. This was followed by ‘Knowing VET graduates can earn as much or more than uni graduates’ (49%), ‘Knowing that I can get the same job from VET as if I’d studied at university’ (46%), ‘Knowing VET provides pathways to many jobs predicted to have the greatest growth in the next 5 years’ (34%), ‘Knowing that there is local demand for certain VET skills’ (22%), ‘Knowing VET training will equip me with the skills to run my own business’ (16%) and ‘Knowing VET training will equip me with leadership skills’ (13%).
It’s clear online video is king when it comes to delivering VET-related content to young people. ‘Facebook videos’ (53%), ‘YouTube videos’ (43%), ‘Instagram feed videos’ (35%) were the top three most chosen responses. ‘Television ads’ (33%), ‘Written website content’ (28%) and ‘Online news website/newspaper stories’ (28%) were the next three most popular responses indicating a middling interest in more traditional media forms. ‘Instagram stories’ (22%), ‘Infographics’ (14%) and ‘Television news stories’ rounded out the bottom three responses.
Q17: What changes would make you more likely to choose VET? (Tick up to 3)

This question asks young people to select 3 changes to the VET system that would make them more likely to choose it as an education pathway. The most important change was ‘Awareness of the benefits of VET’ with 58% choosing this option. This was followed by ‘Cheaper course costs’ (54%), ‘More job opportunities in local industries’ (38%), ‘Skilled teachers with industry knowledge’ (34%), ‘Opportunities to train locally’ (30%), ‘Better information about local industry needs’ (23%) and ‘Better transport and accommodation assistance’ (18%)

Interestingly, the change identified as having the most influence was not actually a structural change to the VET system but rather increasing the awareness of the benefits already in place. This is good news for government and industry bodies as well as VET providers since it suggests simply improving their marketing and presence in schools is enough to effectively improve the consideration of VET amongst youth.