



Building a Bridge

Young adults, mental wellbeing and work:

How can we support young adults on their journey to purposeful work?

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About BHERT

The Business Higher Education Round Table (BHERT) was established in 1990 to strengthen relationships between business and industry, and tertiary education, through supporting collaboration between the organisations. One of the key areas BHERT seeks to influence and improve is that of alignment between education and employment.

The questions identified by VicHealth include:

- How can job seekers achieve better outcomes when searching for meaningful work?
- What can business and industry do to assist with this?
- What can the tertiary sector do to assist with this?
- How might collaboration lead to better outcomes for job seekers and employers?

BHERT brings significant linkages, experience, and skills to this discussion. Over the last 27 years, BHERT has conducted over 100 events (round tables, conferences, forums, and guest speaker events), and published over 50 topic-specific publications. It hosts the longest-running collaboration Awards in Australia, and its membership comprises 26 Universities and 15 companies and associations.

Context

The Australian economy is considerably more difficult for young adults than it was 8 years ago.

According to Greg Jericho (The Guardian Australia, 24 April 2018;

<https://www.theguardian.com/business/grogonomics/2018/apr/24/weve-broken-the-participation-record-but-were-not-all->

[winners?utm_source=esp&utm_medium=Email&utm_campaign=Australia%27s+Morning+Mail+2017&utm_term=272446&subid=19877090&CMP=MorningMail_AU](https://www.theguardian.com/business/grogonomics/2018/apr/24/weve-broken-the-participation-record-but-were-not-all-winners?utm_source=esp&utm_medium=Email&utm_campaign=Australia%27s+Morning+Mail+2017&utm_term=272446&subid=19877090&CMP=MorningMail_AU)) ABS analysis demonstrates:

- **Youth employment has fallen:** men 15-19 years old by 4.1%; women 15-19 years old by 0.7%; men 20-24 years old by 2.2%; and women 20-24 by 0.2%
- **Youth underemployment has increased:** men 15-24 years old from 11.6% to 15.4%; women 15-24 years old from 14.9% to 19.1%

- **Youth-employing industries have declined:** Since 2010 the four industries that have accounted for nearly three quarters of the growth in all employment have been healthcare, education, professional, scientific and technology, and construction – not the traditional youth-employing industries of retail trade, and accommodation and food

There has been a migration to study, including increased proportion who work while studying:

Australian 15-24 years old: occupations	2010	2018	Change
Working	39.7	36.2	Down 3.5%
Studying	27.8	30.5	Up 2.7%
Working and studying	20.8	22.5	Up 1.7%
Not working or studying	11.6	10.7	Down 0.9%

This illustrates that, while Australian unemployment is relatively low across the population, it is actually high and getting higher for 15-24 year-olds.

The challenge

BHERT believes the transition from study to work has become significantly harder, and that barriers to employment have emerged for young adults. *Young Australians are attempting to navigate this critical transition without a guide.* We believe there are several key inhibitors:

- **Young adults often have little knowledge of the job market landscape.** It can be hard to know where to look for jobs and with which companies or organisations; how to identify jobs that are appropriate for one’s qualifications, skillset and level of experience; and how to determine what an appropriate starting salary is. This is made more difficult with increasing digitisation; without knowledge of job titles it can be difficult to search online databases for appropriate roles, and putting down the wrong expected salary could mean an applicant is screened out of a job application process without an opportunity to show their capabilities
- **Increased digitisation also means that feedback is not frequently given.** Often young people do not hear back about jobs they have applied for. In addition to not knowing how to improve one’s efforts, this can make job seeking very isolating and feel like a hopeless task
- **Staying on track implies that there is a track to begin with.** While some careers (medicine, engineering, law, IT) might have a clear pathway from education to employment, many do not (science, humanities), and this can leave job-seekers feeling confused and isolated, unsure where to search for jobs and who to turn to for help

Potential Solutions: Building a bridge

Building bridges between young people and the workforce can help guide young people as they search for meaningful work

- Development of networks – The people who are in the best position to give advice, create connections and welcome young people into networks are those already in the workforce. Even conversations which don’t result in jobs can lead to new connections and possibilities to be explored: perhaps a role one hasn’t considered applying for before, perhaps a

company one hasn't heard of before, or possibly even new contacts to approach for guidance and further conversations

Recommendation: Engage companies directly with schools and universities (as per the COAG recommendation of April 2018), with explicit mechanisms to ensure young people get to know people in organisations in their locality. Work Integrated Learning (WIL), work experience, internships are all powerful tools for engagement between companies and educational organisations

- Direct relationships - Face-to-face contact is important to reduce isolation during the job seeking process. Face-to-face contact is also very beneficial as it allows opportunities for open conversation, where young people can engage with mentors or fellow job seekers about the challenges they are facing, and how they might be able to rise to these challenges

Recommendation: Develop mechanisms where personal contact is available for all job-seekers, in parallel with digital (non-personal) channels

- Feedback – Feedback is vital for improving one's chances at making a good impression and showing off what they have to offer employers. It also allows job seekers to tailor their efforts according to realistic expectations, and to adjust their job seeking strategies, in order to find more meaningful work. Face-to-face contact with peers and mentors is one useful way of facilitating feedback

Recommendation: develop formal strategies and skills for employers – even through digital channels – to provide information back to job-seekers on their approach, and their employability. Make these available and – over time – make them a requirement for all employers

Conclusion

BHERT believes there is significant opportunity to improve the transition of young adults from education to employment, and that both educational institutions and companies have a vital role to play. The suggested measures above address current deficiencies, and would, if adopted, materially improve the transition, reducing stress and uncertainty, and providing better employment outcomes for young adults.