



LIMITING FUTURES:

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN THE ACT

ANGLICARE
NSW SOUTH, NSW WEST & ACT



**Anti-Poverty
Week**

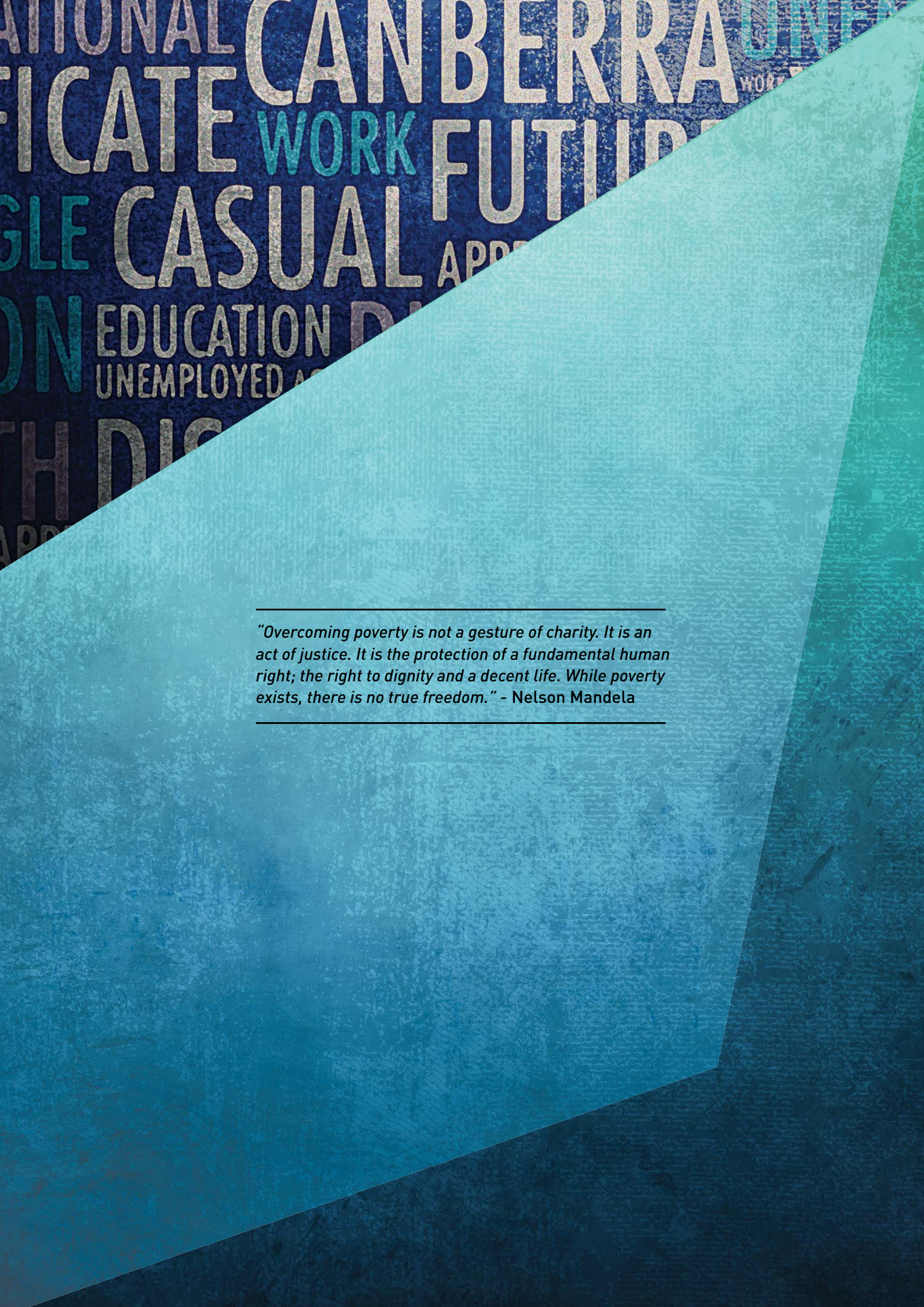


Acknowledgement

Limiting Futures - Youth Unemployment in the ACT Report.

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"Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human right; the right to dignity and a decent life. While poverty exists, there is no true freedom." - Nelson Mandela

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Limiting Futures: youth unemployment in the ACT

"The way we deal with young people going through one of the most vulnerable periods of their lives must foster aspirations and real hope, not further alienation. Just tinkering with welfare policy won't help and withdrawing benefits for some of our most marginalized young people will have harsh unintended consequences." - Tony Nicholson, Executive Director, Brotherhood of St Laurence



Key Learnings

- In Australia and in the ACT, there are significantly more people seeking work than there are job vacancies.
- While we did find that entry-level jobs vacancies do exist in the ACT, the vast majority of jobs advertised require either qualifications or experience, and often both of these at very substantial levels and with a very specific focus.
- The biggest areas of jobs growth in the ACT will be the Public Administration and Safety and the Health and Social Assistance sector.
- Entry into low-skilled casual work is associated with remaining in low-skilled jobs over the long term with little opportunity for progression.
- Some of the systems intended to assist young people into work are not functioning optimally.
- When employers are reluctant to hire people without experience, job service providers need to help young people find work experience or volunteer work relevant to finding a sustainable job.
- The findings of the 'Job Snapshot' experiment support the focus group's perception that there are few job vacancies that don't require experience, and those that do fit this criteria are rarely linked to a clear vocational path or opportunities for full-time employment.
- Traditional web/newspaper media does not appear to be the most effective place for young people without qualifications or experience to seek jobs. Given the evidence from our focus groups, we question the practice of some job service providers who ask young people to spend time just looking for jobs in the paper or on the internet. Job service providers might instead use their networks to organize trial shifts, work experience or internship type roles to support young people to build their own networks and ultimately secure jobs.

Youth Unemployment Myths

"There are jobs available to those who want them. People are just too picky, or too lazy."

- In Australia, it is estimated that there are more than five people seeking work for every one job vacancy.¹ This does not include those who are underemployed and need to work more. (People are considered employed even if they have had as little as 1 hour of work per week).
- In the ACT, there are 2-3 people seeking work for every one job.² Again, this does not include those seeking work because they are underemployed and who may have as little as 1 hour of work per week.
- Very few of the jobs advertised through the major internet and newspaper channels are accessible to a person without qualifications or, more importantly, relevant experience.³

"Any job will help a person improve their circumstances. Unemployed people just need to get a job."

- While a transition into full-time work is associated with an exit from marginalization in the long term, a transition to part-time work is not.⁴
- Jobs in very poor psychosocial situations have been found to be more damaging to mental health than unemployment.⁵
- Churning between short-term low-skilled jobs and unemployment is associated with a marginal job trajectory and not associated with a progression to more stable or skilled employment.⁶

1 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014, cat. 6354.0; ABS, 2014, cat. 6202.0.

2 ABS, 2014, cat. 6354.0; ABS, 2014, cat. 6202.0.

3 See Section 3 of this report for examples in a randomly selected week.

4 Cruwys et. al., 2013.

5 Butterworth et. al., 2011.

6 Yu et. al., 2012.

Introduction

Youth unemployment has been acknowledged as a growing problem for Australia, particularly in certain regional areas. Young people who experience a difficult transition from school to further training and/or the workforce are in many cases disadvantaged for years into the future.⁷ There are widespread benefits to the individual and community in finding the most effective way to move them into the next stage of their educational or vocational lives.

Certain analyses of the causes of youth unemployment have led to proposals for more punitive approaches to income support for young jobseekers. There appears to be a belief that young people, and indeed most job seekers, prefer to subsist on Centrelink payments than participate actively in the workforce. This understanding of the issue is unfortunate and it is our responsibility, as an advocate for the young people we work with, to better inform this discourse with facts and give voice to the accounts of lived experience which disadvantaged young people have shared with us.

Purpose & outline of the project

This project was designed to shed light on various aspects of youth unemployment, focusing on the ACT context. By considering the labour market in which young jobseekers are operating, scanning for jobs accessible to those without qualifications or experience, and talking to young jobseekers in person, we have developed an informative document considering multiple facets of the issue.

The project has three main parts:

1. Contextual background on youth unemployment in the ACT and available job market projections.
2. Focus group with young people on their experience of unemployment, job-seeking, and the related services they interact with.
3. Snapshot of jobs in the ACT: what proportion could a person without qualifications or experience apply for?

Contextual background on youth unemployment in the ACT and available job market projections.

Unemployment and underemployment in Australia

The seasonally adjusted unemployment rate in Australia as at August 2014 is 6.1%, according to the Australia Bureau of Statistics (ABS). On top of that is the national underemployment rate estimated at 8.5% for the same period.⁸ It is important to note that the ABS definition of 'unemployed' is a person who worked for less than one hour in the reference week, looked for work that week and would have been ready to commence work if offered a job. Therefore the underemployment rate includes every person who worked at least 1 hour in the reference week and would have liked to work more.

Youth Unemployment and Underemployment

Youth (meaning persons aged 15-24) unemployment in Australia has been gradually increasing over the past 10 years. Seasonally adjusted figures peaked in July 2014 at 14.2% and August figures are slightly less at 13.4% on a national scale.⁹ This figure is the percentage of young people aged 15-24 who are looking for work, ready to commence work, and worked less than 1 hour in the week prior to the survey being done. A further 17% of young people were underemployed. This puts the current total labour underutilization for young people in Australia at around 30.5%.¹⁰ Nearly a third of Australia's young people are not currently able to participate economically to the extent that they would like.

Picture in the ACT

The ACT had an unemployment rate of 4.6% in August 2014, and a further underemployment rate of 6.6%.¹¹ For young people aged 15-24, the unemployment rate was 11.3% as at January 2014.¹² The ACT is relatively well off compared to many regions of Australia and on average its population is economically well off and has good access to services. However it has been argued that living in poverty within a comparably affluent community like Canberra can serve to further marginalise vulnerable families and individuals owing to the higher cost of living, particularly rent. Standard measures of socioeconomic disadvantage such as

7 Brotherhood of St Laurence, 2014. On the treadmill: young and long-term unemployed in Australia.

8 ABS, 2014

9 ABS, 2014

10 ABS, 2014 cat 6202.0. Seasonally adjusted figures used.

11 ACT Government, 2014.

12 BSL, 2014. Australian Youth Unemployment 2014: Snapshot.

Socio Economic Indexes for Area (SEIFA) tend to mask the extent to which some Canberra households experience poverty owing to the unusually high level of diversity within many suburbs.¹³

Analysis of current job vacancies

The Australian Bureau of Statistics reports there being 764,100 unemployed people across Australia in August 2014. The ABS figure for the number of jobs vacant in May 2014 is 146,100. This equates to more than 5 people seeking work for every vacant job. It is not known whether these jobs are full- or part-time, or ongoing or not, since the definition of 'job' is very broad; only jobs lasting less than one day are excluded, and recruitment action (such as advertising) must have been taken for a job to be counted.¹⁴ Underemployment is not included in this calculation; there are likely far more people competing for the available jobs than just those who have no work at all.

In the ACT context, the ABS estimates that there were approximately 3200 job vacancies in May 2014. During May, the ACT had approximately 8500 people seeking work, and most recent estimates based on data from August show an increase to around 10,400 people. It would appear that the ACT has a better ratio of jobseekers to jobs than Australia overall, but one which still leaves thousands of people without hope of finding work.¹⁵ Again excluding the significant underemployed population, there are 2-3 people without jobs for every vacancy estimated by the ABS.

Employment projections for the ACT

The jobs market in the ACT is projected to grow by about 4.7% over the five years 2013-2018.¹⁶ This is slower growth than the projection for Australian metropolitan areas overall, which is 7.6%. Perhaps of more concern however is that the ACT population is projected to grow by about 8% over the five years 2012-2017¹⁷ to reach over 405,000, suggesting that jobs growth may not keep pace with population growth. However, both the ACT jobs market and population growth are influenced by growth in the public sector. Indeed it is worth noting that population projections conducted by the ACT Government in 2007¹⁸ predicted a population of just over 384,000 by 2019.¹⁹ We are only

about 6,000 people away from this projection today in 2014, illustrating the difficulty in long-term forecasting in a location so dependent on political decisions.

Skill levels of future jobs in Australia

The Department of Employment projects that the smallest growth will be seen in jobs requiring the lowest level of skill (secondary education or Certificate I). More than 2 million people across Australia currently work in jobs at this level, but growth will be in the region of 3.5% over the five years 2013-2018. Jobs requiring the next level of skill (Certificates II or III) will grow at a much higher rate of 7.4%; likely relating, at least in part, to a significant projected increase in childcare and aged care jobs which require minimum Certificate III level qualifications. Currently more than 3 million people across Australia are employed in jobs at this level, across all industries.

Unsurprisingly, the greatest projected growth is seen in jobs requiring a Bachelor degree or higher qualification, which is also the greatest share of current jobs at nearly 3.5 million across Australia. A 10.3% increase in jobs at this level is projected by 2018. Similarly, an 8.6% increase in jobs requiring a Diploma or Advanced Diploma is predicted over this time.²⁰ These figures underline the importance of supporting young Australians to pursue the highest level of education or training they can.

ACT specific data on projected job skill levels is not available. However, the ACT is significantly more highly educated than Australia overall. As well, workers in the ACT were much more likely than Australians overall to be employed as a professional, manager or clerical/administrative worker than at other levels²¹, which suggests that a greater proportion of jobs in this region may require significant education or experience.

Industry projections and the ACT

The ACT is predicted to experience relatively low growth in jobs over the 2013-2018 period. The greatest source of jobs growth is predicted to be the Public Administration and Safety sector, with an increase of around 4000 jobs over the 5 year period²². This is despite the pointed slowing of growth in the Australian Public Service, although the ACT Public Service and

¹³ ACT Government, 2013, Detecting Disadvantage in the ACT.

¹⁴ ABS 2014

¹⁵ ABS 2014

¹⁶ Department of Employment, 2014, page 8.

¹⁷ ACT Government, 2013

¹⁸ ACT Government, 2007

¹⁹ ABS 2014

²⁰ Department of Employment, 2014, Skill Level projections to November 2018, Excel spreadsheet. Accessed on 19/9/14 at <http://lmp.gov.au/PortalFile.axd?FieldID=1453078>.

²¹ ABS 2012

²² Department of Employment, 2014

other bodies operating in this sector may be largely responsible for the growth. Most jobs in the public service require significant study, training or experience to qualify.

The sector with the second largest growth in jobs is the Health and Social Assistance sector.²³ It is projected that Child Carer and Aged and Disabled Carer occupations in particular are likely to see strong employment growth in Australia overall²⁴ and this trend is likely to be reflected in the ACT. Workers in these occupations are typically employed on a casual or part time basis and the equivalent full-time pay is significantly lower than the median Australian full-time wage. Women constitute the majority of employees in both of these occupations, but the age demographics differ: while Child Carers are typically younger, with a median age of 32, Aged and Disabled Carers are older, with a median age of 48. In both occupations, the significant majority of workers have a Certificate III or IV level qualification.²⁵

Increasing casualization

Increasing casualization of work, particularly in junior roles, has been identified as a problem which has a particular impact on young people.

“Three times as many teenagers and twice as many young adults not in education now work part-time compared to 25 years ago”.²⁶ Employment on a casual basis can be unpredictable and young people are less stable financially. Continued employment on a casual basis might lead to a level of financial exclusion, where it is more difficult to access certain financial products. Without leave entitlements, long term employment on a casual basis may be risky as life events such as illness or pregnancy would cause significant disruption to income.

What kinds of jobs will be created in the ACT in the future?

Given the available data, it is difficult to generalize about the types of jobs that will be available in the ACT in the future. Jobs in the Public Administration and Safety sector include a wide variety of roles from low-skilled jobs such as call centre workers to senior public servant and professional roles. While much of the public service is permanent or contract based, lower skilled work in this sector is likely to be casual.

An important change coming to the Health and Social Assistance sector is the National Disability Insurance Scheme, where services for disabled people will no longer be block-funded through organizations but will be purchased individually by consumers. The types of carer roles required by people with disabilities may be quite different to the roles currently available in terms of work times and stability of available shifts. As well, the move towards empowering people with disabilities to directly employ their own staff may create a set of roles which might not offer even the limited potential for career progression that working through an organization might. Workers pursuing further training would need to do so on their own, and may not have access to more economical group staff training packages. The employer may be keen to increase their staff member's skill set, but there is perhaps more risk of a conflict of interest where staff up-skill in hope of a promotion or higher pay which is not available through their individual employer.

Does job growth in lower skilled jobs present opportunities for stable employment in the future?

Unfortunately for those entering a low-skilled occupation, analysis has found that it is unusual for people in lower skilled roles to have significant career progression. In 2012 the Workplace Research Centre at the University of Sydney analysed data from the national Household Income and Labour Dynamics (HILDA) survey to better understand occupational trajectories in Australia. ‘Occupational segmentation’ was seen, where “individuals tended to spend long episodes in the one occupation and entrenched in either high-skill or low-skill roles.” In particular, those who entered a low-skilled or semi-skilled occupation were unlikely to have opportunities to progress. The trajectory is described in more detail below.

“Low-skill trajectories: these were characterised by entrenchment in low-skill work. ‘Mobility’ for those working in low- to semi-skilled roles, such as labourers and clerical worker, was defined by significant turnover, with little movement into higher-skilled roles. These workers were likely to move frequently between these jobs, with little evidence of sustained career progression and with some spells in unemployment or outside the labour force. Alternatively, these low-skill trajectories were also characterised by long tenures in low-skill roles, with little engagement with further study or access to higher skill roles.”²⁷

²³ Department of Employment, 2014

²⁴ Australian Government 2012

²⁵ Australian Government 2012

²⁶ ACYS 2013, quoting Australian Social Inclusion Board 2012

²⁷ Yu et. al. 2012, page 8.

Spending extended time in low-skilled roles is of course not inherently problematic and many people may find that they genuinely enjoy their job despite a lack of career progression. In the community sector context, it is often much more desirable to have long-term staff in caring roles since their relational experiences brings great value to the organization and the people in their care. However, for many in low skilled roles, the experience was unfortunately one of “the absence of vocational identity and pathways. Lack of employer support, resource constraints and lack of confidence were prominent barriers to career development and were exacerbated by precarious terms of employment and/or periods of unemployment.”²⁸

Importantly, however, the report notes that “the one clear exception to this absence of career direction were low-qualified care workers in community services, who reported a clear vocational identity located around the notion of patient care, consistent with their counterparts in higher-skill roles. Despite these aspirations, business and institutional settings severely constrained their ability to progress along a clearly defined pathway.”

Since the Health and Social Assistance sector is projected to experience growth over the coming years, and it is likely to be in the lower-skilled roles, it may be wise for the sector to consider ways to integrate further training into existing low-skilled roles in order to retain committed staff and provide opportunities for those with minimal qualifications who might otherwise remain entrenched in low-skilled, low-paid work. The report acknowledged that this was not simple owing to resource constraints in the sector.

“...resource constraints in the sector manifest themselves by limiting the opportunities of lower-skilled workers for accessing training and development, while acting as broad deterrents for those interested in progressing vertically.”²⁹

Challenging the notion that any job will assist someone to improve their life

A report on Vocational Education and Training found that for young people leaving school early, part-time work was of significant benefit to them to avoid the more persistent workforce exclusion associated with being neither in education nor employment.

“Young people who experience difficulties in their transition from school to full-time work risk prolonged

periods of unemployment, a trend that is exacerbated in the case of early school leavers and those who transition without part-time work.”³⁰

However, if the young person was not studying or training, and the part-time work was not able to offer them scope to progress and develop their career, it would likely have been of limited use in the long term. As a recent report from NATSEM found, part-time work was not a significant predictor of a disadvantaged person or family exiting marginalization over a ten year period.³¹

A trajectory of marginal interaction with the workforce was also problematic, characterised by cycling between short-term low-skilled jobs and unemployment, or out of the labour force. Transitioning out of low-skilled labourer roles, for example, was found to rely strongly on the employer’s willingness to provide training, and workers were reluctant to undertake formal study outside of work owing to time-poverty and financial constraints.³²

Poor psychosocial working environments, including job strain, low social support and job insecurity were also predictors of common mental health disorders.³³ The poorest psychosocial environments were associated with comparable or worse mental health than unemployment.³⁴

In light of these highly significant findings, it is not clear that certain assumptions underlying government policy can be upheld. The perception that long-term unemployed people just need to ‘get a job, any job’ and the related myths of ‘job snobs’ and ‘dole bludgers’ are based on the damaging assumptions that people are always somehow personally responsible for their own poverty, and their pride, or laziness, is all that gets in the way of them exiting it.

Internships as a problematic replacement for entry level jobs

The Fair Work Ombudsman has recently been looking more closely at the growing trend of free or low-paid internships forming the first part of a person’s career. There are a number of considerations for interns overall, with regard to their rights at work, the expectations with which they undertake free labour, and whether businesses are operating fairly by using intern labour.

30 Woods, 2007.

31 Cruwys et. al. 2013.

32 Yu et. al. 2012, page 27

33 Stansfeld & Candy, 2006

34 Butterworth et. al., 2011

28 Yu et. al., 2012

29 Yu et. al., 2012, page 9.

However the increase in internships, occurring at the same time as a decrease in entry-level positions, has caused a particular problem for young people of lower socio-economic backgrounds. The report states that in the UK, “trade unions argued that internships... inhibited labour market access by many young people from disadvantaged and poor backgrounds, and that, in industries where extended periods of unpaid work was becoming the norm, many were excluded altogether and skills gaps were exacerbated.”³⁵ This suggests that even if participation in further education is equally accessible by people of disadvantaged backgrounds, job outcomes post graduation are not equalised simply through participation in the same courses. People with dependents, those living without access to family support, and those with disabilities may not be able to withstand the opportunity cost of spending their time undertaking free labour, even if it leads to better opportunities in the future.

Is there a gender aspect to the unemployment issues young people face?

Currently in Australia, young men have a higher unemployment rate than young women, at 15.1% compared to 12.1% for females. In the ACT, women of all ages have a higher underemployment rate than men, probably relating to their higher likelihood of holding part-time employment.

The Health and Social Assistance sector is nearly 80% female.³⁶ In particular, many of the lower-skilled jobs in the health and community sector are care-based jobs, which are traditionally female-dominated. These jobs are often casual and may not have a clear pathway to full-time employment. While they can be entered with qualifications at Certificate III level, or working towards that qualification, further training would be required to progress in a career path, such as studying at Diploma level. There continues to be proportionally more men employed in higher-level positions in this sector than in lower. In the community sector, for example, up to 85% of the workforce is female, while 40% of senior management roles are held by men.³⁷ The community sector also held the dubious honour of having the largest gender pay gap in Australia in 2012 despite having a high percentage of female senior management staff; this likely speaks to the low rates of pay afforded to those employed in caring roles.

35 Stewart & Owens, 2013, p212.

36 Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency, 2012.

37 Australian Council on Social Services, 2012

It will be important for providers of child care, aged care and disability care services to ensure sufficient opportunities for their staff to pursue further training, both to support the quality of their service and to invest in the career progression of loyal staff. Providers of disability care services have previously voiced concerns about what effect the National Disability Insurance Scheme will have on their ability to fund and support staff training. It remains to be seen how services and workers, as well as individuals, will navigate this change.

Key learnings

- In Australia and in the ACT, there are significantly more people seeking work than there are job vacancies
- The biggest areas of growth in the ACT will be the Public Administration and Safety and the Health and Social Assistance sector
- Entry into low-skilled casual work is associated with remaining in low-skilled jobs with little opportunity for progression

Focus group issues & analysis

There are considerable structural barriers to young people overall in transitioning to employment, and in particular these have heavier impacts on disadvantaged young people. But while there is speculation in policy and media discourse about what might be the source of these problems, and what part the young people themselves play in their own marginalization, there is much less opportunity for young people to speak for themselves. Those young people who do have a voice in these domains are rarely the most disadvantaged.

It was important to gather the thoughts of some young people who had experienced significant and complex disadvantages and were struggling to transition into the workforce.

Methodology

A focus group was convened on the August 28th 2014 with 11 young people. Most of the young people were recruited through Anglicare's Youth Education and Engagement Programs: Y.Engage, Youth Education Program (YEP) and Youth Connections. Two participants were recruited through some the young people's own social connections. The young people had experiences of difficulty transitioning into work

and several were considered ‘Stream 3’ or ‘Stream 4’ by Centrelink, indicating that they had high support needs and significant non-vocational barriers to employment. Several were engaged with Disability-specific Job Service providers.

As a way to encourage participation and acknowledge the value of the young people’s time and contributions, an incentive was provided in the form of a \$40 gift card valid at a number of shops in the Canberra Centre.

The focus group was led by Anglicare’s Co-ordinator of Youth and Educational Support Services and notes taken by Anglicare’s Research and Advocacy Officer. An audio recording was made of the hour-long discussion and this was transcribed after the focus group. Themes and illustrative quotes are shown below.

Questions were asked to the group as a whole, and some participants were more vocal than others. The group leader invited comments from the quieter members of the group where there was an opportunity. The question sheet is attached at the end of this document (see Attachment A).

The demographics of the group were:

- 3 young women and 8 young men
- all aged between 17 and 25

For some of the participants, a sustainable pathway to employment might include other goals before a successful transition to work could be made. However, regardless of the complexities of each young person’s story, their perceptions of services and of the difficulties of transitioning into the workforce are valid and important to consider in optimizing services that will help these young people progress in the future.

Findings

The focus group discussion raised a number of issues, all of which were familiar to workers and young people. It is likely that the views presented here are only one account of a very complex story. Educational, employment and welfare policies affect young people in many ways and in some regards can work, perhaps unintentionally, to further their exclusion. Proposed changes to increase the penalties for continued unemployment are likely to create further difficulties again for some young people, particularly those who are already excluded and lack supportive networks outside government services.

A number of themes could be distilled from the transcript. These are outlined below.

Three of the themes are reflected consistently in findings around Australia. These are the frustration, the importance of education, and the desire to participate in the workforce that young people

| Theme | Components |
|-------------------------|---|
| Frustration | With Centrelink |
| | With Job Services Australia (JSA) agencies |
| | With potential employers |
| Needing networks | Necessary to secure employment if lacking industry experience |
| | Needing support to build networks if none of their own |
| | Discrimination |
| Education & preparation | Importance of education |
| | Lack of preparation for transition to employment at school |
| Wanting to work | Feeling productive |
| | Having money for everyday things and saving for goals |
| | Unemployment a negative experience – lonely, boring |

report. Extensive research by organizations such as the Brotherhood of St Laurence³⁸ and other youth advocacy bodies³⁹ have reliably found similar results consulting with young people on these issues.

The finding that young people needed networks, and assistance to build them, was more specific to the ACT. The ACT-specific context, with a huge proportion of the population employed in the public service and fewer small businesses, as well as a large population of students relative to the Territory population, creates a slightly unusual workforce dynamic. Programs such as those operated with the Youth Attainment and Transitions funding successfully negotiated this difficulty by engaging directly with employers to improve “the quality and quantity of structured

38 See for example, BSL 2014 “Employment Services 2015-2020: Submission to the Department of Employment”; BSL 2014 “Barely working: Young and underemployed in Australia”; BSL 2014 “Australian Youth Unemployment 2014: Snapshot” among many others.
39 See AYAC 2013

workplace learning placements [for example, using] industry focused checklists... to assist employers to gather evidence of student competence.” This assisted employers to understand student needs better and in turn ensure “work placements were better suited to employers’ needs.”⁴⁰ It was important to develop strategic partnerships involving schools, businesses and the ACT community.⁴¹ With the unfortunate closure of the Youth Connections program at the end of 2014, programs of this kind will be threatened and young people supported by them left without access to this type of support.

These themes will be explored in more depth below.

Frustration with Centrelink

Most members of the group expressed frustration with Centrelink, both on their own behalf and on behalf of family members. For example, one young person told the group he had been given an exemption from looking for work because they had him listed as being linked with Youth Connections, and as a result he was not eligible for support from a Job Service Australia (JSA) agency. However, he had been unlinked from Youth Connections more than a year ago.

“going to a job provider, so they could help me make a resume... and they said I couldn’t”

The group found it hard to believe that a person who was actively seeking basic help to find work would be denied it.

“No he should still be able to get that assistance, no matter what.”

Another young person also had trouble where Centrelink had referred him to a JSA, which then advised him that their books were full and they could not take him on. There appeared to be difficulties in communication between agencies.

There are many reports of young people and other disadvantaged groups experiencing difficulties engaging with Centrelink; perhaps most recent is the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition’s survey published in April 2014. This report found that many young people were not aware of the referral and support services Centrelink did offer alongside income support, and that many were at times reluctant to engage with Centrelink even when it was necessary. Information provided by the agency was often difficult to understand and some felt frustrated with the workers who they encountered, who did not always

have enough specialised knowledge to help them with complex issues.⁴²

Frustration with JSAs they had come into contact with

Some young people had had some very frustrating experiences with the JSA agencies they had encountered. Only one person said they had ever successfully transitioned into work with the assistance of a JSA agency. It should be noted that some of the discussion centred around a particular JSA agency with which a number of young people had had negative experiences, and some of the more frustrated comments may have referred more specifically to that agency rather than all JSA agencies. A Disability Employment Service (DES) agency that some young people had started with recently was noted for being particularly helpful, although as stated above, only one participant said they had ever found a job with the assistance of a JSA agency so far.

Some young people reported feeling like the requirements were pointless, for example going in and just spending hours looking for work on the internet. They felt like the workers assisting them lacked interest in their outcomes and were not prepared to help them in a meaningful way.

“I looked for 67 jobs last week and applied for them. It’s like, I can do everything I do [at the JSA], at home. What are you going to do as a job service provider to help me in a different way that I can’t do myself?”

[things that worked when getting support from a JSA included] “them actually wanting to help you instead of ... filling their day time or numbers”

“So instead of saying come in, spend two hours for two days every week on the computer looking for a job to fill their quota, be like for example [DES provider], taking me out to interviews... sit down with me, calling people up to get a job you know, like being involved with people, not saying do this, do that”

Focus group participants’ perception of disinterest on the part of the JSA agencies was particularly frustrating when it appeared that their workers were not listening, or not understanding important things

“I had to tell my worker the same thing 7 times within a period of 10 minutes before he actually understood what I was saying... he’s wasting my time... he just didn’t listen to what I had to say”

40 dandolopartners, 2014, page 55.

41 dandolopartners, 2014, page 56.

42 AYAC, 2014, page 9.

Alongside the workers' apparent disinterest in their outcomes, young people also reported feeling disrespected and disempowered by certain providers. Some young people spoke of how JSAs had the power to cut off payments, creating fear and the perception that they were forced to participate in something which had little value to them in terms of assisting them to transition into work.

"I want to feel like they're involved, like they actually want to help you, not threaten to cut off your payments because you're 'getting paid to come here and search for a job'"

At other times young people reported that workers came across as disrespectful or unnecessarily obstructive.

"they just treat you like a retard"

"they wouldn't pay \$33 to replace my white card for a job I already had lined up... I'm a Stream 3, I'm supposed to have that funding... and they said, you haven't shown us enough commitment."

Frustration with potential employers

Young people expressed frustration that potential employers would not 'give them a chance'. Young people in the focus group spoke about the difficulty of finding a job when they had no experience. The job market was perceived as unfairly circular; they could not get experience without a job, and they could not get a job without experience.

"you need the experience to get the job... "

"you can't get the job because you've got no experience"

"it's a catch 22"

This was demoralizing, as was the current practice among many businesses of not responding to applications that are not successful or short-listed.

"Every time I go to apply for a position I either get no responses or – basically I get no responses whatsoever... it makes me go, obviously nobody wants me to work, so – I stop trying"

Support to sidestep the 'catch 22' of lacking experience was an area where JSAs could have provided considerable assistance, for example through organizing trials or work experience, or through helping young people to build networks to include people which might employ them.

Needing networks to find jobs, and if they didn't have them, needing support to build them

The group concluded that in order to sidestep the barrier of having no experience, personal contacts or networks were the solution. Several of those who had jobs, or had had jobs in the past, acquired them through a family member or someone they knew. One young person had gained his training and qualification in a particular trade through a relative owning a business.

"it's basically one of the only ways to get a job these days, cos no-one's hiring, it's not what you know it's who you know"

Eight people out of the group of 11 agreed with the statement 'it's who you know, not what you know, in Canberra.'

This was an area that young people identified JSAs could have been very helpful, but weren't. Young people, and particularly those experiencing complex disadvantages, as those in the group were, often require support to build networks and find contacts who can guide them and assist in their transition into the workforce.⁴³

One young person had been assisted to set up work experience by the Youth Education Program. She volunteered for a year while she studied in an internship type process, before she was offered work by the business she had volunteered at. She was, at the time of the focus group, working in her chosen field and applying to do further study.

The importance of assistance to build connections with businesses willing to take on a work experience student, and support provided to the student to participate for the duration of the work experience, should not be understated.⁴⁴

When young people were asked to imagine they were a youth worker, and asked how they would support a young person to get work, some of the things they would do included helping build their networks and supports.

"How do you support them? You lift them up and help them out, like write up a resume, all that, and then they get some stuff together, like something to wear for an interview... [we couldn't afford that] but there are organizations that help out with stuff like that, yeah."

⁴³ dandolopartners, 2014, page 7.

⁴⁴ dandolopartners, 2014, page 8-9.

"I would become a personal reference, put my own number on their resume."

It seemed that some of the JSA agencies these young people had worked with had missed the opportunity to assist with the crucial network building that they needed. As one young man identified, young people needed JSAs to help them in a way that they couldn't do themselves. As the group leader summarized during the discussion, young people believed that the characteristics of a good JSA are:

"That they care, you want them to care, you want them to build networks with you, and you want to feel like you're being supported."

In light of the quite demoralizing employment environment the young people perceived, through frustrating interactions with JSA agencies and a lack of opportunities for people without experience, a rather poignant remark was made:

"I would say to the young person to keep trying."

Discrimination

It was important for young people to build positive networks not only in situations where they were relatively isolated, but where their own networks served as a detriment to their finding employment. When asked about experiences of discrimination, two young people volunteered experiences of being turned down for jobs because of their personal connections. For example, one young person believed that both she and her grandmother had been turned down for a job from a major supermarket chain because her sister and grandfather had previously worked there, and her grandfather had been injured and received compensation.

Physical appearance was another attribute a number of the young people associated with discrimination. One young person had had comments made about his own appearance at work, and his tasks apparently allocated on this basis.

"I was not 'pretty' enough to be put on front counter... The supervisor's exact words are 'you have to be in back area making burgers because you are not tappable enough to be put on front counter'. Those were her words! You are not tappable enough! I'm not tappable enough."

While the young person appeared to be in good humour about the incident, the supervisor's comments were unprofessional and the young person

may have had fewer opportunities to gain experience in different areas of the workplace as a result.

Another young person had not experienced discrimination herself but her supervisor at one time had joked to her about not hiring people he didn't find attractive

"he goes, you know what I don't hire ugly people, because he just finished an interview with someone else and then comes over to me because I was a manager, so he was like my friend, but saying that this chick was all ugly and that's why he didn't want to hire her."

The topic of employment difficulties was an emotional one for some participants, and a few group members became increasingly agitated during the discussion. A comment made by an agitated member of the group highlighted that frustrations associated with being unable to secure stable employment can manifest in anger and antipathy towards people from different racial backgrounds. Another young person disagreed with him, saying "It will come down to how good of a worker you are. It should come down to, regardless of your race, how good of a worker you are."

The agitated young person responded, "give me a chance to ... work and I'll show you I'm a better worker..." echoing the concern that young people without experience in an industry had great difficulty finding ways to get the experience they required to enter it and felt that employers weren't 'giving them a chance.'

Almost all would rather work than not, even if the job was not their ideal job

Young people in the group agreed that they would rather work than not work, even if the job they could have was not ideal. These findings are supported by AYAC's recent report which found that 96% of the 134 young people they asked "would prefer to 'have a job and earn their own money' as opposed to 'getting money from Centrelink'."⁴⁵ Some young people spoke about how working was important to them because they felt having a job gave them a sense of purpose.

"I want to work because I don't want to sit on my arse all day and be lazy and... [I want to] go out and do something."

"Gives you purpose"

Not being in paid work is also associated with a five

⁴⁵ AYAC, 2014, page 6.

times higher risk of marginalisation.⁴⁶ Unsurprisingly, several had experienced financial difficulties while they had been unemployed. Some young people had accessed Emergency Relief, mostly while unemployed. At least two young people described poverty as a feeling.

"Well I found when I was living out of home, and not having a job or anything, I found that really hard because like, one you need money to support yourself and also pay rent and all that, so I found it really hard living out of home."

"when I'm not employed... I feel poor, I've got no money"

Some had goals and interests that were out of reach for them without the income a job would provide.

"I say if you want to have the good stuff like say for example my goal's at the moment, get a job ASAP because next year I'd like to go to... the cricket world cup... stay in a hotel. So that's why [I want to] get a job."

For most of the group, money was a major part of why they wanted to work. All but four group members agreed that working was 'about the money'. One of those who disagreed said it wasn't so much about money as she just liked working.

"Because I like talking to people, and like helping people, it makes me happy. I get told that I'm really pretty and stuff, by drunk guys and stuff"

The social component to working was also widely acknowledged, whether or not their priority was financial. Most of the group agreed that they experienced loneliness and boredom when they were unemployed.

"[you] have to find new things to occupy yourself like they kind of get really boring so you've got to find something else to do by yourself"

"you get bored"

"Well I was working for 6 months, and I got a complication, and then when I stopped working, I didn't have any friends because I only just moved to Canberra, so like, obviously I just felt like really lonely"

One young person expressed that he would not experience boredom if he wasn't working, because he could find ways to occupy himself with TV, books and games.

Young people didn't seem to have received significant preparation for work during school

It was clear that preparation for the workplace was variable across the young people's different educational experiences. Two had accessed a clear pathway to a trade or occupation. One young person had commenced in a construction pathway, and gained a certificate. He had also gained his asbestos certificate, although it had been issued with his name spelt incorrectly. He was looking for a job. The other, who had attended a supported education program through high school, had commenced in a pathway towards hospitality early in his high school career.

"I went out to functions like [at] the National Zoo and Aquarium, and did front of house, whatever, cooked and make things beforehand, and do front of house. And then through my work experience went to the AIS and cooked breakfast, lunch and dinner."

For these particular young people, it had not yet resulted in stable employment. However, the young person with hospitality training had held a number of positions in the past and was engaged in volunteer work.

Although their transition was not yet complete, the sense of preparation they had through participating in a Vocational Education and Training (VET) type program is supported by the literature. School-based VET programs "have a particularly positive impact on the transition to post-school study for early school leavers... shown by a higher take-up of apprenticeships, traineeships and upper-level VET courses... compared with early school leavers who do not participate."⁴⁷

Some of the other young people had not experienced much work preparation through school. When asked if they had, for example, written resumes at school, most said no. For some, this was owing to marginal participation in school. One young person had missed any work preparation he might have participated in because he was suspended frequently.

Some of the group who had had participated in Anglicare's Youth Education Program (YEP) after disengaging from school had completed courses such as the Certificate I in Work Preparation. This course included necessary skills such as resume writing, communication and Work Health and Safety processes. YEP had also assisted young people to

⁴⁶ Cruwys et al, 2013, page 9.

⁴⁷ Woods, 2007.

enrol in and study other courses, and also set up work experience placements.

Reflecting on the importance of education

It was widely acknowledged in the group that education was of great importance, not simply because of the skills and knowledge gained but in being able to show a certificate of completion to a potential employer in support of their application to work.

When asked what they would advise other young people to do, in order to support them into work, young people said to focus on school and not other things.

"Stay in fricken school... to have that education you have it under your belt, you have a certificate stating you have that much of an education... that you have done it... just having the education under your belt will help you get the job."

"[I would tell a young person that] at your age relationships aren't exactly the most important thing... that they should probably refocus on school work... I was a lot more focused on guys than I was focused on school."

In particular, young people with poor literacy had great difficulty in finding work.

"And like people who have like, dyslexia, or can't read or write properly and don't know their maths, they just won't give them a go"

Some were studying, or planning to study, at university or diploma level.

"I'm aiming to do a nursing course if hairdressing doesn't work out for me."

"I finished my application!"

"I'm doing a dual diploma in Business and Business Management."

Barriers to education were also discussed. Young people identified issues such as disinterest from educators, and personal struggles. "Self confidence" and "motivation" were mentioned as impediments to engaging properly in study. Young people felt that these types of issues were not helped by educators not only appearing disinterested, but declaring the same.

"When I was back in, like, back in high school and I realized that the teachers really didn't care if you were there or not they would still get paid."

"Yeah they said it to us at TAFE, they said we don't

care if you come here, and it's like, shouldn't you do something as our teacher to instill self-motivation... or, don't act like YOU don't care, lead by example...

"They said that to me at [school name] that they really don't care if you're there or not because they get paid either way."

It is not clear that these participants would necessarily have had better educational outcomes if they did perceive teachers as caring more about their engagement in school. As found in a paper recently published by the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth, by the time a young person is aged 15, schools have very little influence on their engagement in school, particularly on young people at risk of early school leaving.⁴⁸ While the study found that a small number of school characteristics, including a perception of high teacher quality, had a small effect on student engagement, other factors were much more influential. However, "the impact of perceived teacher quality, as measured via teachers' use of structuring and scaffolding strategies in the classroom, further improved at-risk students' cognitive engagement with school."⁴⁹

Barriers to work identified

Throughout the course of the discussion, young people identified some issues that made it harder for them to look for work or, having applied, to be considered by employers. Lack of experience was identified as a major problem, owing to the lack of job vacancies that were prepared to train new staff or take on a person without relevant experience. A level of frustration was voiced around potential employers 'not giving them a chance' because they lacked experience.

"A lot of businesses don't give people chances... you need experience to work in a place but nobody will hire you because you've got no experience, you get the experience by working there."

There was considerable discussion around internet access. It was identified as one of the most important things needed in order to apply for jobs.

"These days it's like, every time I've gone in to get a proper job, cos like I only do every now and then at [workplace], but yeah, every time I've gone in there, they've always told me to go online"

"Everywhere does, Coles, McDonalds"

48 Gemici & Lu, 2014

49 Gemici & Lu, 2014, page 30.

Almost nobody in the group had regular internet access at home. Four people said that they had internet at home, but even of those four, not all actually had access to the internet most of the time.

"I have a computer but no internet"

"I [have internet] but I've got no credit"

"I've got internet but I can never get onto the computer because my mum's always got the computer"

Young people mentioned the library and the youth centre as places to access the internet if, and when, they needed to. They identified that these were not always a perfect solution but they were accessible.

"[printing at the library is] 25 cents a page. But bro, we're going to a library to use the internet, we obviously don't have money"

"Or you just like come [to the Anglicare youth centre], because it's free"

"Yeah the youth centre"

"Yeah that's why this place is really good and they should never close it!"[emphasis his own]

Some participants recommended handing resumes to shops and applying for work directly that way. Although some spoke about using this technique successfully, one person was concerned that it might be technically illegal to approach local businesses with his resume owing to 'no soliciting' signs around the town centre.

A number of young people identified that a barrier to education was feeling as if the teachers at school didn't care if they came to class or not. Some had encountered Job Services Australia workers who also appeared to give young people the impression that their personal outcomes didn't matter. The sense that the teachers and workers would get paid whether young people participated meaningfully or not seemed to impact, not only on how well education and services were delivered, but on how important young people may have perceived the activity at the time.

Services which appeared to take a genuine interest in the young people's outcomes, interests and lives appeared much more successful. In many cases where a person has particularly complex issues or high needs, a much more holistic support model is required to support sustainable transitions into employment. A pilot program conducted by Anglicare in 2010-11 found successful outcomes for the 'Home to Work' model which assisted many of its highly disadvantaged

participants into work or along a pathway towards being able to transition into work.⁵⁰

In a policy context where the Federal Government intends to dramatically change income support benefits for young unemployed people, there is a very uncertain future for many young people struggling with their transition to full-time work. It is important to clarify that, since the young people in this focus group who were not working were mostly classified as Stream 3 or Stream 4 for JSA, and mostly engaged with a Disability Employment Service (DES) provider, these particular young people would not necessarily be subject to the long waiting periods without income support.⁵¹ However, with the closure of Youth Connections at the end of 2014, young people in similar situations to those who participated in the focus group will have less support in the future.

Key learnings

- Some of the systems intended to assist young people into work are not functioning optimally
- When employers are reluctant to hire people without experience, job service providers need to help young people find work experience or relevant volunteer work
- Where people providing education or employment support appear disinterested in their progress, young people get the message that the activity is not important or that their participation is not important

⁵⁰ Anglicare ACT, 2012.

⁵¹ Department of Social Services, 2014.

Internet & Newspaper jobs snapshot

In order to place the findings of this project in an ACT context, a snapshot of local job advertisements was developed. Over a snapshot period during September, positions advertised in The Canberra Times, Seek.com.au, MyCareer.com.au and Gumtree.com.au were captured and categorised to find the number and nature of positions which did not require experience or qualifications. The findings from this snapshot clearly supported the impressions that young people conveyed to us: there are very few positions advertised through traditional means which are available at all to any person entering the labour force without qualifications or experience, and of those that are, many do not provide a pathway to sustainable employment or vocational development.

Methodology

The researchers are well aware that it was not possible to capture every available job, or even every advertised job. It is clearly acknowledged that this methodology is not able to conclusively find exact results. A true measure of the number of jobs available at any time, through formal and informal methods, is very difficult to develop. Not all jobs are advertised through traditional methods of newspaper or online; and of those that are, not all are advertised in the major sources. Many ads suggest multiple positions, but not how many, so it is difficult to determine how many jobs are advertised overall and find a proportion of positions suitable for people without experience or qualifications with any degree of accuracy. Meanwhile significant employers of young people such as major chain supermarkets, fast food restaurants and shops frequently do not advertise at all but hire continually using an online application process. Data about job vacancies in these businesses is not freely available.

However, despite these limitations, this was a valuable and interesting exercise. It supported the anecdotal perceptions of the young people involved in the project and highlighted the current issues relevant in the ACT context.

Ads were collected from Seek.com.au, MyCareer.com.au, Gumtree.com.au and The Canberra Times over a period of 2 weeks. Jobs were considered 'entry level' if they did not specify a qualification, a role title which was associated with a qualification or professional membership, or any required experience. First-year apprentice advertisements were included but not later year apprentices. In The Canberra Times, where an

ad suggested multiple positions, the greater of 2 or the number of positions individually mentioned was recorded. It was not practical to do this for website advertisements owing to the large numbers of ads. Website ads were assumed to relate to one job only.

As a result of the assumptions above, the frequent cross-posting of advertisements for the same job, and in light of the significant employment sources not able to be counted, it was not feasible to construct a sum total of the jobs advertised. Findings were treated by individual day and individual medium published. A sample day was then taken, based on the day with the largest number of advertisements during the snapshot period, and the jobs on that day analysed further to determine the nature of the jobs listed.

Findings

Findings across the different media were variable. All positions were counted if they met the criteria described, but this meant that roles that might only last a few days or, in the case of 'mystery shoppers', hours, were included.

Canberra Times

The Canberra Times has a significant set of classified advertisements including jobs on Wednesdays and Saturdays. Other days, in general, have only a very small number of employment vacancies advertised. Overall, the Canberra Times appeared to hold the greatest proportion of suitable ads.

CANBERRA TIMES JOB ADS FOR SEPTEMBER 2014

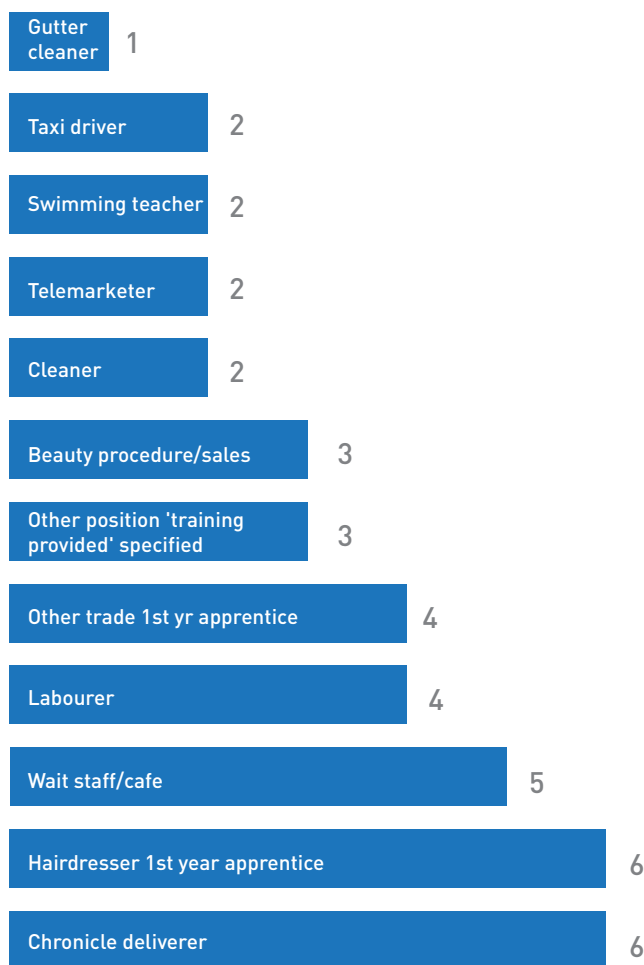
| DATE | % suitable for no experience/qualifications | Total ADS |
|--------|---|-----------|
| WED 09 | 34 | 82 |
| SAT 10 | 33 | 180 |
| WED 17 | 31 | 117 |
| SAT 20 | 22 | 160 |

There were 40 jobs considered 'entry-level' out of a total of 180 advertised on the 13th of September. The jobs are categorised further below. Positions such as 'Chronicle deliverer', cleaner, labourer and telemarketer are all likely to be associated with a marginal workforce trajectory, with very low income and few opportunities to grow within the position,

develop skills or progress to a higher skilled position. Within these jobs, several required a driver's licence, own transport and/or white card. A further 24% are for first-year apprentice positions which, while potentially leading to further training and development, are likely to be very low paid jobs.

Canberra Times Breakdown of entry-level ads: SEPTEMBER 12/09/2014

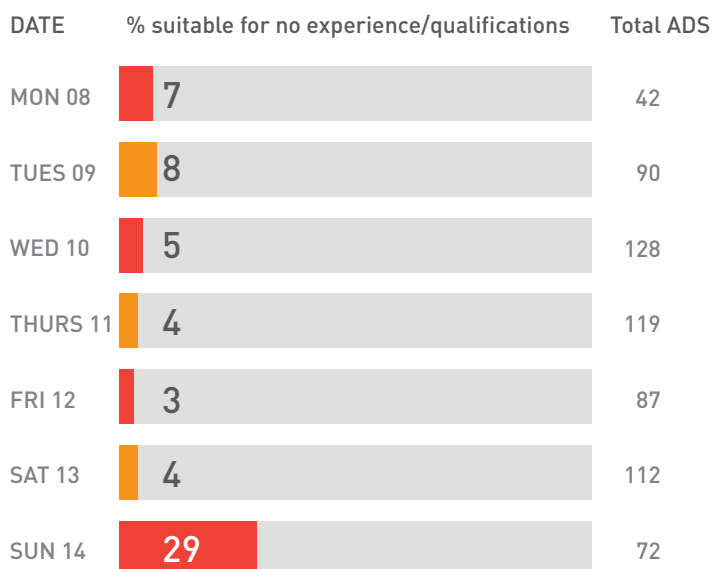
Number of ads



MyCareer

It would appear that on most days, substantially less than 10% of jobs advertised on MyCareer.com.au might be accessible to a person without experience or qualifications. The unusually high result on the Sunday contained many of the same ads found in the Saturday Canberra Times, perhaps reflecting a particularity in the system of publishing ads across various media. Many of the ads on MyCareer.com.au on the 14th suitable for inexperienced or unqualified people are those discussed above.

MyCareer JOB ADS FOR SEPTEMBER 2014



The day with the largest number of advertisements found on MyCareer was Wednesday the 10th, where only 7 positions out of the total 128 advertised were suitable for a person without qualifications or experience. The most frequent position was Babysitter, representing 3 out of the 7 ads, followed by two 1st-year hairdressing apprenticeship positions. While private babysitting work may be a source of (limited) income for an unskilled person, it is unlikely to lead to further opportunities to develop skills and would be associated with a marginal career trajectory. The advertisement for a wait staff member specified that a full time position was available. However, on closer observation, all entry level jobs identified on MyCareer apart from babysitting roles were duplicates of those identified in The Canberra Times above.

MyCareer.com.au Breakdown of entry-level ads: SEPTEMBER 10/09/2014

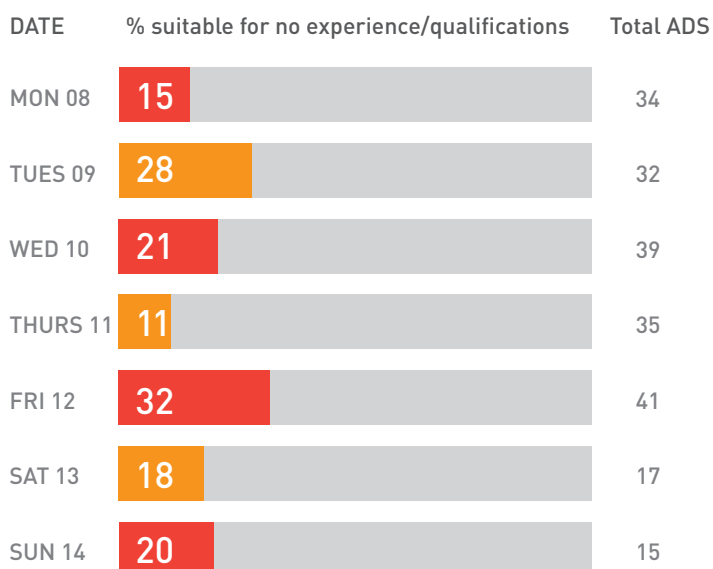
Number of ads



Gumtree

Gumtree.com.au had a higher proportion of informal jobs such as very short term roles, but had fewer roles overall.

GUMTREE JOB ADS FOR SEPTEMBER 2014

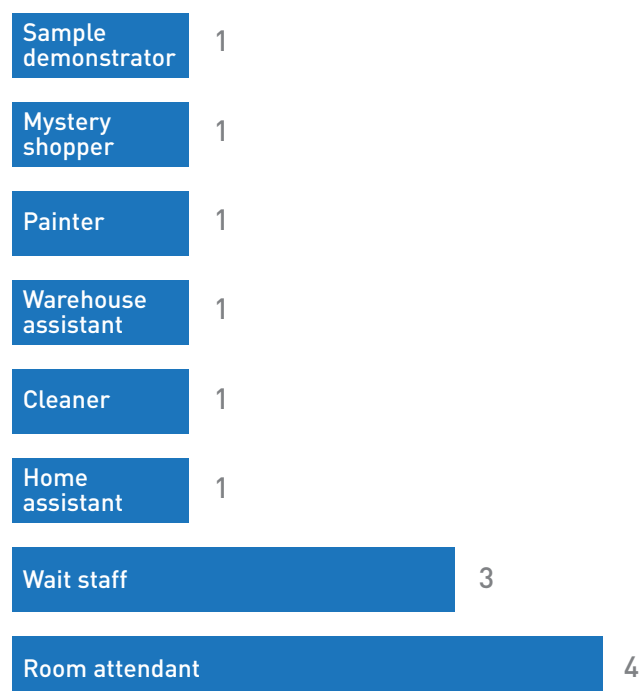


Again, although it appears that there are several entry level positions advertised each day, very few were in a field where there would be an opportunity to progress further in a vocation. Cleaning, mystery shopping, babysitting and casual wait staff were regular opportunities along with labouring. As observed in Section 1, jobs of this kind carry a significant risk that they will not lead into sustained career progression.

On Friday the 12th, on which the most jobs were advertised on Gumtree.com.au, 13 advertisements were deemed suitable for inexperienced or unqualified people out of a total of 41. The most frequent position was Room Attendant, all 4 of which were put up by the same advertiser and which appeared to be directed at recruiting people from overseas on particular visas. Other ads included 'mystery shopper' and an unusually worded 'home assistant' position which made suggestions about the required ethnicity of the successful applicant. While some jobs did not specify the hours required, all of the positions were likely to be casual, part-time or short-term contract based.

Gumtree.com.au Breakdown of entry-level ads: SEPTEMBER 10/09/2014

Number of ads



Seek

Seek.com.au had the highest number of job ads, and a similarly low proportion of opportunities for people without qualifications or experience. Those few jobs that were advertised however did appear to be more likely to be associated with a sustainable career path; notably, on Friday the 12th, out of the 11 ads considered suitable for a person entering the workforce without qualifications, only one was likely to be associated with a marginal vocational trajectory (Dog Minder). Jobs in sales and hospitality however, which represented 45% of the jobs found, are usually shift-based and another job (Monitoring station operator) specified that it was shift-based. Depending on the number of shifts available, the risks associated with part-time or casual work may impact on employees here. However, since training was also mentioned with some positions, there may still be scope for growth in some of these positions.

Seek.com.au JOB ADS FOR SEPTEMBER 2014

| DATE | % suitable for no experience/qualifications | Total ADS |
|----------|---|-----------|
| MON 08 | 5 | 170 |
| TUES 09 | 7 | 153 |
| WED 10 | 6 | 169 |
| THURS 11 | 6 | 179 |
| FRI 12 | 6 | 191 |
| SAT 13 | 18 | 28 |
| SUN 14 | 11 | 9 |

National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) identified three broad vocational pathways through their study of HILDA data: high skill trajectory, low skill trajectory, and marginal attachment. The third of three vocational pathways identified by NCVER, a marginal attachment to the workforce, is characterised by "clusters of activity outside the labour market... [which] can incorporate periods of paid employment, but these episodes appear to occur on the margins of the labour market. Marginal attachment includes the unemployed and also affected women moving in and out of the labour force, as well as older workers with decreasing attachment to the labour market."⁵²

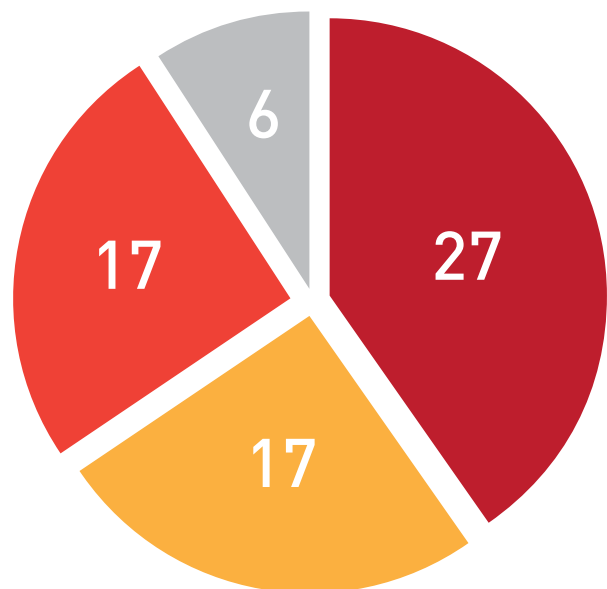
The sample captured suggested that overall, around 10-15 % of ads in traditional media in the sample were suitable for a person with no qualifications or experience. It is important to note that all figures are approximate owing to the difficulties in capturing accurate information and excluding repeated ads, as outlined above, and a significant number of entry-level jobs are not advertised through these methods at all. Out of these jobs, around 40% were those which could potentially lead to a sustainable career path, 26% were likely to remain in casual/part-time low skilled work, 25% were considered marginal and 9% could not be categorised based on the information available.

Seek.com.au Breakdown of entry-level ads: SEPTEMBER 12/09/2014

Number of ads

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Dental assistant | 1 |
| Sales - Apple | 1 |
| Monitoring station operator | 1 |
| Dog minder | 1 |
| Data entry | 1 |
| Fashion casual | 2 |
| Wait/cafe/bar | 2 |
| 1st yr Apprenticeship | 2 |

Categorization of the entry-level positions found



- Entry level & could lead to sustainable employment
- PT/casual and may not lead to FT/sustainable work
- Marginal
- Unknown

⁵² Yu et. al. (2012), page 8.

40% of the entry-level positions found were considered to potentially lead to sustainable employment. However, around half of these were first-year apprenticeship positions, many in hairdressing. While these positions combine study and work, they are paid at a low rate and incur a fee per semester for the training component. However, those which were not apprenticeships and appeared to be full-time or lead to ongoing work may well lead to sustainable employment for those who enter those jobs.

Meanwhile another 26% of the jobs found appeared likely to lead to a low-skilled trajectory without much opportunity to develop into a sustainable career progression. These jobs were part-time or casual in nature without a suggestion that they might progress to more hours, which would leave a person seeking full-time work underemployed and on a low income.

Around 25% were associated with a marginal vocational trajectory owing to their highly casual nature, low pay and lack of options for sustainable career progression. These jobs included delivery of a local newspaper, babysitting, very short term jobs and telemarketing. As Yu et. al. observed, there is limited mobility between low, medium and high skill trajectories. Further study or training would need to be undertaken outside of work in order for a person in this type of occupation to move into sustainable employment; often a significant ask for a person on a low and unstable income.

Although accurate figures on total regional job vacancies are hard to find, it is clear that the vast majority of jobs advertised through the major traditional methods in Canberra are inaccessible to young people without experience or qualifications. Very few of the jobs accessible to people without qualifications or experience were full-time; most were part-time or casual.

The findings of this section, albeit limited, strongly support the perception of young people in the focus group who felt that there were very few jobs accessible to a person without experience. Further, the jobs that were available were rarely in a role which was associated with a clear vocational path.

Key learnings

- The findings of the 'Job Snapshot' experiment support the focus group's perception that there are few job vacancies that don't require experience, and those that do fit this criteria are rarely linked to a clear vocational path or opportunities for full-time employment.
- While we did find that entry level job vacancies exist in the ACT, the vast majority of jobs advertised require either qualifications or experience, and often both of these at very substantial levels and with a very specific focus.
- Traditional web/newspaper media does not appear to be the most effective place for young people without qualifications or experience to seek jobs. Given the evidence from our focus groups, we question the practice of some job service providers who ask young people to spend time just looking for jobs in the paper or on the internet. Job service providers might instead use their networks to organize trial shifts, work experience or internship type roles to support young people to build their own networks and ultimately secure jobs.

Report conclusion

This project has used three quite different components to examine different aspects of a very complex and important issue. Youth unemployment is an increasing problem in Australia and can have lasting effects on young people's engagement with the workforce and broader wellbeing. The structures in place intended to support the transition from school to further education or employment are not effective for the most vulnerable young people who need the support most.

Based on the available research, it is difficult to see how disadvantaged young people can improve their circumstances by simply hoping to obtain short-term or casual work such as many of the jobs found through searching online and in the newspaper. Unfortunately, as entry-level jobs at all skill levels are replaced with internships which are less accessible to disadvantaged people, even completing further study is no guarantee of a stable, sustainable transition to work.

To ensure the best opportunities for the future lives of our young people, particularly those who enter adulthood with significant vulnerability, the following is required:

- Targeted and holistic support for vulnerable young people to find work – support which is based on establishing relationships with the young person and not limited to a mere bureaucratic systemic response. Workers providing this support require youth work skills as their primary skill set.
- Reform in the Health and Social Assistance sector to provide employment progression pathways for low-skilled workers
- The development of employment pathways utilizing internships with meaningful opportunity to progress to sustainable full time employment

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 - 'Table 11. Labour force status by Sex – Australian Capital Territory – Trend and Original'
 - 'Table 17. Labour force status by Sex – Persons aged 15-24 years – Trend, Seasonally adjusted and Original'
 - 'Table 22. Labour underutilization by Age and Sex – Trend, Seasonally adjusted and Original'
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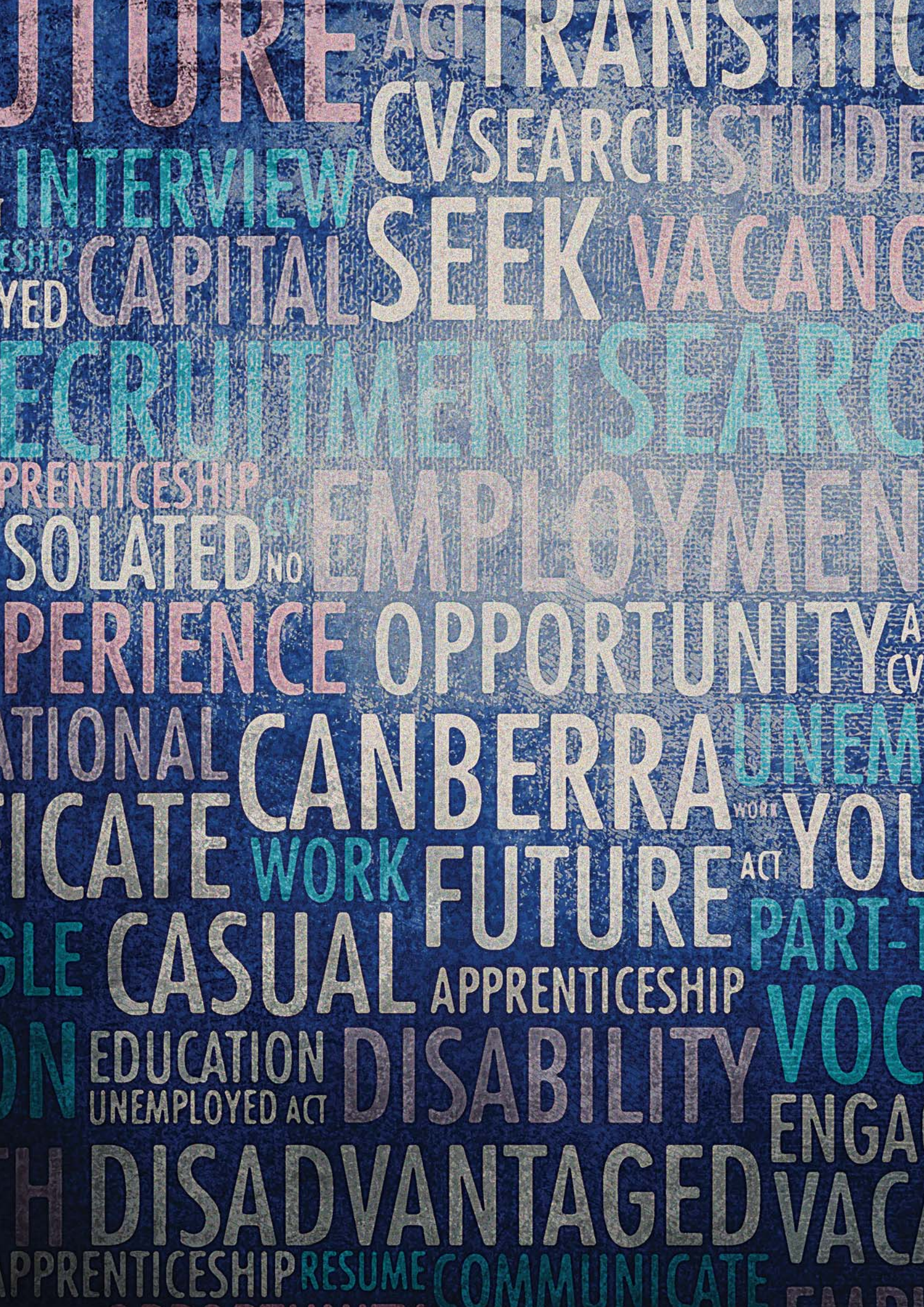
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