# After The ATAR III

The Role of Passion and Purpose in Connecting Youth to Meaningful Education and Employment

YEAR IS YouthSense



## WE ARE

## YEAR13 IS AN EDTECH THAT EMPOWERS YOUNG PEOPLE TO MAKE MORE INFORMED DECISIONS ABOUT THEIR FUTURE AND ENCOURAGES THEM TO LEAD HAPPIER AND MORE FULFILLING LIVES.

We are a trusted advisor to 1.5 million young Australians each year, helping them to navigate their post-school transition and ultimately find more meaningful employment. The Year13 marketplace hosts our end-to-end career and life advice platform, which supports youth in the development of their optimal pathway across education, employment and experiences.

Powered by Year13, YouthSense is a youth insights platform focused on educating employers, brands, government, teachers, career advisors and parents on best practices when aiding youth through their post-school transition, with particular focus on understanding, communicating and working with young people. This is achieved through the provision of quantitative and qualitative data collated from youth surveys conducted by Year13 and YouthSense.

# After The ATAR III



The Role of Passion and Purpose in Connecting Youth to Meaningful Education and Employment





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"School was a great environment to allow me to gain a fundamental insight into who I was as a person - what matters to me, the hobbies and strengths I have. I think high school is an incredibly important point in life. It genuinely has the ability to cultivate passions."

21 | F | NSW



AFTER THE ATAR III FOREWORD

## **Foreword**

Thinking back to my high school days, I realise now how incredibly influential teachers are to our development as young people. I think we can all recall at least one or two teachers from our youth who truly inspired and supported us through our tumultuous teen years. I was fortunate enough to have one high school teacher who really made a difference and I can honestly say that if it wasn't for Mr Cooper, I don't know what I would be doing now—certainly not Year13.

During most of my schooling life, I was perceived as the kid who wasn't quite reaching his potential. I was always getting distracted, preferring to give my attention to activities that fell outside of the classroom (namely skipping school to surf). But—for reasons that I couldn't understand at the time—under Mr Cooper's guidance, I started to perform better.

Of all teachers I'd had growing up, why was this one teacher able to unlock not only my interest, but also my potential? It wasn't until we conducted this research and wrote this report that I began to understand; what is clear to me now is that it all came down to passion.

You see, Mr Cooper contextualised everything he said by relating it back to the real world. He explained topics in a way that allowed me to vividly see their application in my own life and he was genuinely interested and passionate about the subjects he taught. He himself had studied these things in depth, telling me about the projects and essays he'd completed at university that related to what we were covering in class. Before commencing a new topic, he would first explain how he had applied what we were about to learn in the past and when it had benefitted him in his own personal experience.

I never gave this much thought until recently. And yet, when I look back, I see the significant influence it has had on my life.

That is why I believe this report is so important.

Being a teacher is hard work; there are conflicting objectives, time constraints and kids like me that just won't shut up. Teachers are one of the most important assets we have as a society, so I want to be very clear that this report is designed to empower change within the system that will not only optimise student outcomes, but aid teachers as well. We are all on the same mission and I am yet to meet anyone within the schooling system who doesn't have the best of intentions for all young people. But it is the peripherals that are important here; shining a light on the issues that are often kept in the dark, not due to a lack of awareness but simply a lack of data and credible backing to give them the attention they deserve.

This is our intention with After the ATAR III: The Role of Passion and Purpose in Connecting Youth to Meaningful Education and Employment; utilising the voice of young Australians to shed light on the issues that affect us all and help the various stakeholders and youth influencers come together to champion meaningful change in young people's lives.

- Will Stubley | CEO & Co-Founder | Year13

## Year13 Methodology

#### **AFTER THE ATAR III SURVEYS**



Three national surveys of Australian youth, conducted by Year13 and YouthSense between May 2019 and December 2019.

Total responses = 4,681

These three surveys formed the basis of this research paper and were designed to gather comprehensive information about youth (aged 15-24). These surveys were conducted online and respondents were sourced via social media and through Year13's eDM (electronic direct mail) database. Youth quotes featured throughout this report were sourced from extended response questions included in each survey.

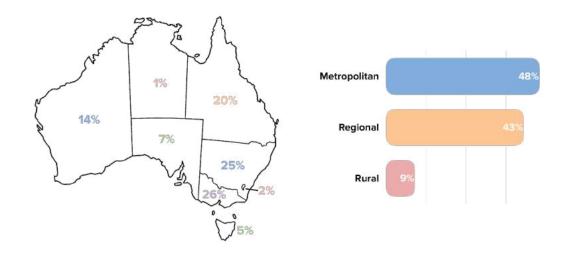
For ease of reading, we will not reference data collated from these surveys. It can be assumed that data in this report, unless otherwise referenced, was derived from this research.

See right for combined demographics of these surveys.

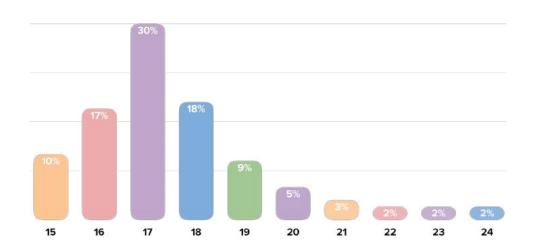


AFTER THE ATAR III YEAR13 METHODOLOGY

#### **LOCATION BREAKDOWN**

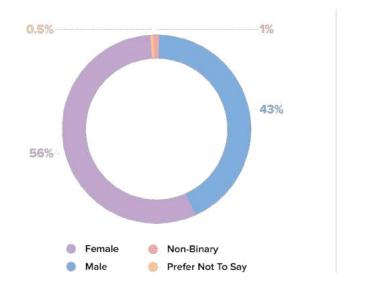


#### **AGE BREAKDOWN**



#### **GENDER IDENTIFICATION**

#### **OUR RESPONDENTS**





#### Introduction

EACH YEAR, YEAR13 GAINS MORE
INSIGHT INTO THE SIGNIFICANCE OF
YOUTH ISSUES AND HOW THE SHARED
EXPERIENCES AND STRUGGLES OF
YOUNG AUSTRALIANS CAN PERMEATE
INTO WIDER SOCIETY.

In 2017, our first *After The ATAR* report delved into the status of youth mental health in Australia and highlighted that many young people are struggling with the transitional journey from school into employment and further education and training. Then, in 2018, *After The ATAR II* shed light on the decision-making process and factors influencing young people's post-school choices, the findings of which showed a lack of comprehensive understanding of different pathway options and a favouring of university amongst students, teachers, schools and parents alike.

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AFTER THE ATAR III INTRODUCTION

The ramifications of this lack of understanding can be linked to a number of wider social issues. Higher rates of youth being pushed towards higher education has contributed to an increase in university dropout rates and an undersupply of students in Vocational Education and Training (VET), resulting in low apprenticeship and traineeship commencement rates and a national skills shortage in many trade roles.<sup>1</sup>

This lead Year13 to consider; in what other ways could youth issues be impacting Australia as a nation?

The effects of youth issues on government spending alone are staggering, particularly in the portfolios of education, employment and health. For example, currently in Australia there are 404,000 underemployed youth<sup>2</sup> and 580,000 people between the ages of 15-29 classified as NEETs (Not in Employment Education or Training).<sup>3</sup> If youth unemployment and underemployment were brought in line with the rest of the population, it is estimated that there would be \$11.3 billion in additional Gross Domestic Product.<sup>4</sup>

Additionally, an undersupply of young talent entering in-demand industries has contributed to a national skills shortage, whereby inaction on major transport projects due to the skills crisis is estimated to see the costs of road congestion grow from \$19 billion in 2016 to \$39 billion in 2031.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, mental health issues amongst people aged 12 to 25 costs the economy \$10.6 billion a year,<sup>6</sup> while the average cost per youth suicide is valued at over \$2.8 million.<sup>7</sup>

Year13 postulates that in order to decrease government spending in these areas, preventative measures need to be implemented at the student level to address the root cause of these problems. Instead of reactive solutions, proactive approaches employed earlier, particularly in high school, may help curb these social issues before they develop into significant and expensive national problems.

Our previous ATAR reports have highlighted that there is a breakdown in the transition process out of high school and that this has implications on education, employment and mental health. Thus, we wanted to identify a solution that could improve this transitional journey and encourage more positive post-school outcomes for youth.

After collating 4,681 survey responses from Australian youth aged between 15 and 24, it became clear from our research that passion and purpose play a substantial role in these formative high school years. In After the ATAR III: The Role of Passion and Purpose in Connecting Youth to Meaningful Education and Employment, we explore the notion that supporting young people's passions and providing a sense of purpose may have a hugely beneficial impact on students transitioning out of high school.

Further, we delve into the ways in which the Australian school system is impacting youth's discovery of their passions, to what degree schools are connecting the curriculum to a greater purpose beyond the classroom, and the effects of finding meaningful post-school education and/or employment on building resilience against mental illness.

We posit that with greater connections to what they are doing, young people are able to make better decisions about their future. This in turn could have a significant impact on society as a whole and improve the happiness and mental wellbeing of entire generations to come.





**CHAPTER ONE** 

# The State of Passion



46% OF YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE
A PASSION THEY ARE
DEDICATING THEMSELVES
TO SERIOUSLY

3% OF YOUTH FEEL THERE
ARE NO BARRIERS TO
PURSUING THEIR PASSIONS



CHAPTER ONE THE STATE OF PASSION





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92% OF YOUNG PEOPLE SAY THEY HAVE A GOAL FOR WHAT THEY WANT TO ACCOMPLISH IN LIFE



## The State of Passion

## WHAT ARE YOUNG PEOPLE PASSIONATE ABOUT AND HOW ARE THEY PURSUING THESE PASSIONS?

They say that if you find a career that you are passionate about, you will never work a day in your life. While this concept might seem abstract and intangible, recent research indicates that passion and purpose play a significant role in developing a sense of connection to one's work, and that this in turn can impact on an individual's mental wellbeing. At this stage, much of this research has occurred outside of Australia, which is why Year13 wished to delve deeper into the state of passion within our nation, with a particular focus on young people in the areas of mental health, education and employment.

We surveyed thousands of young Australians about their passions—whether they had any, and if so, what they were and whether they were actively pursuing them. In this chapter, we explore current trends in the passions and motivations of youth, including who supports them in following their passions and who—or what—holds them back. Note that when we discuss 'passions' here, we are referring to the goals and dreams our respondents have for their life and career, even if they view these goals as too far-fetched or out of reach to achieve.

## WHAT IS PASSION AND PURPOSE?

The definition of passion and purpose is put most simply by University of California Management Professor, Morten T. Hansen, who believes that, "Passion is 'do what you love', while purpose is 'do what contributes."

According to a study published in the International Journal of Social Sciences & Educational Studies, passion is "motivation, seeking for the new and willingness to learn. Passion is showing a strong tendency and willingness through spending time and energy on an activity that someone likes or believes is important. Being passionate is closely related to learning and experiencing new ideas." <sup>9</sup>

The Director of the University of California's Institute of Human Development, Professor Ronald E. Dahl, believes that feelings of passion are rooted in the

same deep-brain systems as biological drives and the primitive elements of emotion. Despite the primality of passion, it can be harnessed to service higher-order goals.

"Passion intertwines with the highest level of human endeavour: passion for ideas and ideals, passion for beauty, passion for music and art. And the passion to succeed in a sport, business, or politics, and passion towards a person, activity, object, or pursuit can also inspire transcendent feelings," Dahl says. <sup>10</sup>

Meanwhile, the Director of Stanford University's Centre on Adolescence, Professor William Damon, defines purpose as a stable and generalised intention to accomplish something that is at the same time meaningful to the self and consequential for the world beyond the self. For young people, he says "finding a clear purpose in life is essential for their achievement of happiness and satisfaction in life... A purpose can organise an entire life, imparting not only meaning but also inspiration and motivation for ongoing learning and achievement." <sup>11</sup>

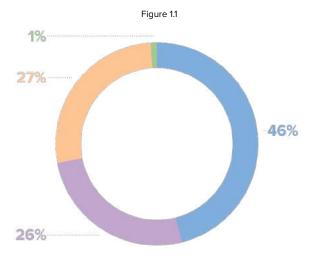
CHAPTER ONE THE STATE OF PASSION

Year13 wished to test the notion that passion and purpose could in fact affect levels of motivation and satisfaction in youth, both within the school environment and beyond. But first, we had to understand whether young people felt they had identified passions in their lives and whether or not they were actively trying to pursue them.

## THE STATE OF PASSION AMONGST AUSTRALIAN YOUTH

When it comes to identifying their passions, our surveys show that less than half of young Australians have a passion they are currently dedicating themselves to seriously (46%). The remainder have passions that they are not dedicating themselves to seriously (26%), or do not currently have any passions but are searching for them (27%). Just 1% of young people say they do not know what they are passionate about and are not interested in finding a passion (Figure 1.1).

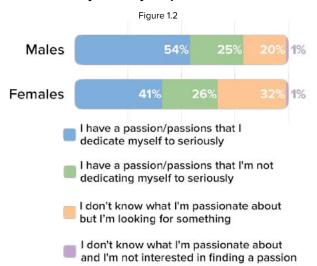
## Which of the following best describes you and your passions?



- I have a passion/passions that I dedicate myself to seriously
- I have a passion/passions that I'm not dedicating myself to seriously
- I don't know what I'm passionate about, but I'm looking for something
- I don't know what I'm passionate
   about and I'm not interested in finding a passion

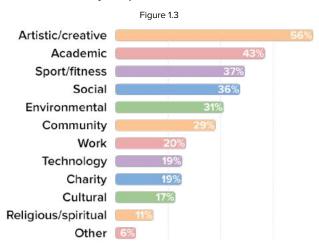
The results across young people from metropolitan, regional and rural areas were largely consistent, but interestingly, when broken down by gender, males were more likely to be pursuing their passions. 54% of males say they have a passion which they are dedicating themselves to seriously, while only 41% of females attest to the same (Figure 1.2).

#### Which of the following best describes you and your passions?



Artistic and creative endeavours are the most popular area in which young people's passions lie. Following are academic, sports and fitness, social and environmental. Religious and spiritual endeavours are where the least amount of young people find their passions (Figure 1.3).

#### Which of the following categories do your passion/s fall into?



With less than half of young people currently on the path to pursuing their passions, it is important to understand who is supporting them, who is preventing them and what barriers youth face in chasing their passions.

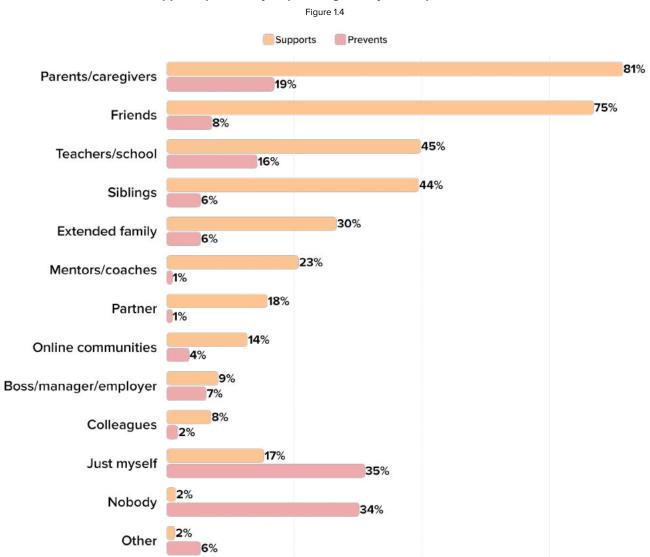
Family and friends are the greatest source of support for youth, with 81% of respondents saying their parents/caregivers support them in pursing their passions, while three quarters say they are supported by their friends (75%).

In comparison, less than half of Australian youth believe that their school supports them in what they are passionate about (45%), meaning the majority of students feel that they are not having their passions fostered by the institution aimed at preparing them for post-school life and their future careers. In his book, *Changing Australian Education*, Professor Emeritus of Education at the University of South Australia, Alan

Reid, proposes that a key purpose of high school is to provide 'individual purpose'. "Schools provide opportunities for all children and young people to 'acquire knowledge that takes them beyond their experience' and which enables them to lead rich, fulfilling and productive lives." <sup>12</sup> The role of schools in encouraging the exploration and nurturing of students' passions will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 3 of this report.

When it comes to who is preventing young people from pursuing what they are passionate about, 35% say it is only themselves, meaning they see themselves as their greatest barrier to pursuing their passions. Just 34% of youth say nobody is holding them back, meaning that two thirds of young people feel they are hindered by someone in their life, be it a parent, teacher, friend, sibling, colleague or themselves (Figure 1.4).

#### Who supports/prevents you pursuing what you are passionate about?



CHAPTER ONE THE STATE OF PASSION

Once again, females are more likely to feel held back from pursuing their passions, with 39% of males saying nobody holds them back compared to 29% of females.

Outside of their interpersonal relationships, the greatest barrier for young people pursuing their passions is money (76%), followed by time (61%). Just under half say a fear of failure holds them back (49%), a concern that is felt more acutely amongst females (57%) than it is males (37%).

"I've never had the opportunity to do anything I'm passionate about, so I don't know if I'm any good at it and my fear of failure will probably always override any thirst for achievement I could have."

18 | F | VIC

Further, 31% of young people say that their mental health, 18% their social capabilities and 12% their

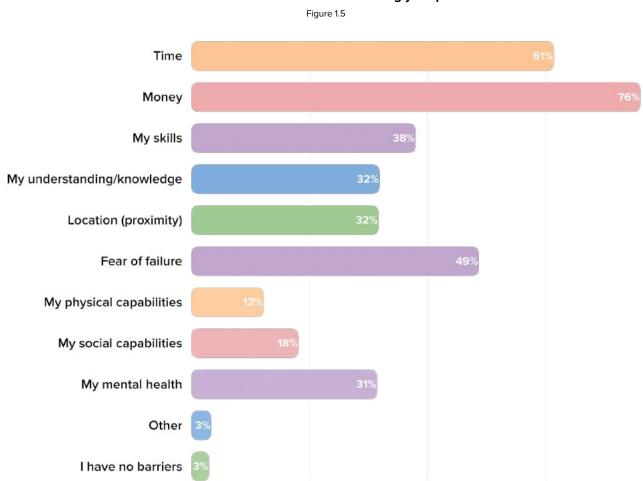
physical capabilities are barriers in the way of pursuing their passions. 36% of females say their mental health holds them back compared to 23% of males. With a third of young people hindered from pursuing their passions by their mental health, this appears a significant barrier in the transition to a fulfilling future and is explored in more depth in Chapter 2 of this report.

Just 3% of young people say they have no barriers to pursuing their passions (Figure 1.5).

"I am pursuing my passions, but unfortunately a lot slower than I wish to be, due to a lot of reasons like mental health, travelling around and struggling to feel confident in what I produce even with all the support I get."

24 | M | SA

#### What other barriers are there to following your passion/s?



#### **PLANNING AND GOAL SETTING**

Most young Australians have life ambitions, but many are lacking a defined plan to reach their goals.

92% of youth say they have a goal for what they want to accomplish in life, while 70% say they have some form of a plan to reach these goals. Interestingly however, youth are not identifying this fact amongst their peers; when asked if they think their peers have goals and plans for their future, youth believe that on average only 58% of their peers have goals while 46% have a plan. In both cases these findings are significantly lower than the self-reported numbers, implying that there is a misconception regarding how prevalent planning and goal setting is amongst youth and their peers.

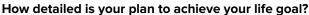
70% of young people say they have a plan for reaching their goals, however, of these respondents just 5% say that their plan is detailed, meaning they know **all** of the major steps **and** the specific details. Instead, the majority (52%) say that they only know some of the major steps and not the specific details of their plan (Figure 1.6).

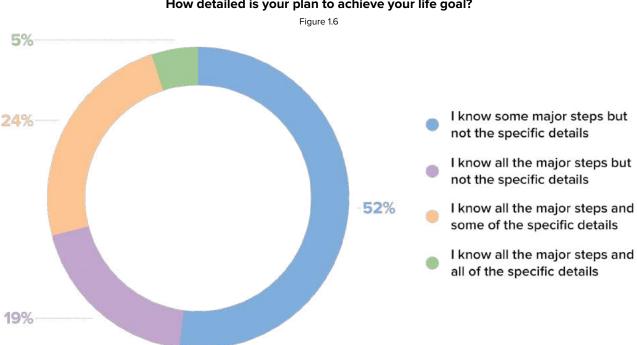
It is important to note at this point that young people who are following a passion are more likely to say they have goals for their future, plans for reaching these goals, and more thorough plans than those who are not currently pursuing a passion. Just 2% of young people who have a passion they are dedicating themselves to seriously say they do not have a goal for their future. This compares to 7% for those who have a passion they are not dedicating themselves to seriously and 17% for those who do not have a passion but are looking for one (Figure 1.7).

Furthermore, just 16% of those dedicating themselves seriously to a passion say they do not have a plan for reaching their goal, compared to 38% for those with passions they are not dedicating themselves to seriously and 50% for those without a passion. Passion could therefore be tied to the ability of young people to visualise a clear future, motivating them to create more detailed plans of how they wish to achieve their life goals (Figure 1.8).

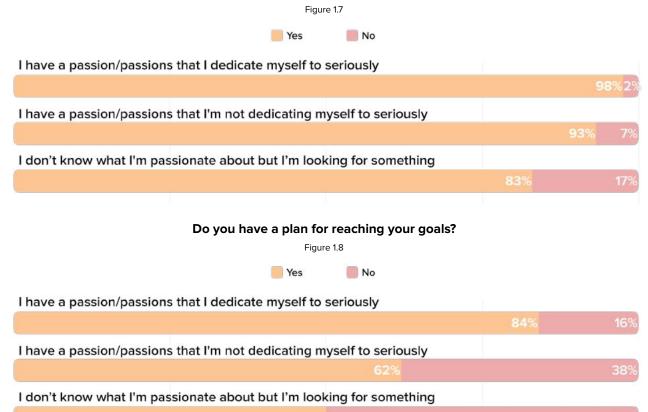
"I had found myself a passion to chase several years before I arrived in high school, but during my time there I had the opportunity to chat to every single one of my teachers which altered and developed my passions into tangible goals and a step by step process of how to achieve them."

19 | F | TAS





#### Do you have a goal or goals for what you want to accomplish in life?



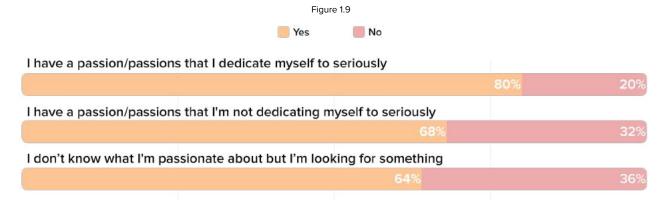
## YOUTH BELIEVE THEY CAN CREATE CHANGE

The majority of young Australians feel that as individuals they can make an impact on the world, with 72% of respondents believing there is an issue in the world that they can personally change or improve. Through our research, it has become clear that the vast majority of young people consider themselves to be socially-conscious, with 84% of Gen Zs claiming their social and environmental concerns impact the

way they spend their money<sup>13</sup> and 73% claiming they would not work for a company if it was not taking positive actions for the environment.

It is noteworthy that youth currently pursuing their passions are more likely to believe that there is an issue in the world they can change or improve (80%) than those who have a passion they are not pursuing (68%) and those currently looking for a passion (64%). It could be suggested that when dedicating oneself to a passion, an individual is more likely to feel empowered to make a change in the world beyond themselves (Figure 1.9).

#### Is there an issue in the world you believe you could personally change or improve?



Daniel Kahneman, Nobel laureate and Princeton University Professor of Psychology and Public Affairs, has found that the happiest people are usually not those who try to attain pleasure for themselves. Instead what leads to happiness is partaking in something absorbing and challenging that makes a valued contribution to the world beyond the self. <sup>14</sup>

Similarly, Professor Damon writes how the "exertion of hard and often thankless effort in service of purpose, with little thought of personal gain, is a surer path to happiness than the eager pursuit of happiness for its own sake. Self-absorption and self-indulgence simply do not work as successful strategies for achieving happiness. People end up feeling empty and resentful because they have failed to satisfy one of our species' truest and deepest desires: the universal yearning for life with meaning." <sup>15</sup>

This could indicate that taking actions that contribute to the betterment of wider social issues could in fact be providing a greater purpose to young people, which in turn could be having a positive impact on their happiness and mental wellbeing, particularly amongst passionate youth. It is an interesting concept and in Chapter 2 of this report, Year13 explores the correlations between passion, purpose and mental health in Australian youth.

"My school runs an environmental program in the junior years to educate us on the climate crisis and our future. It gave me a sense of purpose and meaning to my life. A responsibility. If we had never had that class, I would have become a depressed kid with no sense of direction or purpose. Because of it, I feel so connected with the earth and am trying to figure out how I'm going to change the world... It made me recognise my community and notice likeminded people. I feel connected."

17 | F | VIC

CHAPTER ONE THE STATE OF PASSION

YOUTH SAY

"My high school hardly encouraged us in our own individual passions. They strived to make themselves look great in the education system and encouraged us to get into university, but never considered anyone's personal goals... Lack of subject choices didn't allow for everyone to explore what they might have wanted to do. It felt like they were doing the bare minimum for us personally but when it came to their reputation as a school, they cared... I'm so terrified to leap back into the same type of environment with university, so I decided to take a gap year to be able to find what I'm really passionate about."

17 | F | QLD



"I want to discover better ways of sustainable agricultural practices, as well as better understand the relationship between agriculture and the Australian environment... I want to change the world, all year I've read articles about scientists and business people who are changing the world and I want to do that as well."

18 | F | SA

"Through completing my Certificate II in Sport and Recreation, I see this as a way to help and educate my community about health and fitness, as I am from a remote community in Queensland where there have been deaths due to preventable diseases... I want to help encourage and improve the lives of others in my community. I am only a teen, but I am a teen with big dreams and hopes."

16 | F | QLD

CHAPTER ONE THE STATE OF PASSION

"A passion has to be grounded by a realistic worldview, and only then can it be followed. I have been able to pursue my passions, but location and hence money is a major limit on my ability to do so. It is only through scholarships that I have been able to follow my passions so far."

19 | M | NSW

"Walking around school you could always see posters advertising availabilities in different teams, bands, and service groups. We'd also get emails for various activities. Whilst an emphasis on our study was maintained, I loved that my school encouraged me to remain involved in my sport, culture, and charity, because it kept my day to day life interesting. Because of this, high school allowed me to find my true passions."

17 | M | QLD





**CHAPTER TWO** 

## Passion & Youth Mental Health





36% OF YOUTH FEEL THAT THEY ARE NOT IN CONTROL OF THEIR FUTURE



OF YOUTH SAY THEY SUFFER FROM ANXIETY AS A RESULT OF BEING STRESSED ABOUT THEIR FUTURE

75% SAY PASSION MOTIVATES THEM TO SUCCEED WHEN THINGS GET CHALLENGING









## Passion & Youth Mental Health

## THE ROLE OF PASSION IN BUILDING RESILIENCE AGAINST STRESS AND MAINTAINING MENTAL WELLBEING

As well as taking a huge personal toll on sufferers and those around them, mental health issues in Australia also take a large financial toll on government spending. The average cost per youth suicide is valued at \$2,884,426<sup>16</sup> and in total, mental illness in people aged 12 to 25 costs the economy \$10.6 billion a year - \$7.5 billion from lower employment, absenteeism and the premature death of young people with mental illness; \$1.6 billion from the deadweight loss of transfers including welfare payments and taxation forgone; \$1.4 billion from direct health system expenditure; and \$65.5 million from other indirect costs like informal carers.<sup>17</sup>

It is clear that youth mental health has effects that ripple out into wider society, beyond those who are directly affected or know someone who is struggling with their mental wellbeing. Thus, Year13 wanted to explore how these issues could be combatted through the implementation of preventative measures at the school level.



A number of psychological studies have found that having a purpose in life helps to build mental resilience. Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist Viktor Frankl's theory of psychotherapy, known as 'logotherapy', is based on the premise that the primary motivating force in humans is to find meaning in life. He developed the theory after surviving detention in a concentration camp during the Holocaust, in which time his determination to see his wife and to share with the world his experience compelled him to survive. He found those around him who did not lose their sense of purpose and meaning remained more positive through suffering and were able to survive longer than those who lost hope.

In turn, he found that a lack of meaning in an individual's life is the chief source of depression and anxiety. As such, logotheraphy posits that finding purpose in life acts as a protective barrier against some of the negative influences on an individual's mental health.<sup>18</sup>

With this in mind, Year13 wished to conduct our own research into the role of purpose and passion in building resilience amongst young Australians, and whether this could be the solution to safeguarding young people's mental health into the future.

## THE CURRENT STATE OF YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

In 2018's After the ATAR II, Year13 uncovered that more than two thirds (68%) of young Australians have struggled with their mental health at some point and, alarmingly, only 29% of those sought the help of a mental health professional. We also discovered that youth are not prioritising their happiness; when asked what the most important thing in the world to them is, 'doing well in my studies' (27%) ranked higher than 'my happiness' (23%) and 'pursuing my passions' (14%). Year13 believes the skew of these priorities is having a direct impact on the mental wellbeing of young people and wished to investigate this further in After the ATAR III.

## YOUNG PEOPLE ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THE FUTURE

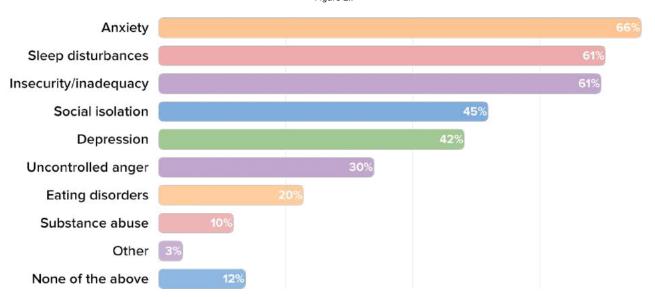
When asked what their biggest struggles are right now, the most popular answer amongst youth is 'figuring out my future' (51%), followed by money and finances (43%), their studies (39%) and their mental health (34%).

Concerningly, as a result of being stressed about figuring out their future career, a whopping 66% of Australian youth say they have suffered anxiety, 61% have experienced sleep disturbances and 61% have experienced feelings of insecurity and inadequacy. A further 45% have experienced social isolation and 42% felt the effects of depression (Figure 2.1).

#### Have you suffered from any of the following symptoms as a result

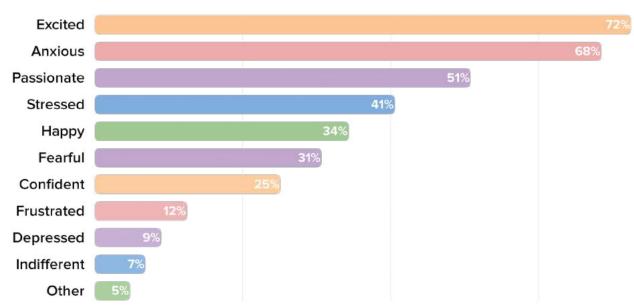
of being stressed about your future career?

Figure 2.1



#### Which of the following best describe how you are feeling about the future?

Figure 2.2



These are frightening statistics, but the feelings appear bittersweet. When asked which emotions best describe how they are feeling about the future, youth say they are feeling excited (72%) more than any other emotion. This is followed by anxious (68%), passionate (51%) and stressed (41%), evidencing a slew of mixed emotions during the transitional period of a young person's life (Figure 2.2).

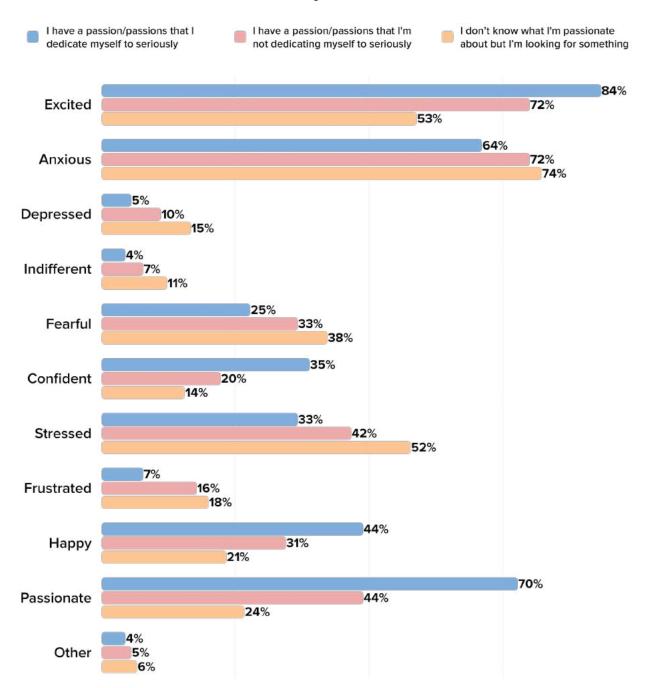
"My high school didn't really do anything at all to help me find my passions. I think a greater exposure to professionals, and most importantly specific instruction and direction regarding how to go from school to university to a real career would be fundamental in allowing me to discover my passions, and practically pursue them. A lack of direction and understanding of how to pursue my passions has left me feeling overwhelmingly anxious and depressed."

Most interesting, however, is the breakdown of these statistics between youth who are currently pursuing a passion and those who are not. Young people who are dedicating themselves seriously to a passion are more likely to use positive words to describe how they are feeling about their future career than those who are not. On average, they say they feel more excited, confident, happy and passionate, and less anxious, depressed, indifferent, fearful, stressed and frustrated (Figure 2.3).

Year13 posits that this could potentially be due to the aforementioned fact that youth who are currently pursuing a passion are more likely to have goals and more thorough plans for reaching those goals than those who are not dedicating themselves seriously to a passion, making them feel less concerned and more certain about the future.

#### Which of the following best describe how you are feeling about the future?





"I have many passions, and I honestly don't know what I would do without them! My passions drive my whole life and keep me hopeful and excited for my future."

17 | F | TAS

# PASSIONATE YOUTH ARE MORE LIKELY TO FEEL IN CONTROL

Over one third (36%) of young Australians feel that they are not in control of their future—another factor which could be having detrimental effects on youth mental health. In his book, *Lost Connections: Uncovering the Real Causes of Depression - And the Unexpected Solutions*, journalist and author Johann Hari argues that there are nine causes of depression and anxiety in society, seven cultural and two biological.

Of the cultural reasons, Hari finds that a disconnection from a hopeful and secure future is one of the primary causes of depression. This is because feelings of hopelessness tend to occur when an individual does not have a sense of control over their own destiny. "Extremely depressed people have become disconnected from a sense of the future, in a way that other really distressed people have not," he says. <sup>20</sup>

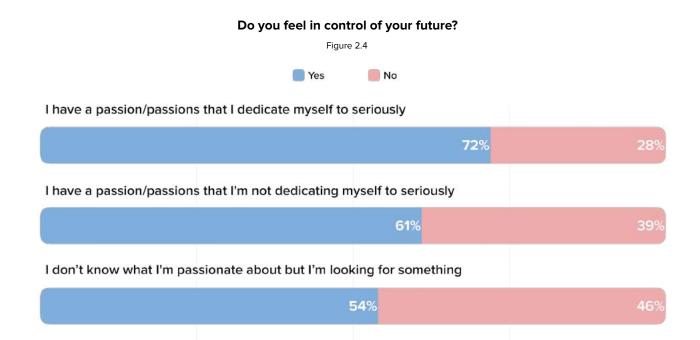
Citing research by psychologist Michael Chandler researching Canadian Native American communities

with high levels of suicide, it was found that these communities were primarily on reservations controlled by government, where residents had little to no control over the running of their own affairs. However, in communities which had regained control over their reservations and over elections, police, health services and teaching their own language in schools, Chandler found that suicide epidemics did not occur. <sup>21</sup>

According to our research, the number of young people who feel in control of their future increases amongst those who are pursuing a passion. 72% of youth who are dedicating themselves seriously to a passion feel in control of their future, compared to 61% who have a passion they are not currently pursuing, and 54% who currently do not have a passion but are looking for one. This could indicate that passion is an important contributor to a young person feeling in control of their life, aiding youth mental health by connecting them to a more secure and hopeful future (Figure 2.4).

"I had no idea where I wanted to go or what I wanted to do with my life. The depression worsened and frankly, I wasn't sure if I could see a future for myself. I felt like everyone in the world could do anything they wanted, anything at all; all but me. I've changed my university course more than five times and my majors even more than that."

19 | F | QLD



# PASSION MOTIVATES YOUNG PEOPLE TO OVERCOME CHALLENGES

According to American researchers Tim Kasser, Peter Schmuck and Richard Ryan, there are broadly two types of motivations which drive people; intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivations—like passion, persistence and altruism—are inherently rewarding to pursue because they are likely to satisfy innate psychological needs for autonomy, competence and growth. By comparison, extrinsic motivations like fame, money and glory are focused on obtaining material rewards and the positive evaluations of others.

"Such (extrinsic) goals generally reflect a sense of insecurity about oneself and also lead one to engage in more stressful, ego-involved, and controlled behaviour which does not satisfy one's needs. Thus, when individuals are especially oriented toward extrinsic goals, they are likely to ignore their needs and to engage in activities which work against their health and well-being," they wrote. <sup>22</sup>

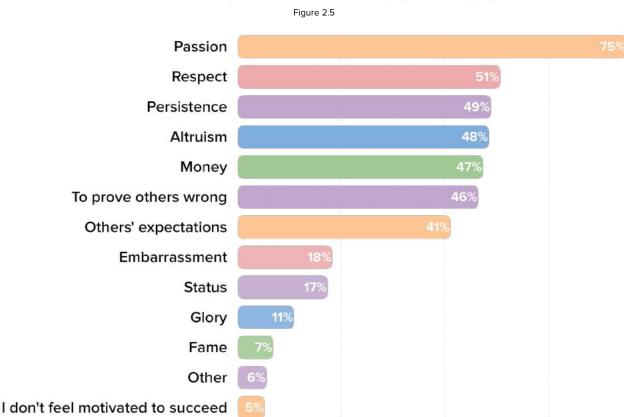
Their research finds that people who achieve extrinsic goals do not experience any increase in day-to-day happiness. However, those who achieve their intrinsic goals do become significantly happier and are less inclined to feel depressed and anxious. <sup>23</sup>

Positively, young Australians appear more motivated by intrinsic values than extrinsic ones. When asked what motivates them to succeed when things get challenging, 75% of youth say passion is their main driver, ranking higher than respect (51%), money (47%), status (17%), glory (11%) and fame (7%). Once again, youth who are currently pursuing a passion are more likely to be motivated by intrinsic goals than those who are not currently pursuing a passion (Figure 2.5).

"Schooling... should focus on the intrinsic reward of a love of learning and passion for an area, and not the end result. The competitive aspect of schooling helped me to get good marks, but I was only ever happy if I was near the top of the class, which is destructive and futile in the scheme of learning and love of work."

18 | F | VIC

# What motivates you to succeed when things get challenging?

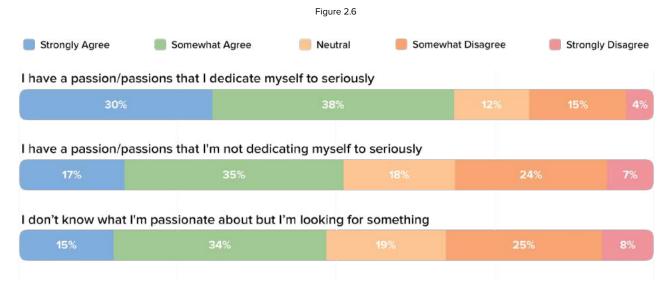


CHAPTER TWO PASSION & YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

Further, 59% of young people agree with the statement 'stress doesn't deter me when I'm working on something I'm passionate about,' indicating that youth themselves identify passion as an important element when dealing with stress and building mental resilience. Again, this number rises to 68% amongst youth who are currently pursuing a passion (Figure 2.6).

With so much evidence to suggest that passion helps young people cope with challenges and feel more in control of their future, Year13 believe there is a strong argument for passion having the ability to act as defence mechanism against the negative consequences of stress, lowering the likelihood of mental health problems during the transitional period from high school. With this in mind, we believe that promoting passion as a prime motivator for learning in Australian schools is essential for improving student resilience.

# How much do you agree with the statement 'stress doesn't deter me when working on something I'm passionate about'?



40

"I think high school was good in the way it gave me an opportunity to allow my own curiosity to find out what was good for me, however... the pressure to succeed in grades and other extrinsic motivations undermined my inner passion and curiosity equally so! So, in short, [school] helped me find my passion but it didn't do a great job of helping me grow that passion, rather deteriorated it through stress and anxiety. But now at uni I am rekindling my passions that I discovered in my early school days."

19 | M | ACT

YOUTH SAY

"[My] deputy principal is really open minded, which lets me express myself more comfortably at school. From this, I got more self-confident, which has improved my mental health as I have more space to think about who I am and what I want. Being a senior student now and being allowed to choose my own subjects also makes a massive difference... I currently haven't got a solid plan for the future but the subjects that I'm doing allow for me to experiment with aspects that I'm passionate about... I think electives should be all of your subjects in Year 10 rather than Year 11; my mental health went majorly downhill in Year 10 from lack of purpose and motivation in any of my subjects."

17 | Non-binary | NSW

**CHAPTER TWO** 

"My high school has always been incredibly supportive of my individual needs as a learner and I think that this support has really helped in finding my passion... I have struggled with mental health issues for many of my high school years, and my school has been very accommodating of my unique learning needs and have adapted learning goals for me. This has been so beneficial and has helped me to still be here."

17 | F | NSW

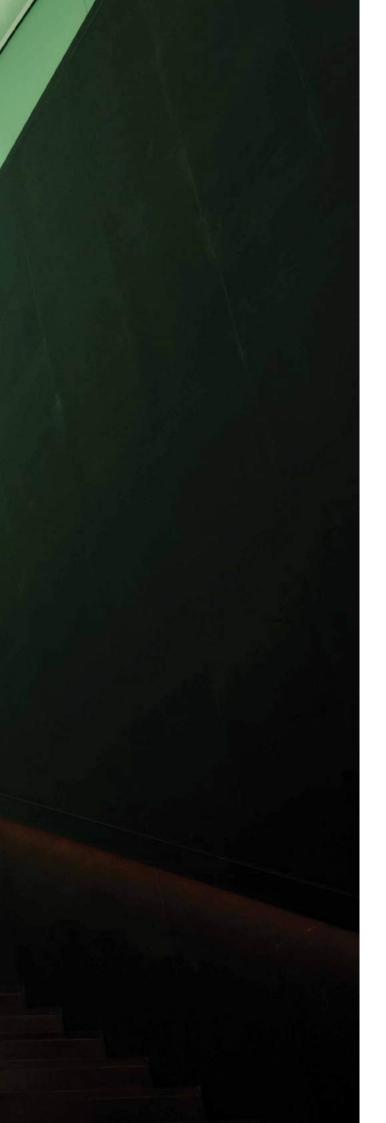
"It's weird because I feel like I almost have too many passions that I don't know how or where to start and it's really scary for me to even begin, but I know I really want to regardless of my anxiety about my future. My biggest challenge is fear and stepping out of my boundaries, so I guess that's why I'm not actively beginning to start my passions."

17 | F | NSW

"I am currently pursuing my passion, or trying to, but issues with my mental health have heavily impacted my progress. I hope that working through my mental illness and finding solutions to dealing with my problems now will allow me to pursue my passions in the future. I have set out a plan which I can follow easily enough, I just need to remain motivated."

18 | M | SA





**CHAPTER THREE** 

# Passion & Purpose in Australian High Schools

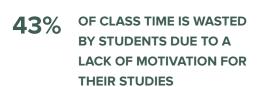




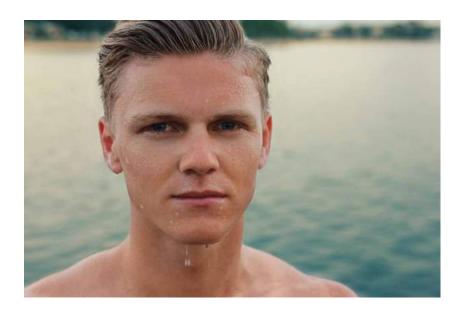
44



77% OF YOUTH SAY THEY SPEND
MORE TIME ON SUBJECTS THEY
ARE PASSIONATE ABOUT









OF TEACHERS SPEAK TO THEIR STUDENTS ABOUT WHY THEY ARE PASSIONATE ABOUT WHAT THEY TEACH



# Passion & Purpose in Australian High Schools

# HIGHLIGHTING THE FUTURE APPLICATIONS OF HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION TO ENCOURAGE THE PURSUIT OF PASSION AND IMPROVE TRANSITIONAL OUTCOMES FOR YOUTH

Between fostering passions and developing the skills students need to survive in the 'real world', schools are in a unique position to shape young people's futures. As such, Australian high schools are a key player in creating and implementing measures that may assist in the prevention of wider social issues, particularly those occurring in further education and training, such as university dropout rates and low vocational education uptake.

From previous *After the ATAR* reports, we know that the understanding of post-school education and training options amongst students is heavily skewed towards university. What this means is that more students are entering university who may in fact be better suited to a different education option, such as vocational education or the more specialised private education. This could be contributing to the fact that 62% of students consider dropping out of university at some point,<sup>24</sup> and to the decrease in apprenticeship and traineeship commencements in Australia. Consequently, a national skills shortage has been created in many of the trade industries that rely on this kind of training to pipeline new talent.



Year13 believes there exists a need to promote passion as a valid decision-making tool in schools. We posit that a fostering of passion to create goals, in conjunction with transparency around the post-school options that will best facilitate these goals, will be the most effective way to combat problems arising in further education and training.

We also believe teachers play a large role in improving the transitional journey for youth by demystifying the real-world applications of the high school curriculum. In doing so, teachers can enable young people to make more meaningful connections to what they are learning in school and help them visualise a more secure and certain future.

# CONNECTING YOUTH TO THE FUTURE APPLICATIONS OF THEIR HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION

When asked whether young people feel they go to high school because they 'have to' or because they 'want to', Year13 found a near even divide; 48% say they attend school because they 'have to' and 52% because they 'want to'. It is a concerning result considering how much of adolescence is spent in high school, thus it is important to unpack some of the factors that may be causing this (Figure 3.1).

One reason could be that many young people are failing to connect what they are learning in school to a purpose beyond the classroom. On average, young Australians say that less than half (40%) of their high school teachers explain to them how they can apply what they are learning in the real world. However, these explanations are vital because – according to

# Why do/did you go to high school? Figure 3.1 48% Because I want to Because I have to

Professor Damon – without "discussing such broader questions as what a person can and should do with the academic knowledge in the world beyond school - the all-important question of the purpose of learning - we are stripping schools of their capacities to inspire purpose." <sup>25</sup>

"Teachers always told us about how what we were learning could be applied in the real world, meaning that it was easier to translate an interest in a subject into an actual career plan. I think that if this was more common the trope of 'everything we learn in school is useless' would be less prevalent."

19 | M | WA

# PASSION FUELS AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE PURPOSE OF SCHOOL

When asked to pick the top three reasons for what they believe to be the purpose of high school, youth say it is to gain knowledge and skills (46%), to prepare for post-school education (44%) and to develop life skills (30%) (Figure 3.2).

Further down the list were the more emotional purposes 'to find my passion' (27%) and 'to learn subjects I enjoy' (22%). However, while passion is not currently seen by students as the primary purpose of school, our research has found that passion can have a significant impact on the degree to which youth commit their time and effort into their education.

On average, youth say they are passionate about half of the subjects they learn in high school (52%).

However, of the subjects they are passionate about, 77% of respondents say they spend more time on them than other subjects, 76% say they put more effort into succeeding and 71% say they pay more attention in class (Figure 3.3).

# When young people feel more passionate about high school subject:

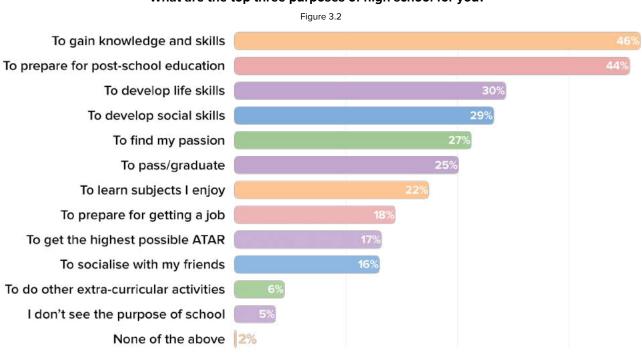
Figure 3.3

Spend more time on it 77% Put more effort into succeeding 76% 71% Pay more attention in class 70% Get better marks 57% Do not want to miss class 50% Make sure they get their work done 40% Can deal with challenges/setbacks better 39% Do more than their teacher asks of them

"I found my interest in economics and politics through my school subjects, and the incredibly passionate teachers that I had. Their passion for the subjects they teach and their clear vested interest in our success inspired me to do extra research outside the study design in order to better understand the subject."

18 | F | VIC

# What are the top three purposes of high school for you?



On average, young Australians say they waste 43% of their total class time as a result of a lack of motivation for what they are studying, which means that according to students, close to half of the school day is being underutilised. However, the percentage of class time wasted decreases for youth who are currently dedicating themselves seriously to a passion (39%) compared to youth who have a passion they are not pursuing (47%), and youth who do not have a passion but are looking for one (48%). Additionally, young people who are currently pursuing a passion are more likely to say they go to school because they 'want to',

Similarly, youth who are currently pursuing a passion indicate that a higher percentage of their teachers explain to them how they can apply what they are learning in the real world (42%), than those with a passion they are not dedicating themselves to seriously (38%) and those without a passion but who are looking for one (36%). This speaks to the influential role teachers play in fostering a connection between students' passions and their education.

rather than because they 'have to' (Figure 3.4).

"More could be done to inform students of real world applications of our schooling and of career paths that each subject could lead to, which would allow students to make a plan for where they want to go, something many students struggle with when they reach the end of high school."

17 | M | VIC

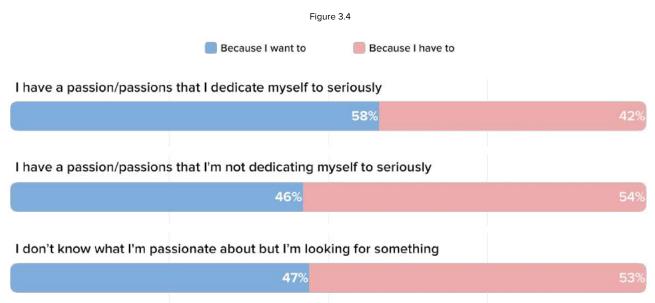
# THE ROLE OF TEACHERS IN FOSTERING PASSION

On average, 56% of young Australians say that their teachers have helped them find a passion that they want to pursue in life, either directly or indirectly. However, this number rises to 64% amongst youth who feel they go to school because they 'want to', and to 65% amongst youth who are currently dedicating themselves to a passion. This suggests that high school teachers play an important role not only in students' enjoyment of learning, but also in the discovery and pursuit of their passions.

"There were the few teachers who actually cared and were passionate about the stuff they were teaching, this energy exuded from them energised and convinced us that it was worth listening and learning about."

17 | F | VIC

# Why do/did you go to high school?



51

However, on average youth say that just 35% of their teachers speak to them about why they themselves are passionate about the subjects they teach.

According to the Director of the Teachers College Philosophy and Education program at Colombia University, Professor David Hansen, passionate teachers can encourage students to become passionate individuals in order to achieve more successful outcomes.<sup>26</sup> A 2019 study published in the journal of Psychology Research and Behaviour Management investigated the association between a teacher's passion and their students' passion and whether emotional contagion theory (the phenomenon whereby one person's emotions, behaviours and attitudes directly trigger similar emotions, behaviours and attitudes in other people) applies in an educational setting. The report concludes that "...individual behaviour can be strengthened by other people's modelling of behaviour. Our data supports this theory and suggests that a teacher's work passion can be translated into a student's passion when students emulate or mimic the working behaviour of their favourite teachers (i.e., emotional contagion). Therefore, a teacher can serve as a role model by showing his/her genuine interest and enjoyment in teaching." 27

Once again, Year13 research indicates that youth who are dedicating themselves seriously to their passions are more likely to have had a higher percentage of their teachers speak to them about why they themselves are passionate (38%), than those with a passion they are not dedicating themselves to seriously (34%) and those without a passion but who are looking for one (31%). These are promising statistics that suggest, with more role models in the classroom who exhibit passion for what they teach and clarify the real-world applications of their subjects, students are more likely to feel inspired. And, as aforementioned, when students are passionate about what they are learning, they are more likely to put time and effort into succeeding in the classroom.

"My high school teachers who taught the subjects I liked always made me like their class. Other than

that high school was just something compulsory. I believe if teachers were to talk to students and ask them what they want to be in the future and how their class can relate or support their goal/s then people would be more motivated."

17 | F | SA

# EQUAL WEIGHTING FOR ALL FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING OPTIONS

In previous After the ATAR reports, Year13 explored the ways in which advice regarding further education and training is being delivered in high schools, discovering that much of the advice youth are receiving from their parents, teachers, advisors and friends favours higher education over all other post-school options. This is resulting in students' understanding of further education options to be skewed, with 49% of youth having a good or strong understanding of university compared to 19% for vocational education and training and 16% for apprenticeships.<sup>28</sup> Further, 46% of youth say they face 'too much pressure' to enter university from their high school, while only 10% say they face 'no pressure at all'.<sup>29</sup>

With 56% of students desiring more access to unbiased career advice and 76% asking for more personalised career advice, 30 we posit that the current focus and resourcing of high school career advice is not sufficient enough to encourage all young people to follow their passions. Favouring university tends to result in a favouring of 'professional' roles, meaning those young people who are passionate about traditionally 'non-professional' or vocational roles (and who are potentially better suited to the learning environment vocational education provides) are being directed away from pursuing these pathways. We believe the current stigma that exists in schools surrounding apprenticeships and traineeships, as well as institutions such as TAFE, is directly affecting the number of young Australians pursuing trade and vocational careers and contributing to the nationwide skills shortage.

Similarly, Year13 suggests that career advice should equip students with a well-informed view of the changing world of work in order to improve employment outcomes for youth. In his book, *The Fourth Industrial Revolution*, Founder and Executive Chairman of the World Economic Forum, Klaus Schwab, describes how rapid changes in technology are creating entirely new kinds of work. He suggests that society is moving into a new Industrial Revolution, which is "characterised by a range of new technologies that are fusing the physical, digital and biological worlds, impacting all disciplines, economies and industries."<sup>31</sup>

When considering their career, 40% of young people say they have not looked into jobs with skills shortages or future growth potential. Additionally, just 15% say their schools have spoken to them about jobs with skills shortages and 37% about jobs with future growth potential. As a result, many young people are not being given the full context of the future employment landscape in order to make the most educated decision about their career (Figure 3.5).

"My high school gave me various opportunities to gain insight into the various industries and

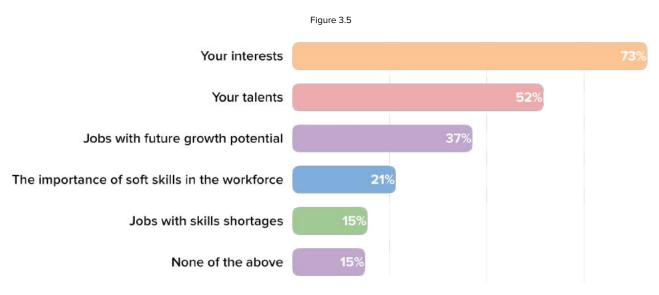
jobs outside of school life, through the teachers explaining the subjects use itself, or through careers advisory. However, not enough areas are being explored that apply to today's major job vacancies and jobs that are needed to improve the nation."

17/M/NSW

As aforementioned, young people who are currently pursuing their passions are more likely to have thorough plans for reaching their life goals. Therefore, Year13 believes comprehensive and personalised career advice that allows youth to build detailed and achievable career plans based on their passions is vital to tackling wider social issues.

We believe advice that is unbiased towards specific institutions, and realistic about the current job market will better equip youth with the information they need to make career decisions that best suit their passions. This will allow them to visualise an effective and more realistic post-school pathway, based on their personal learning styles and training preferences. By providing this sense of purpose, we believe we can better prepare youth for the transition into further education and the changing world of work.

# Which of these does/did your school/teacher/ careers advisor speak with you about?



"I think teachers at school could explain more about how the skills we are being taught could apply to real life or if one job relates to a certain topic... Otherwise the content we are learning all seems very pointless and aimless and it doesn't feel as though what we are learning will get anywhere in the future."

17 | F | VIC

### **YOUTH SAY**

"The best thing my high school did was consistently get real life applications to the concepts we were learning in class... It gave me extra knowledge and made me realise how cool the real world is. School allowed me to dream using the material I had already been given through giving me problems to solve that fuel my passions."

18 | M | ACT

"I went to a publicly funded academically selective high school and whilst there were major perks - there were also a myriad of issues that were left untreated. Due to the majority of my cohort wanting to do well academically, particularly in the senior years, teachers taught throughout all my schooling years strictly to the syllabus - aiding our marks and our ATARs but never discussing life outside of high school, how to apply things to the real world and, most of all, helping us find out our passions through experimentation and exploration."

21 | F | VIC

"A lot of my peers did subjects that the school and their parents pushed as being 'better' and 'more likely to get better results' meaning that a lot of people did subjects that they didn't enjoy under the false impression that their results would be better - but I was passionate enough about all of my chosen subjects that I excelled, and it paid off in my ATAR. Doing subjects that I was passionate about set me up for university with the attitude that every subject is what I make it."

20 | Non-binary | NSW

"While I had several teachers in high school who were passionate about their work/respective fields, and whom I admired, I felt that many others failed to contextualise how our learning would benefit us beyond high school. This made my transition into university challenging [and] for the entirety of my first year I've lacked a sense of direction and motivation, and my attitude towards my studies has wavered."

19 | M | VIC

"Every single teacher I had at my high school was extremely passionate about their subject/job. This was reflected in their everyday teaching in the classroom and in one-on-one chats. Being surrounded not only by people passionate about their job, but also incredibly motivated to guide students into discovering their own passions, sets an example and demonstrates how work can be meaningful and enjoyable if it is something an individual truly feels an affinity for."

19 | F | TAS





**CHAPTER FOUR** 

# Connecting Youth to Meaningful Work







58



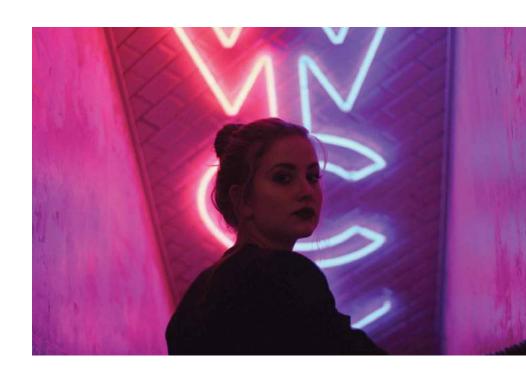
94% OF YOUNG PEOPLE FEEL IT IS IMPORTANT TO LIKE YOUR JOB

OF YOUTH HAVE TAKEN DAYS
OFF FROM WORK DUE TO A
LACK OF MOTIVATION FOR
WHAT THEY DO



OF YOUTH HAVE TAKEN A SICK DAY FOR REASONS OTHER THAN BEING PHYSICALLY SICK





# Connecting Youth to Meaningful Work

# INCREASING PRODUCTIVITY AND MENTAL WELLBEING BY CONNECTING YOUTH TO MEANINGFUL EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES

The current state of youth unemployment and underemployment in Australia is concerning; the youth unemployment rate of Australians aged 15-24 years is sitting at 12.1%,<sup>32</sup> while 580,000 people aged between 15 and 29 years are Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEETs).<sup>33</sup> It is estimated there would be \$11.3 billion in additional GDP if youth unemployment and underemployment were brought into line with the rest of the population.

More and more research is being conducted into the role that passion plays in workplace productivity and the impact that meaningful work has on an individual's overall mental wellbeing. A study published in the journal of Psychology Research and Behaviour Management has linked passion with positive work outcomes, wellbeing, growth, and entrepreneurial success, indicating that passionate people feel greater dedication towards their work which allows them to persevere through challenges to achieve excellence.<sup>34</sup> With work being such an important part of an individual's identity, having a passion for it can profoundly impact their overall well-being.<sup>35</sup>



In this chapter, we explore this concept in order to understand whether more personalised career advice could improve employment outcomes for students transitioning from high school. With the ability to create more detailed and realistic career plans based on work they feel passionate about, Year13 hypothesises that we can encourage more youth to take up employment and improve workplace productivity, retention and mental resilience amongst Gen Z employees. In connecting more youth to meaningful work, we genuinely believe we can help young people lead happier, more fulfilling lives.

# YOUTH BELIEVE IT IS IMPORTANT TO BE PASSIONATE ABOUT THEIR CAREER

When it comes to gathering information to make a decision about their future career, 84% of young Australians want to know that the career will match their passions—significantly higher than the 65% who want to know how much money they could make. With previous *After the ATAR* research indicating that 94% of youth think it is important to 'like your job', it is clear that youth view passion as a significant factor when considering their career.<sup>36</sup>

"I am currently pursuing my passion because I want to make sure that I have a fulfilling and secure future with a job that I can be proud of."

19 | M | WA

However, evidence suggests many Australians are not passionate about the work they do. Gallup's State

of the Global Workplace report has found that 71% of Australian employees (compared to 67% globally) are 'not engaged' in their job, meaning they "show up each day but do just what is absolutely necessary to get through the day — and no more." Another 15% of employees are actively disengaged at work, meaning they are "not only unhappy at work, but determined to undermine their colleagues' positive efforts." Just 14% of Australian workers are engaged, meaning they "show up every day with enthusiasm and the motivation to be highly productive."

Gallup's workplace research demonstrates that businesses with more engaged workforces, which support and develop their employees' strengths, are more productive and more profitable. However, just 21% of employees in Australia strongly agree with the statement, "I like what I do each day." Gallup says this is "a troublesome sign of their lack of emotional investment in their daily work life... In that light, it is clear that employers need processes that identify employees' individual strengths." <sup>37</sup>

### PASSION AND PRODUCTIVITY

Professor Damon writes how a major issue for young people today "is a lack of a source of motivation, the lack of a sense of purpose. In the long run that lack of purpose can destroy the foundations of a happy and fulfilling life." <sup>38</sup>

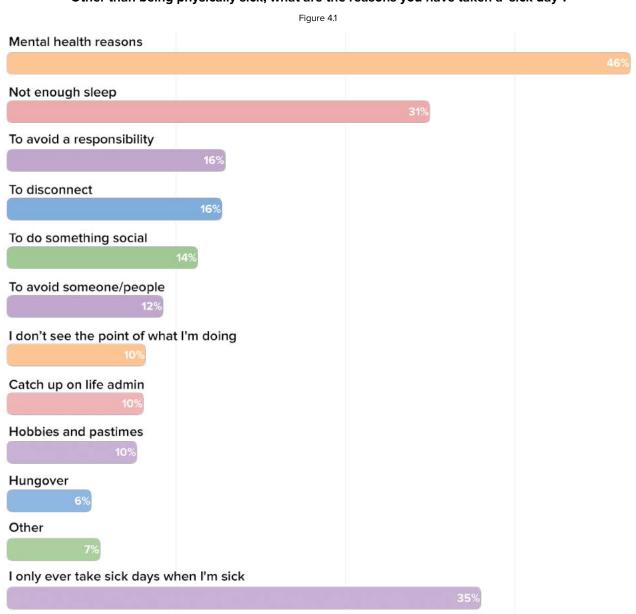
Our research shows that nearly one third (30%) of youth who have worked in the past 12 months have taken days off due to a lack of motivation for what they do. However, of youth currently pursuing a passion, this number drops to 27% who have taken

days off work, compared to 34% of youth who are not currently pursuing their passion and 29% who do not currently have a passion but are looking for one.

Mental health issues appear to be one of the biggest hindrances to productivity amongst young people. Other than being physically sick, 46% of young people claim that they have taken a 'sick day' for mental health reasons. This is more prevalent amongst females (55%) than it is males (31%). Another 31% of young people say they take sick days because of a lack of sleep.

One third (35%) of youth say they only ever take sick days when they are genuinely sick (Figure 4.1).

## Other than being physically sick, what are the reasons you have taken a 'sick day'?



64

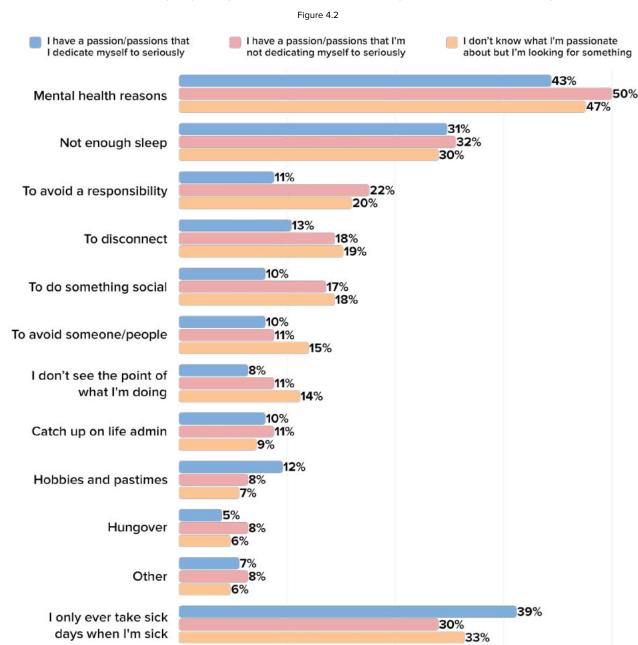
According to Edinburgh Naiper University's Dr. Pete Robertson, who specialises in postgraduate career guidance programs, mental health problems "frequently arise in the teenage years or early adulthood and may recur throughout adulthood. For this reason, there is the potential for major economic impact in terms of absence from work, reduced productivity at work, claiming of sickness-related working age benefits and increased demand for health and social care services." 39

However, passion may once again be the answer to improving these statistics among the younger generations. Youth dedicating themselves to their

passions are less likely to have taken sick days due to mental health issues and are also more likely to say that they only ever take sick days when they are genuinely sick (Figure 4.2).

"Schools could put a procedure in place in which they survey every student to find his passion and set him up on that path [sic]. They could offer a variety of subjects that are only linked to the future job that they want to do, so that the student can be motivated during school and after school and also give his full potential to work towards that goal." 18 | M | NSW

## Other than being physically sick, what are the reasons you have taken a 'sick day'?



Research from The Australian National University has found the importance of not just having a job, but having a job you enjoy. Their study, published in the journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, tracked people who had recently gone back to work after unemployment and found that those who moved into jobs they enjoyed had a significant improvement in their mental health, while people who moved into jobs they did not enjoy reported a greater decline in their mental health than those who remained unemployed. As a result, it found that the mental health benefits of becoming employed were dependent on the quality of the job.

"Those who moved into optimal jobs showed significant improvement in mental health compared to those who remained unemployed. Those respondents who moved into poor-quality jobs showed a significant worsening in their mental health compared to those who remained unemployed," the report says.<sup>40</sup>

Citing the Australian National University study's results, The Institute for Employment Studies' Head of HR Research Development, Stephen Bevan, says it is important for psychological wellbeing that people find a job which they enjoy. Poor performance in a job, he states, can partly be because the work does not suit someone as opposed to a fault of the individual.

"It should make us think a lot more about how the quality of jobs can affect our health and productivity," Bevan says.<sup>41</sup>

# AUTONOMY IS IMPORTANT TO MAINTAIN MENTAL HEALTH AT WORK

As aforementioned, 36% of Australian youth feel that they are not in control of their future. However, In *Lost Connections*, Hari finds that autonomy in one's work increases workplace satisfaction and overall mental wellbeing. Citing research carried out by the Australian scientist, Michael Marmot, he found that of employees whose jobs were the same in pay, status

and location but differed on the level of control they had over their work, those with a higher degree of autonomy were far less likely to develop mental health problems.<sup>42</sup>

"If you have no control over your work, you are far more likely to become stressed – and, crucially, depressed. Humans have an innate need to feel that what we are doing, day-to-day, is meaningful. When you are controlled, you can't create meaning out of your work," Hari says.<sup>43</sup>

A study from Cornell University looked into 320 small businesses, half with traditional top-down, controlling management practices and half which gave their workers more autonomy. It found the businesses that offered autonomy grew at four times the rate of control-oriented firms and had one-third the turnover. By giving more autonomy, businesses created more confident, resilient, resourceful and creative employees with more initiative to work because they were self-motivated to achieve their own goals. On the other hand, controlled environments inhibited employees to think for themselves, make their own decisions and innovate new ideas.<sup>44</sup>

# YOUTH NOT IN EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION OR TRAINING (NEETS)

Perhaps most concerning in youth unemployment is in the case of NEETs, that is, young people who are Not in Employment, Education or Training. According to a study published in the BMJ Open Medical Journal, undertaking education and employment is key to successfully transitioning to adulthood, as they provide benefits in the form of income, structure, social contact, common goal setting, status, activity and support networks.

"Individuals with low educational attainment and/or limited employment experience a greater likelihood of social exclusion, disability and isolation, in addition to the impacts of low income... Chronic unemployment is associated with severe levels of disadvantage

When it comes to young people's perception of what is causing their peers to become NEETs, 25% strongly agree and 50% somewhat agree that the problem stems from issues within the schooling system. In comparison, 10% strongly agree and 37% somewhat agree that youth become NEETs because they are 'lazy'. Thus, more young people see NEETs as a failure of the system as opposed to a failure of the self (Figure 4.3 & 4.4).

"High school teachers have a responsibility to support the passions of their students. High schoolers like me lack the support and foresight to foster our passions into something bigger. This is a major contributing factor to why so many people are unemployed and not studying. They don't have a passion and don't see the point."

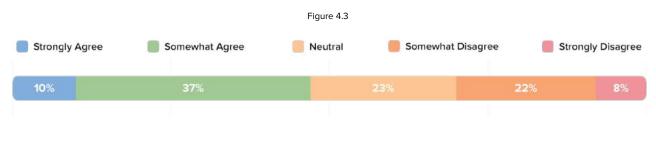
### 17 | M | NSW

This is affirmed by a study published in the Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, which finds NEETs are an economic and mental health issue, not a motivational one. It suggests that many NEET youths are committed to the idea of work and trying to find a job, however, they are hampered by low skill levels and mental health problems. It suggests it is critical to provide enhanced educational guidance to adolescents under 18 years of age with mental health problems to lower the risk of future economic disengagement. In conclusion, it emphasises "the necessity of incorporating mental health services into youth career support initiatives." 46

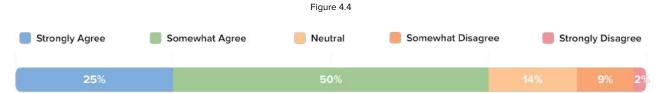
Similarly, Dr Robertson suggests career guidance in schools can help directly address the social causation of mental health conditions. Career guidance in schools, he says, is an "unrecognised asset" due to how many young people can potentially be reached. By encouraging youth to recognise and build on their own strengths, focus on their future, envisage a desirable but attainable lifestyle, work out what is important to them and set achievable goals, career guidance can promote wellbeing.

"Career guidance may offer advantages over other types of employment support service in this respect, because it seeks to help people select opportunities in education and training thoughtfully, choose work that they will have an enduring interest in (and) access lifestyles that are personally and economically sustainable over time," he says.<sup>47</sup>

# Youth who agree/disagree people become NEETs because they are 'lazy':



# Youth who agree/disagree NEETs are caused by problems with the schooling system:



# PROVIDING PURPOSE-DRIVEN EDUCATION TO STUDENTS

"My high school has an amazing careers advisor who gets to know every student on a personal level to help them in finding their passion. This has been instrumental for me and my decision-making regarding my options for the future. In addition, my teachers were supportive and obliging to any questions we would have regarding a particular career area, and having an experienced adult that we respected really influences our perspectives on particular careers."

### 17 | F | NSW

Evidence to suggest the importance of passion and meaningful work to one's mental wellbeing and enjoyment of life is abundant and compelling, thus Year13 believes that in order to alleviate the financial strains on society in the areas of education, employment and mental health, strategies within high schools should be geared towards connecting youth to work that they enjoy.

University of Edinburgh's Professional Fellow in Educational Theory and Pedagogy, Gert J. J. Biesta, proposes that the "question of purpose is in my view the most central and most fundamental educational question since it is only when we have a sense of what it is we want to achieve... that it becomes possible to make meaningful decisions about the 'what' and the 'how' of our educational efforts." 48 Allowing students the time, space and support to identify their strengths, interests and intrinsic motivations (and then embed these within an achievable life plan) is how we believe the transition out of high school should be framed within the schooling system. This is what Year13 calls a purpose-driven education.

Purpose-driven education goes beyond just career advice. Instead, it combines comprehensive career advice with a more purpose-fuelled approach to high school education that involves demystifying the future applications of the curriculum and emphasising

the importance of subject choices to the pursuit of passion. This also includes increasing two-way communication between youth and teachers to highlight the reasons why educators are passionate about the subjects they teach and instil a sense of purpose within their students.

It is also important that a purpose-driven education is available to students from an early age to ensure that young people can sooner align themselves to their preferred learning styles and teaching options. This means that they are better able to tailor their education experience to the pursuit of their passions and their individual needs, including subject selection, choosing to undertake a school-based apprenticeship or traineeship, or even choosing to leave school in pursuit of a passion that falls outside of the high school system.

Armed with a purpose-driven education, students will be able to gain a deeper understanding of themselves in order to better envisage their goals and build more detailed plans for their future after high school. It also allows them to identify the future applications of—and value in—the education and training pathways they must undertake in order to achieve their goal; increasing productivity, performance and enjoyment of learning, both in high school and beyond.

"I'm even more appreciative to those teachers whose sole purpose was to inspire students to follow their own passion. The teachers who had the most positive impact on my life were the ones not following the curriculum and going above and beyond to treat their students like real human beings... Going from being in the top academic classes for most of my life, to dropping all my classes except art, English and fashion design, I learnt that not only I was so much happier but content and not stressed about the work I was doing because I was purely excited to complete assignments. I think our education system needs a huge change."

18 | F | QLD

YOUTH SAY

"My high school pushes for people to go into careers in science, maths and engineering. I have always had a passion for visual art but because of this attitude at my school I am too scared to follow those dreams and have been discouraged."

17 | F | SA

"My high school maths teacher encouraged me to pursue an aerospace subject because I liked maths and science and he knew I was a practical learner and thought that I would enjoy the subject. Subsequently, my aerospace teachers helped me to apply for opportunities that got my foot in the door of the aviation industry and gave me the initial motivation to pursue my pilots licence while still in school. I am truly grateful for the extra effort that they put into encouraging my passion as I am now currently employed as a scenic pilot and love my job."

20 | M | QLD

"I feel the school system is designed around producing good employees, not strong people that are passionate about what they do and who they are in life. I listened to the school and attempted to get a degree to get a good job, but ultimately was left with nothing but anxiety and debt because it was not what I truly wanted to do. After focusing on myself and what I want for the last 18 months I've finally discovered where my interests truly lie and I have set myself down a path to achieve my dreams. Had the school system been more focused on building students up to reach their potential rather than attempting to program everyone for the same path in life, perhaps myself and so many others wouldn't need to spend their early 20s panicking about their post-school existence."

23 | M | VIC

"One of my teachers helped me realise my passion for engineering. They are the most engaging, and creative teacher I have ever had. Their guidance has led to me to pursue [it] as a career and passion after high school."

17 | M | NSW

# Final Thoughts

In Changing Australian Education, Alan Reid proposes that the four key purposes of a school education are:

- 01. "Democratic purpose. Schools are the main means society has to systematically develop young people as citizens who are able to play an active and constructive role in democratic life.
- 02. Economic purpose. Schools make an important contribution to the Australian economy by preparing people for work in the many occupations that comprise the contemporary and future labour markets.
- 03. Individual purpose. Schools provide opportunities for all children and young people to 'acquire knowledge that takes them beyond their experience' and which enables them to lead rich, fulfilling and productive lives.
- 04. Social and cultural purpose. Schools are an important means by which children and young people develop the understandings, skills and dispositions necessary to play an active role with their fellow citizens in a diverse and multicultural civil society." 49

AFTER THE ATAR III FINAL THOUGHTS

It is clear from Reid's assessment that the process of young people leaving school and entering the 'real world' has clear, determinable social and economic impacts. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that the transitional process from high school is continually optimised to ensure the success of not just the young person, but society as a whole.

However, research from this report has shown that the point at which a student **leaves** the schooling system is being viewed largely as a secondary objective of educational institutions. This is not to say that teachers, principals or career advisors are to blame; it is simply the way in which we as a society have structured our schooling system to be focused on metrics that are often isolated to educational environments (e.g. ATAR), rather than on the post-school success of students.

In order to improve outcomes for youth, we need to look beyond student achievement in high school and focus on a more holistic approach to post-school success. From our research and experience, Year13 have identified three key areas in which youth need the most support during the transitional journey from high school, which include:

# WELLNESS & PERFORMANCE

Maintaining one's health, be it physical, mental or emotional is the foundation of a successful postschool transition. Without happiness and wellbeing, youth may struggle with their motivation to succeed, which in turn can affect their performance and productivity both at school and later in life.

# **FINANCES**

On leaving high school, many young people have to exercise financial independence, be it partially or completely, for the first time. From previous research, we know that 91% of youth want more financial help in schools,<sup>50</sup> thus financial literacy is key to ensuring students are adequately prepared for life after school.

### CAREER

Finally, an inclusive and purpose-driven approach to career advice that encompasses both educational pathways, the future of industries and the pursuit of meaningful work is crucial to improving outcomes for youth as they transition from high school into further education and employment.



Considering these key areas, Year13 understands that the responsibility of supporting youth through this transitional period does not fall solely on high schools, nor specifically to career advisors. Rather, Year13 believes there exists a need to acknowledge and adopt a new category of education, known as Post-Education Transition Management (PETM). PETM encompasses a purpose-driven education and extends to performance, wellness, financial literacy, career advice and goal setting.

Because the transition out of high school involves a wide range of processes, PETM promotes a shift away from single-metric measurements of schooling achievement, such as the ATAR, and towards a balanced scorecard approach based on the post-school success of students. The provision of quality PETM services will therefore create a new means of assessing the value that educational institutions are providing to students and society as a whole – both economically and socially. PETM also has the potential to drive the funding, revenue and/or demand of educational institutions, and to become the primary objective of all high schools and post-school education and training institutes.

A rising prominence of PETM could also provide young people with far greater impetus to document their goals and detail a plan for a successful life outside of school. Much of the data revealed in this report highlights the benefits of youth having a life goal and a plan associated with that goal, including increased contentedness, motivation and performance. However, documented plans also provide schools and other stakeholders with insights and data surrounding the post-school landscape and what can be done to optimise the transitional process for youth.

With documented PETM plans, schools can glean data around how many of their students are prepared

for life after school and continue to measure success post-transition. Similarly, data can be leveraged by industry stakeholders in order to bridge the gap between young people and their further education and employment options. Are young people struggling to understand apprenticeships? We can consult the data. Are young people concerned about finding a job? Consult the data. Are young people worried about moving away from home? How many are struggling with their mental health? How many plan on travelling after high school? Consult the data.

With these insights, stakeholders can gain a more indepth understanding of youth in order to improve their communications and offerings for this demographic. This in turn can help youth comprehend the full scope of post-school options available to them and seek the opportunity that best suits their passions and preferred learning styles.

Throughout this report, we have emphasised the need for preventative measures to help curb a number of social and economic issues we are struggling with as a nation. We believe recognising PETM as an important category within young people's education could be that preventative solution. PETM provides a framework through which we view and address the social issues in education, employment and mental health that arise from problems within the youth demographic.

Schools and others who orbit within young people's sphere of influence are in a unique position to help set youth on a purposeful path to meaningful work; therefore, the adoption of PETM amongst these stakeholders is crucial. When these stakeholders come together, Year13 believes we have the ability to improve the transitional journey and foster more positive outcomes for youth, thus encouraging a generation of happier, healthier young people.

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AFTER THE ATAR III FINAL THOUGHTS



"My teachers at school taught me that there was more to high school than just good grades and subjects, it's honestly about finding yourself, your passions, making friends and enjoying life as a journey. My advice to other schools would be to get to know their students better, understand what drives that particular cohort and monitor that they're having some fun along the way. I am so excited for what the future holds for me and will look at high school as a blessing for directing me into the right direction."

18 | F | SA

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