



# Creating New Pathways to Employment





## Acknowledgements

Barwon Water and The Leaders for Geelong project team acknowledges the Wadawurrung peoples as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land on which we live and work, and the water on which we rely. We would like to pay our respects to Elders, past present and emerging.

The project team are grateful for the support of our Barwon Water project sponsors:

- Jo Plummer – Chair Barwon Water Board
- Shaun Cumming – Managing Director
- Melissa Stephens – General Manager, People & Corporate.

We would also like to thank project partners:

- Will Hartnell, Head of Commercial & Growth – Geelong Cats
- Tracy Gilligan, Chief of People & Culture – Barwon Health
- Andrew Deane, Deputy Director & Chief Operating Officer – The Geelong Gallery

This project involved significant engagement from a range of stakeholders in the Barwon region. We would like to thank everyone who generously shared their time to contribute to the findings of this project.

Finally, the project team expresses our gratitude to the Committee for Geelong and Leaders for Geelong Program for giving us the opportunity to engage in this innovative project.

Special thanks to our project mentor Sam Lazzari for guiding us through the process, our insightful facilitators Lauren Carnegie and Karen MacAdie for always keeping us organised. We would also like to thank our 2024 fellow leaders for ensuring our leadership journey together was both insightful and fun.

**The Leaders for Geelong Program is made possible through the support of our generous Program Partners and Scholarship Providers.**

### Leadership Portfolio Partners



### Leadership Portfolio Scholarship Providers





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# Forward

Barwon Water was delighted to have one of the Leaders for Geelong teams take up our proposal to explore the topic of 'creating new pathways to employment in the Barwon region'.

At Barwon Water, we care about a better future. We've a number of ambitious targets to support a thriving community and region. We've a long and proud history as a provider of water and sewerage services, but we're more than a water utility. Recognising the challenges of climate change and population growth, we've shifted our mindset to being a leader of the region's prosperity. The work of our staff each and every day will set out to deliver our aspirations.

We're always looking for like-minded people to join our team. But we know our region, state and country is experiencing a skills shortage. The Victorian Skills Authority (2023) projects significant demands for workers across the region in the coming years with over 18,000 new workers required to meet projected growth and planned retirement. Further to this, the type of skills required by industry are becoming more complex. Over the next decade, more than nine out of 10 new jobs will require some form of qualification, whether higher education or vocational education and training, trade or traineeship.

Research is also finding there are emerging levels of uncertainty, worry and apprehension among young people who believe their education has not prepared them for the working world. We're seeing these challenges firsthand at Barwon Water, as well as other leading employers within in the region.

As part of this project, we partnered with the Geelong Cats, Barwon Health and Geelong Gallery to gain their insights into these challenges and opportunities within their organisation where such a program could fit. We thank our project partners for their contribution and engagement with this exciting project. We're committed to identifying ways we can turn these challenges into opportunities that effect real change for our region and this report provides practical recommendations for us to consider.

We're grateful for the fresh lens the Leaders for Geelong project team have brought to the challenge. The use of survey data and in-depth interviews with students, careers advisers and workplace learning providers are valuable as we consider how we can create a model to support pathways to employment for young people and bridge the skills gap. The project team's enthusiasm, work ethic, open mindedness, and willingness to "find the way" has been impressive and inspiring. The work they have completed on our behalf is valuable, relevant and provides a foundation for us to help support the next generation of workers to ensure they have the skills and qualifications needed to meet our region's needs.

*Jo Plummer*  
Chair  
Barwon Water

*Shaun Cumming*  
Managing Director  
Barwon Water

*Melissa Stephens*  
General Manager, People and Corporate  
Barwon Water



# The Project Team



Chris Longmore is employed by the Victoria State Emergency Service where he oversees volunteer coordination and service delivery across the Barwon Region. His role encompasses business planning, operational readiness, and emergency management. Chris also volunteers with the Country Fire Authority and serves on the Board of the Queenscliff Music Festival Inc. Chris holds an Associate Degree in Emergency Management.



Sally Nepean is employed at Barwon Health, where she has extensive experience working across various health sector areas. She has led operational teams and contributed to high level service planning and the delivery of large-scale health projects. Sally holds a Bachelor's Degree in Speech Pathology.



Kylie Nicol serves as the Events Sales Manager at the Geelong Cats, overseeing the events and catering division, Higher Mark. She has played a pivotal role in both Stage 4 and 5 of the GMHBA Stadium redevelopment and led the rebranding of Cats Hospitality to Higher Mark. Kylie holds an Advanced Diploma in Tourism and Events Management.



San Sorcar is a Project Manager at the National Disability Insurance Agency. She leads multidisciplinary teams and projects that focus on frontline transformation and improving user experience. San has a Bachelor's degree in Information Technology and Communication.



Lorenzo Ernstzen serves as the Portfolio Manager for Carpentry and Construction at The Gordon TAFE. His role involves building strong partnerships with industry, employers, and community organizations to ensure programs meet industry standards. With a keen focus on workforce planning and operational leadership, he oversees project implementation.



Ingrid Woodger Brown is employed as a Director for the National Disability Insurance Agency, leading a team who develop high quality Agency guidance. Ingrid has a Bachelor of Science and a Graduate Diploma in Audiology and prior to working for the NDIA, spent over 20 years working as a clinical audiologist.



# Executive Summary



The Barwon Region, comprising the City of Greater Geelong, Surf Coast Shire, Colac Otway Shire, and the Borough of Queenscliffe, is experiencing significant evolution in its economic landscape. Sponsored by Barwon Water, this project was initiated to evaluate the feasibility of implementing a multi-sector Workplace Integrated Learning (WIL) program tailored for school leavers aged 18 to 25 who have completed either scored or unscored VCE. This report presents an in-depth needs analysis, explores the potential benefits of a WIL program, and provides recommendations based on extensive stakeholder consultation.

The proposed WIL program seeks to bridge the gap between education and employment by integrating practical, real-world experience into students' early tertiary education. Similar fee-paying programs in metropolitan sports and recreation sectors have been successful, offering diplomas that blend academic learning with practical industry experience. However, the unique socio-economic conditions of the Barwon Region require careful consideration before such a model can be adapted for local industries like healthcare, infrastructure, and arts and culture.

Stakeholder engagement played a critical role in this project. The project team conducted interviews, surveys, and consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, including students, parents, career advisors, tertiary institutions, and local industry leaders. The findings revealed a complex landscape where the need for meaningful work experience is paramount, yet financial barriers and existing educational pathways pose significant challenges to the implementation of a multisector WIL program.

Key insights from this engagement include:

- A pressing need for improved school-based work experience programs that offer structured, meaningful placements.
- Significant financial barriers, with 87% of students and 100% of parents surveyed unwilling to pay upfront fees for a WIL program.
- An existing preference among students for TAFE and university courses that provide financial support through Commonwealth Supported Places (CSP), scholarships, and HECS-HELP loans.
- A primary workforce challenge in the region being the filling of senior roles rather than the creation of new graduate-level positions.

Based on these findings, the project determined that there is limited need for a multi-sector WIL program with significant upfront costs. Instead, the outcomes highlight the need to enhance existing work experience programs, which require no initial investment. The report concludes with actionable recommendations to improve the coordination and effectiveness of work experience opportunities in the Barwon Region.



# Project Overview

The Barwon Region is currently undergoing substantial economic transformation. Driven by infrastructure development, population growth, and a strategic pivot towards a green economy, the region is poised for both opportunities and challenges in the coming years. The Geelong Economic Blueprint 2023/24 (KPMG) outlines a vision for sustainable economic growth, with key industries like healthcare, construction, and education playing pivotal roles. The Barwon Regional Economic Development Strategy (2022) further emphasises the importance of transitioning to a net-zero economy by 2045, a shift that will inevitably reshape local industries and the associated workforce requirements.

However, despite these promising developments, the region faces critical workforce challenges. The Victorian Skills Authority (2022) projects that over 18,000 new workers will be needed to support both economic growth and to replace retiring employees by 2030. Furthermore, the complexity of skills required in these growing industries is increasing, necessitating a more agile and responsive education and training system.

The Barwon Region's evolving economic landscape presents both challenges and opportunities. On one hand, there is significant potential for job creation and economic growth, particularly in sectors that are critical to the region's future, such as renewable energy and advanced manufacturing. On the other hand, the region's existing workforce may not be fully equipped to meet the demands of these emerging industries. This skills gap is further exacerbated by the fact that a significant portion of the region's youth are disengaged from both education and employment. Currently, approximately 8.3% of individuals aged 15–24 in the Barwon Region are neither engaged in work nor study. This demographic, often referred to as "disengaged youth," faces significant barriers to entering the workforce. Many of these young people are uncertain about their future employment pathways and feel that their education has not adequately prepared them for the workforce.

One of the major factors contributing to this situation is the disconnect between the skills being taught in educational institutions and those required by employers. This skills mismatch has led to a situation where even though there are jobs available, particularly in sectors such as healthcare and construction, many young people are not qualified to fill them. This not only affects the economic prospects of these individuals but also poses a significant risk to the region's long-term economic stability and growth.

The challenges in the Barwon Region are not unique; they reflect broader national and global trends where technological advancements, demographic shifts, and changing economic conditions are reshaping labour markets. However, the Barwon Region's specific characteristics, such as its relatively small population and the dominance of certain industries, mean that the impacts of these trends are felt particularly acutely.

While there are existing WIL programs in the Barwon Region, these are typically targeted at specific industries or disadvantaged groups. For example, programs aimed at young people with disabilities or those from low socio-economic backgrounds have been relatively successful, but they do not address the broader needs of the youth population. Additionally, scholarship programs exist for academically gifted individuals, yet there remains a gap in multi-sector WIL programs for the 18–25 age group who have completed either scored or unscored VCE.



# Project Logic

## Problem

Determine if there is a need for a workplace integrated learning program in the Barwon region, which provides local pathways to skilled employment (and tertiary qualifications) for school leavers aged 18 – 25 years and addresses skill shortages affecting local businesses and industries.

## Activities

Undertake a needs analysis to:

- Understand the consumer drive for a workplace integrated learning model
- Quantify the problem in the Barwon region, understanding workforce skill shortage
- Identify and understand existing/comparative models and their implementation learnings.

Engage with consumers, surveying students and parents/carers, and interviewing career advisors from identified education providers.

Understand skill shortage in the Barwon region by conducting an environmental scan and interviewing employers offering comparative workplace integrated learning models.

## Outputs

- Provide a needs analysis report which identifies viability.
- If need is identified, provision of feasibility report to guide project implementation

Understand consumer demand of:

- Young people and their families
- Carers advisors, and the likelihood of them recommending such a pathway

Understand demand from local industry including success and limitations of past programs and availability of similar programs in the region.

## Short term outcomes

Provision of a thorough needs analysis and feasibility report (should the need be identified) that lay the foundation for successful future implementation of the workplace integrated learning program in the Barwon region.

Our extensive engagement with key stakeholders including students, will assist Barwon Water to understand consumer demand for the program.

Our evidenced based research will assist Barwon Water to understand projected skills and labour demands in the region

## Long term outcomes

By providing targeted education and on-the-job training, the workplace integrated learning program aims to give individuals access to quality education alongside meaningful experiences. This has potential to increase the pool of skilled workers in the region.

The project has the capacity to increase the employment rate of young people by offering them viable pathways into skilled employment, ultimately driving economic growth and development in the region.

Successful implementation would rely on the development of strong partnerships between education providers and stakeholders. Leading to greater collaboration and alignment between educational curricula and industry needs.

## Exclusion

- Development and implementation of the project model; this is a scoping project only. Execution of the project model will not be in scope.
- Development of specific program course/content.





# Project Scope

The project sought to evaluate the necessity of a multi-sector Work Integrated Learning (WIL) program to establish local pathways to skilled employment for school leavers aged 18 to 25.

The initiative focused on adapting successful fee-based WIL models from metropolitan sports and recreation sectors to other industries in the Barwon Region, such as healthcare, infrastructure, and the arts and culture.

The scope of the project was broad and multifaceted, reflecting the complex nature of the challenges facing the Barwon Region. It included a thorough analysis of the region's labour market, with a particular focus on identifying key skill shortages and employment trends.

In addition to assessing the demand for a WIL program, the project also sought to explore potential barriers to implementation. This included an examination of the financial, logistical, and organisational challenges that might arise in the development and operation of such a program. The project team also considered the broader socio-economic context, including demographic trends and economic conditions, which could impact the feasibility and success of a WIL program.

Another key aspect of the project's scope was the evaluation of existing WIL models. By studying successful programs in other regions and sectors, the project team sought to identify best practices and lessons learned that could be applied to the Barwon Region. This included a review of programs in the sports and recreation sectors, as well as an exploration of potential applications in other industries, such as healthcare and infrastructure.

The project involved extensive stakeholder engagement, gathering input and feedback from a wide range of stakeholders, including students, parents, career advisors, employers, and educational institutions. This engagement was critical to ensuring that the proposed WIL program would be responsive to the needs and expectations of the local community.

# Objectives

By achieving these objectives, the project aimed to lay the groundwork for a successful WIL program that could help address the region's workforce challenges and contribute to its long-term economic prosperity.

- *Conduct a Needs Analysis*  
Assess the need for a fee-paying WIL program in the Barwon Region for school leavers.
- *Understand Consumer Demand*  
Evaluate the interest and demand for a WIL model among students, parents, and career advisors.
- *Quantify Workforce Skill Shortages*  
Analyse the extent of workforce skill shortages in the Barwon Region to understand the scale of the problem and identify the industries that would benefit most from a WIL program.
- *Review Existing Models*  
Identify and examine existing WIL models in other regions and sectors to gather insights and learnings from their implementation.
- *Engage Key Stakeholders*  
Identify and engage with key stakeholders, including educational institutions, industry partners, and community organisations.
- *Develop a Feasibility Report*  
If a need was confirmed, create a feasibility report to guide the implementation of the WIL program. This report would include recommendations for program design, potential funding sources, and strategies for stakeholder engagement.



# Methodology

## Phase 1: Scoping & Development

This phase was crucial for setting the foundation of the project, ensuring that all team members and our project sponsor were aligned on the project's objectives.

The scoping and development phase also involved identifying potential risks and challenges that could arise during the project, allowing the team to develop strategies to mitigate these risks.

## Phase 2: Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder engagement provided valuable insights into the needs and expectations of potential participants and supporters of the program. The team employed several strategies to engage with a broad range of stakeholders.

### Interviews

The project team conducted in-depth interviews with key stakeholders to gather qualitative data on their perspectives and experiences. This included:

- **Career Advisors:** We engaged with 30 career advisors from various schools across the Barwon Region, conducting over 5 hours of interviews. These discussions provided valuable insights into the career pathways students are exploring and the challenges they encounter. The interviews highlighted both barriers and opportunities for implementing a Work Integrated Learning (WIL) program in the region.
- **Employers:** We interviewed representatives from 5 local employers to understand their workforce needs. These conversations revealed the current demand for specific skills and experiences and identified obstacles to meeting these needs through a WIL program.
- **Tertiary Institutions:** We spoke with representatives from 4 tertiary institutions to learn about their existing educational programs and how they align with future workforce requirements. These interviews pinpointed opportunities for collaboration and partnership in developing a WIL program.
- **Providers of Existing WIL Programs:** We consulted with representatives from 2 existing sports and recreation WIL programs to understand their models. These discussions identified the strengths of current programs, the unique advantages sporting organizations can offer to attract youth, and potential barriers to adopting this model across different sectors.

### Surveys

The project team conducted surveys to gather quantitative data on the preferences and concerns of potential participants. The surveys were distributed to students, parents and carers through school networks and online platforms. A total of 112 responses (77 responses from young people and 35 from their parents and carers) were received, providing a robust dataset for analysis.

The surveys provided valuable quantitative data that complemented the qualitative insights gathered from interviews. Together, these data sources offered a comprehensive understanding of the demand for a WIL program and the potential challenges associated with its implementation.



## Phase 3: Desktop Review

A desktop review was undertaken to further enhance the needs analysis. This review was vital for understanding successful existing WIL programs and identifying their key success factors. This review included an analysis of:

- Labor Market Data: from the Victorian Skills Authority, Jobs and Skills Australia, and other sources to identify key skill shortages and employment trends in the Barwon Region. This analysis provided a foundation for understanding the potential benefits of a WIL program.
- Existing WIL Programs: Case studies of successful WIL programs in Melbourne's sports and recreation sectors were reviewed to gain insights into their design, implementation, and outcomes. These case studies offered valuable lessons that could inform the development of a WIL program in the Barwon Region.

## Phase 4: Needs Analysis

This phase involved analysing the data from stakeholder engagement, surveys, and desktop reviews to identify key skill shortages and assess the demand for a Work Integrated Learning (WIL) program. This analysis was crucial for evaluating the feasibility of the WIL program, ensuring that the findings were thorough and dependable.

## Phase 5: Reporting & Finalisation

This phase entailed combining insights from the needs analysis to formulate actionable recommendations, preparing and finalizing the project report, and creating a presentation for the Committee for Geelong's Project Presentation Breakfast. The report was distributed to key stakeholders for feedback to ensure it met their expectations. This stage was vital for conveying the project's outcomes and extracting lessons for future workforce development initiatives.



# Findings & Analysis

## Labour Market Analysis

The Barwon Region is experiencing significant labour and skill shortages across several key industries. The Victorian Skills Authority projects that the healthcare and social assistance sector will see the highest demand for workers in the coming years, driven by an aging population and an increased focus on health services. The construction industry is also expected to expand significantly, fuelled by major infrastructure projects and housing developments. Other sectors, including education and training, retail trade, and the green economy, are also projected to experience notable growth, necessitating a diverse range of skilled workers.

Despite these opportunities, the region faces persistent challenges in filling vacancies, particularly in technical and trade occupations such as electricians, plumbers, and construction workers. The shortage of healthcare professionals, including registered nurses and aged care workers, is also critical. These shortages are exacerbated by the region's near-full employment, highlighting the need for targeted skills development and education initiatives.

The labour market analysis revealed that while there is strong demand for skilled workers in certain industries, there is a mismatch between the skills that young people are acquiring through education and the skills that employers need. This skills gap is particularly pronounced in technical and trade occupations, where employers report difficulty in finding qualified candidates. The analysis suggests that one of the key challenges for the region will be to align educational programs more closely with the needs of employers, particularly in high-demand sectors such as healthcare and construction.





## Stakeholder Feedback

### Career Advisors

Regionally based career advisors, from both the schools based and private sectors, emphasised the need for more structured and coordinated work experience opportunities for students. They highlighted the challenges associated with the current voluntary system, where students are required to initiate and coordinate their own work experience placements. This lack of structure often results in missed opportunities for students to gain meaningful work experience that aligns with their career interests.

Career advisors noted that financial barriers are a significant obstacle for many students, with the majority of families unwilling or unable to pay upfront fees for WIL programs. They expressed a strong preference for programs that offer financial support, such as Commonwealth Supported Places (CSP), scholarships, and HECS-HELP loans.

Additionally, career advisors shared data indicating that a significant proportion of students (30-50%) enrol in a university degree after completing Year 12. However, up to 50% of these students defer their course for a gap year, during which they often work or travel. This suggests that many students may not be ready to commit to a WIL program immediately after completing their secondary education.

The feedback from career advisors also highlighted the importance of early exposure to career options, with many advisors noting that students who participate in work experience programs are more likely to pursue further education or training in the same field. This suggests that enhancing work experience opportunities could have a positive impact on student outcomes, by helping them to make more informed decisions about their future pathways.

**“Why would I want to go to  
Uni if I don't know what I  
want to do? ”**

**Career Advisor - Geelong Region  
Secondary College**



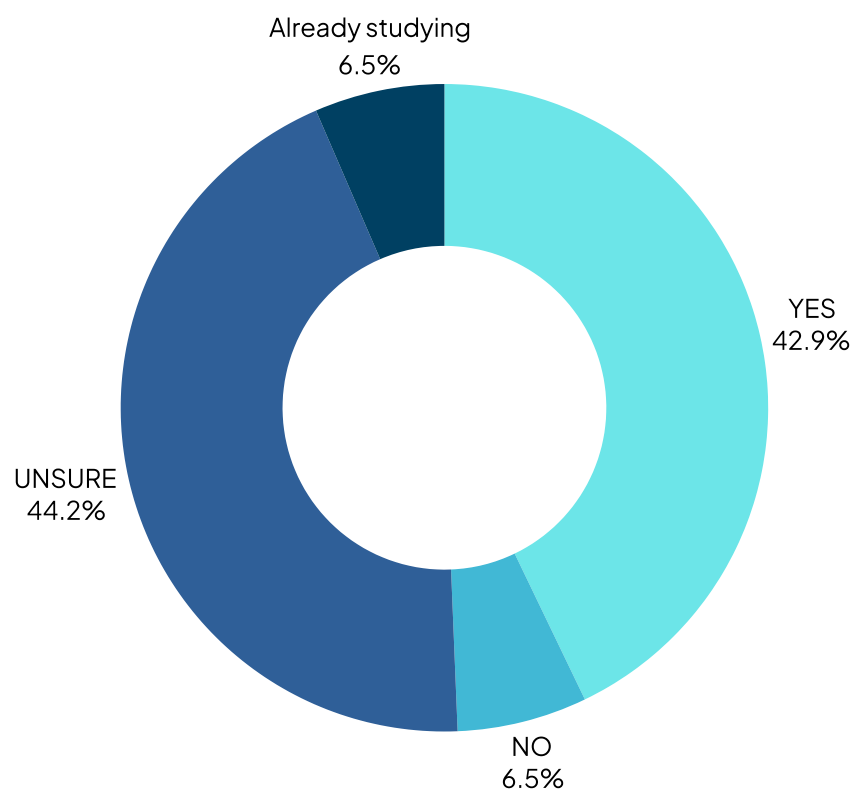
## Stakeholder Feedback

### Young People (16 - 25 years)

A survey consisting of 15 multiple-choice and open-ended questions was distributed to young people aged 16-25 years. This was done through school-based career advisors and via connections established by project team members.

- 77.9% of respondents identified as male
- 16.9 % of respondents identified as female
- 4 respondents preferred not to disclose their gender
- 89% of the respondents were students still attending school
- Nearly half of the young people surveyed were 'unsure' about their post-school career paths, highlighting the need for increased exposure to career options before they graduate.

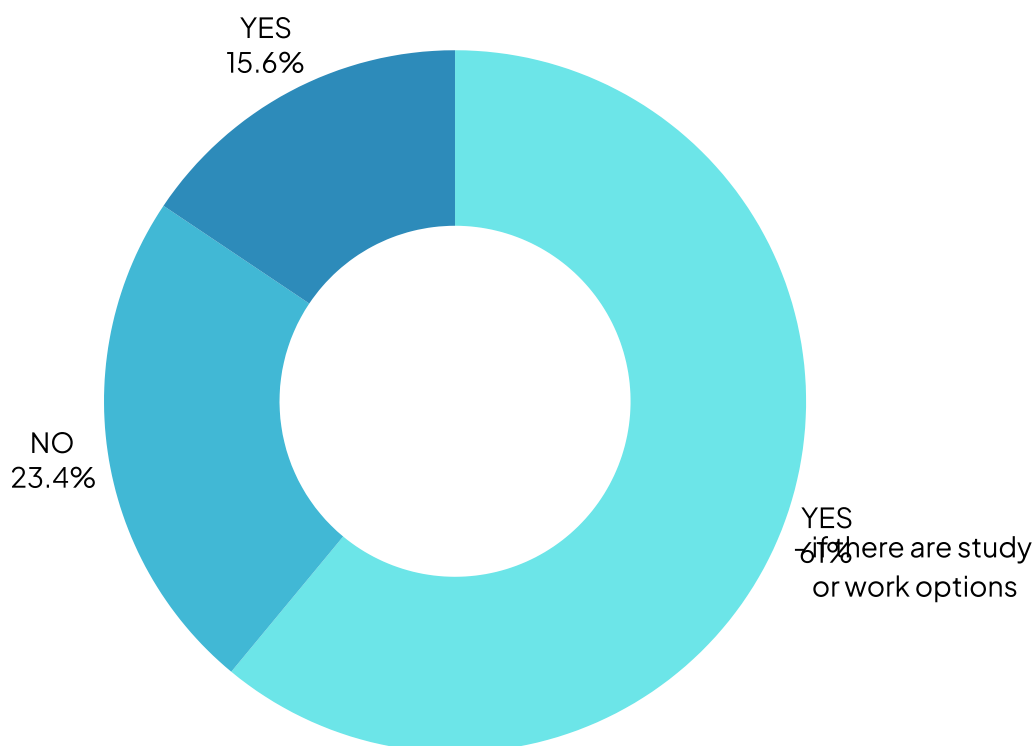
‘Do you know what area you want to study in when you leave school?’



## Stakeholder Feedback

### Young People (16 - 25 years)

‘Do you intend to stay  
in the Barwon region  
to study or work?’

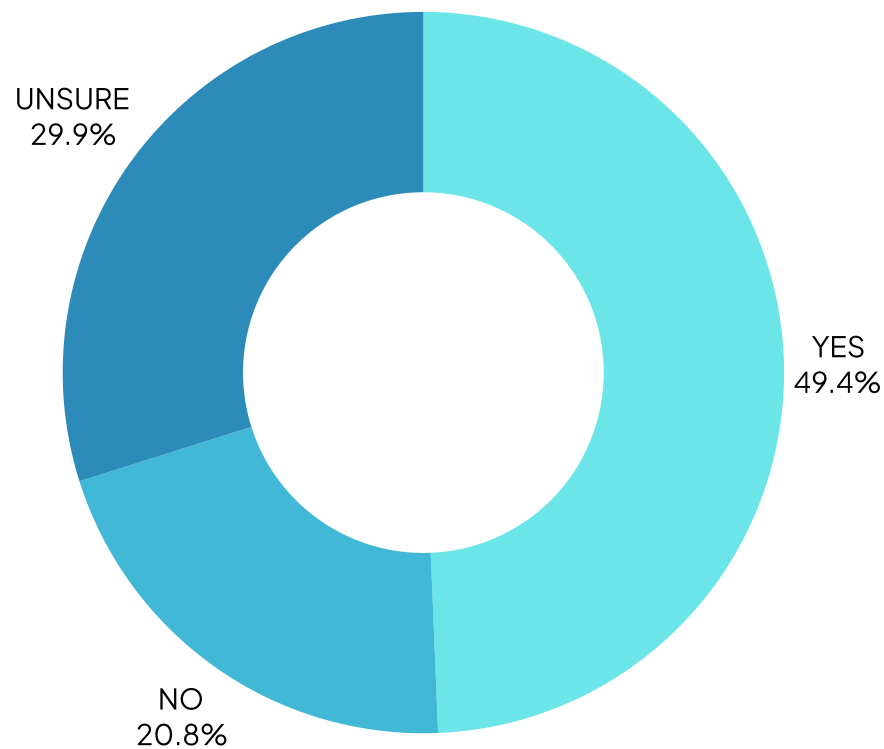




## Stakeholder Feedback

### Young People (16 - 25 years)

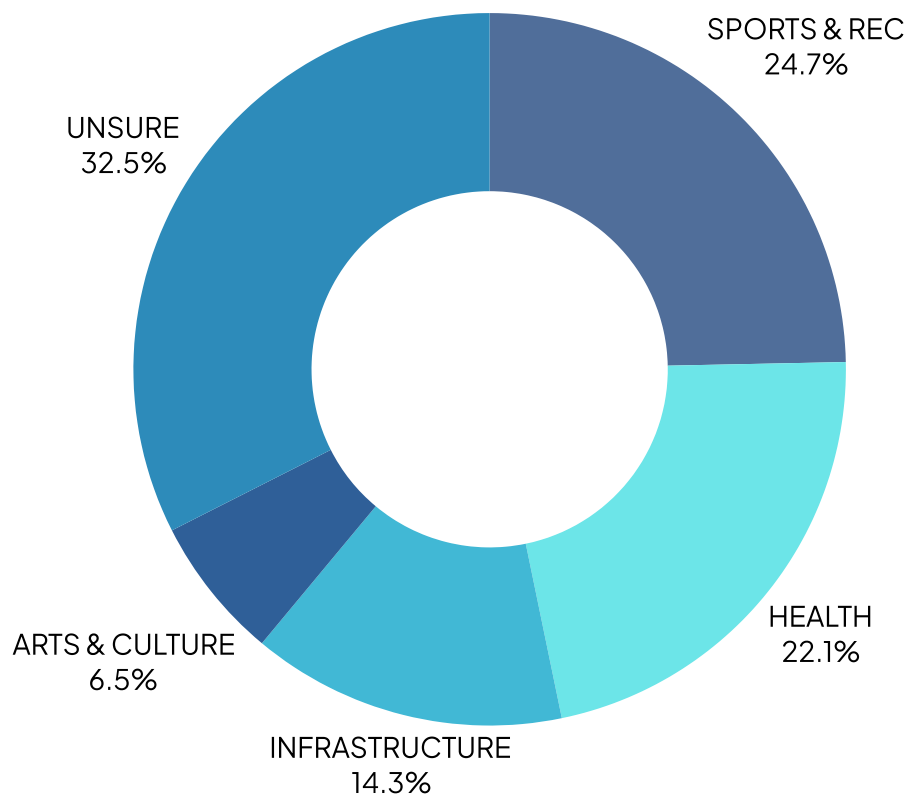
‘Would you be interested in attending a workplace integrated learning program?’



## Stakeholder Feedback

### Young People (16 - 25 years)

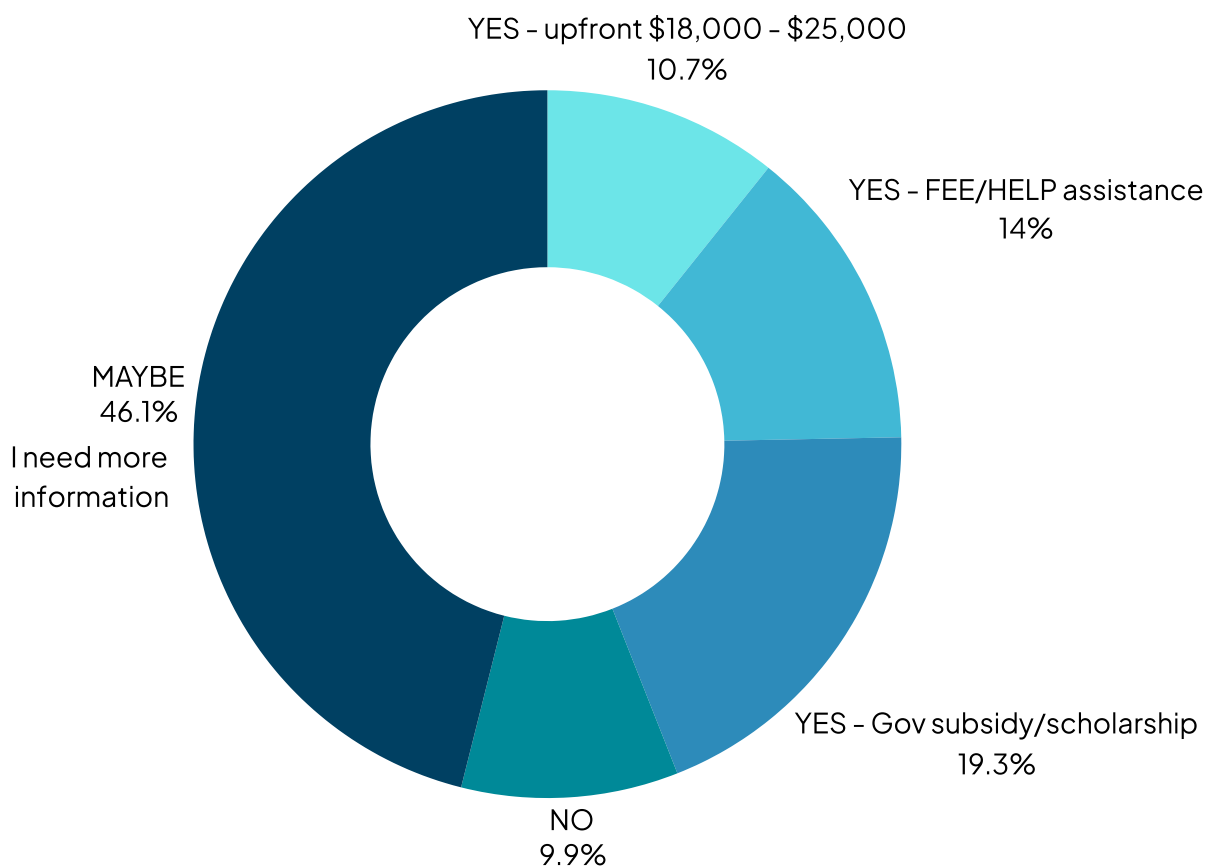
'If yes or unsure,  
what industry would  
you be most interested in?'



## Stakeholder Feedback

### Young People (16 - 25 years)

‘If the workplace integrated learning program had a cost associated, would you still be interested?’







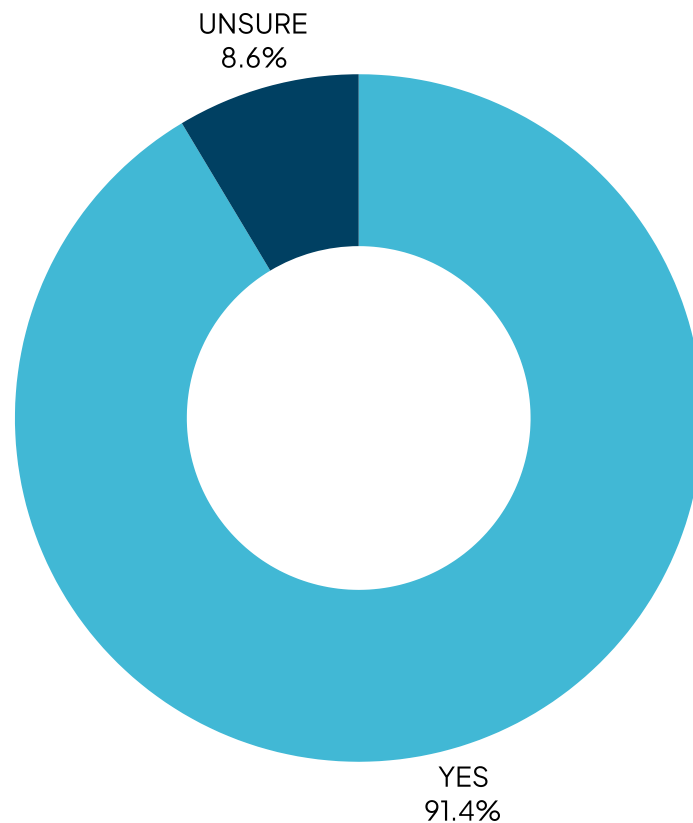
## Stakeholder Feedback

### Parents & Carers of Young People

A survey consisting of 15 multiple-choice and open-ended questions was distributed to parents and carers of young people aged 16–25 years. This was done through school-based career advisors and via connections established by project team members.

- 94.3% of respondents were parents
- 2.9% were official guardian
- 2.9% were other relatives

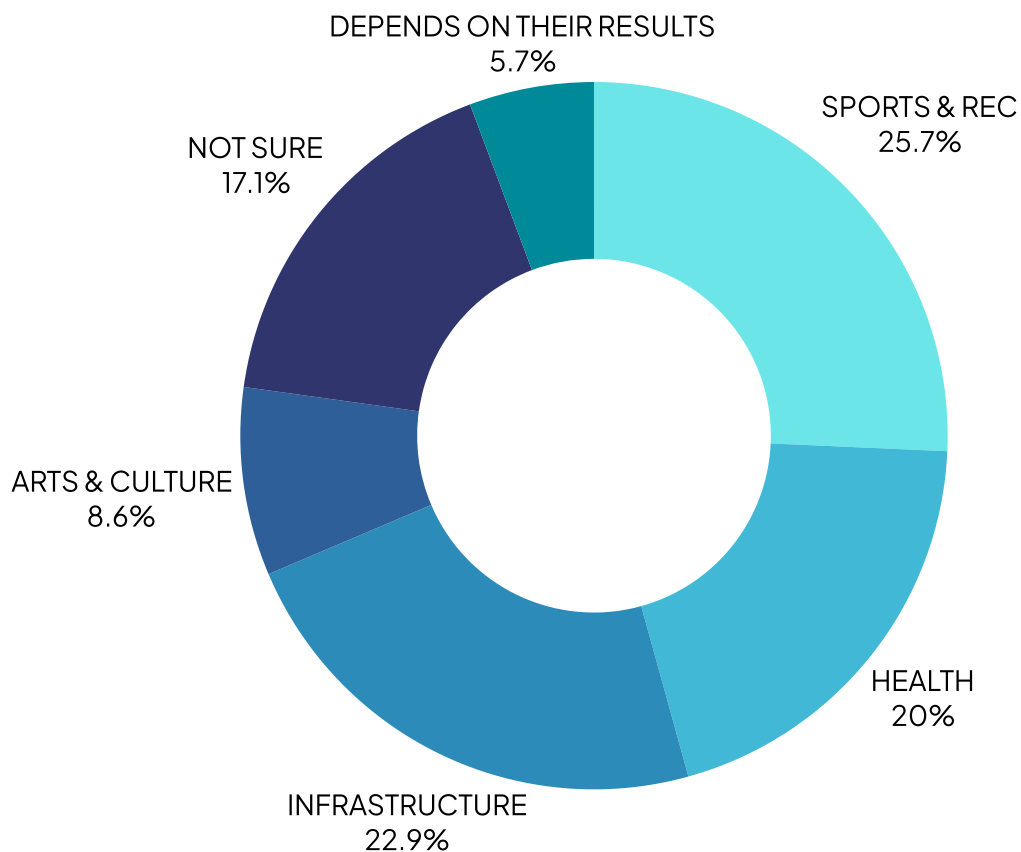
‘Would you enrol your young person in a work integrated learning program, where they attend a local workplace and get on the job training whilst studying a diploma course?’



# Stakeholder Feedback

## Parents & Carers of Young People

‘If yes or unsure, what industry would your young person be most interested in?’

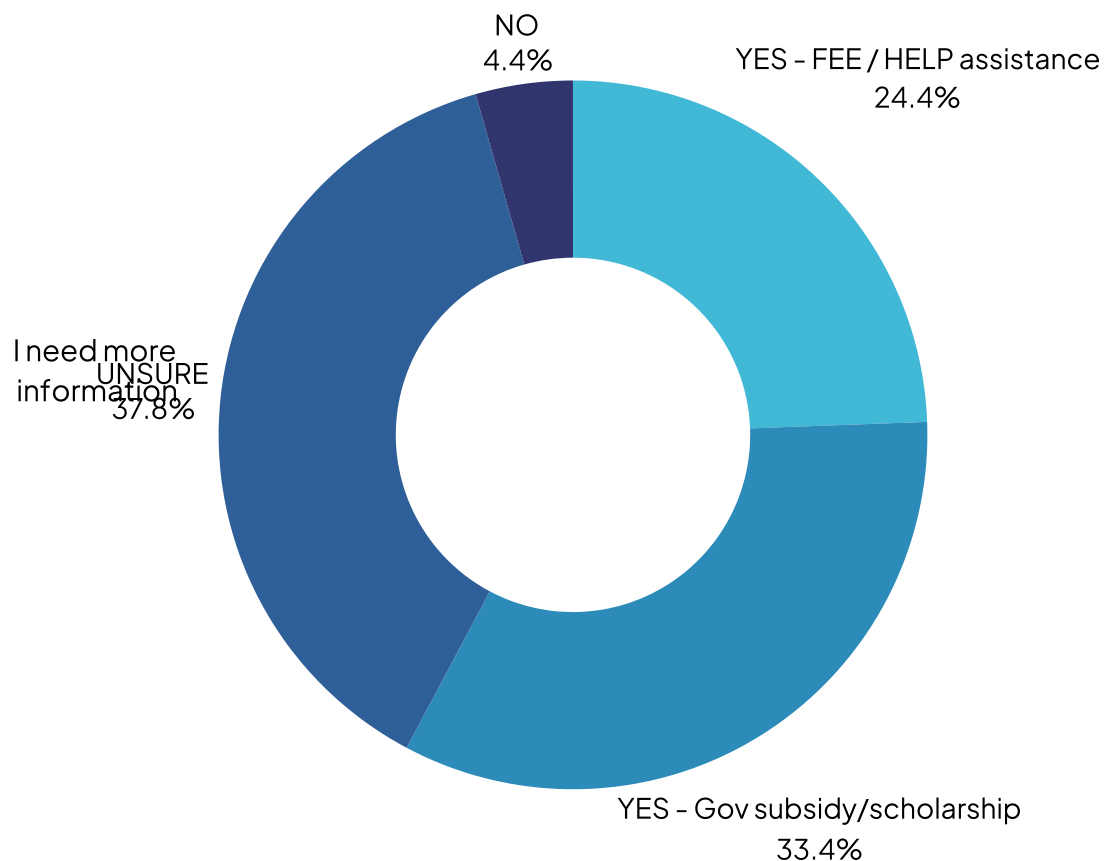


## Stakeholder Feedback

### Parents & Carers of Young People

‘If the workplace integrated learning program had a cost associated, would you still be interested?’

NO respondents said yes to an upfront payment of approximately \$18,000 – \$25,000







## Stakeholder Feedback

### Employers - Regional Talent & Acquisition Leaders

We met with the leaders of Talent and Acquisition teams from a range of organisations across the Barwon Region to better understand the workforce issues they are currently facing. Leaders from the public sector, health, finance and arts industries were consulted. Despite representing distinct workplace industries, common themes emerged regarding recruitment challenges across the following sectors, with these gaps impacting operational efficiency and organizational growth:

- Information Technology (IT)
- Cyber Security
- Project Management
- Administration

Three out of four workplaces reported that their workforce gap is primarily at the technical and skilled level, rather than at the graduate level. These employers, who already provide various graduate programs, traineeships, clinical placements, and WIL placements, noted challenges in supporting even a small number of candidates (2-3) due to funding and resource constraints. They expressed significant concerns about managing a larger cohort as proposed in this WIL project.

Regional workforce leaders identified several key themes and challenges:

- Existing staff face higher demands to support additional WIL placements.
- Current WIL programs, often part of university courses, may not align with organizational needs for a skilled workforce.
- Implementing a system to manage both traineeships and WIL roles is recognised as necessary but difficult to execute.
- Offering permanent positions post-WIL is challenging due to existing graduate and traineeship programs, as well as limited roles and funding.
- There has been a reduction in immersive work experiences previously provided in secondary schools.

Industry leaders recommended developing customized WIL programs tailored to specific sectors to address their unique needs and challenges. They also highlighted the need for enhanced collaboration between workplaces, educational institutions, and Registered Training Organizations (RTOs) to better align programs with market demands. A strong emphasis was placed on creating regionally based work experience programs.

**‘Our challenge is to  
recruit skilled workers.  
We have no one to train  
the graduates’**



## Stakeholder Feedback

### Tertiary Institutions

Tertiary institutions in the Barwon Region noted WIL programs, more broadly known as placements, are generally incorporated into the final years of a tertiary course.

They recognised the need for early access to work experience to support exposure to industry and foster a pathway to lifelong learning.

They stressed the need for any new initiatives to be closely aligned with industry demand and to provide real-world experience that complements existing educational programs.

They also pointed out that partnerships with local businesses and organisations are crucial for the success of any WIL program. Some institutions expressed concerns over the scalability of a WIL program given the current constraints on resources and funding.

The feedback from tertiary institutions underscores the complexity in meeting skilled workforce needs utilising graduate level programs.

It highlights the importance of collaboration in the development of industry based educational programs and the need for access to work experience early to provide students with the skills and experience they need to succeed in their chosen careers.

**“Students use life experience  
to shape their careers.”**

**Deakin University**



## Review of Existing Models

### Carlton College of Sport

Established in 2019, the Carlton College of Sport offers a successful WIL program that combines academic learning with practical experience in the sports industry. In partnership with La Trobe University, the college enrolls around 130 students annually in diplomas for Sport Coaching and Development, and Elite Sport Business Marketing and Sport Management.

#### Key Features:

- **Compulsory Placements:** Students complete 100 hours of placement with organizations like Carlton Football Club, Melbourne Phoenix, and AFL Victoria.
- **Strong Industry Connections:** Partnerships with La Trobe University and Carlton FC provide valuable industry exposure and networking.
- **Program Viability:** The program meets its enrolment targets with a cap of 200 students annually. About 50–55% of students continue on to further studies or secure jobs in the sports industry.
- **Challenges:** competition from other sports programs and bureaucratic processes at La Trobe University, which can impact its flexibility and responsiveness to industry needs.

Overall, the program's success is attributed to its strong industry ties and hands-on approach, while challenges highlight the need for careful planning and collaboration in developing a WIL program.

### The Richmond Institute

Established in 2016 by Richmond Football Club, The Richmond Institute provides a WIL program focused on the sports industry. Initially starting with 45 students, the program has expanded to 178 students in 2024. It offers dual diplomas in collaboration with Swinburne University of Technology.

#### Key Features:

- **Pathways to Employment:** The program offers guaranteed pathways to further study or employment at Richmond Football Club, which boosts student enrollment and supports program success.
- **Challenges:** Finding quality placements for the required 180 hours is difficult, especially as the program grows.
- **Program Success:** Each year on average, 5–15 entry-level roles are offered to graduates, with around 60% securing jobs in sports, health, fitness, or events sectors.

The Richmond Institute provides another example of a successful WIL program that has been able to grow and adapt over time. The program's success is due in large part to its strong connections with the sports industry and its focus on providing students with clear pathways to employment. However, the challenges it faces in securing quality placements highlight the importance of developing strong partnerships with industry and ensuring that the program is responsive to the needs of both students and employers.



# Challenges & Limitations



## Challenges

- **Data Collection:** Collecting sufficient data from students, parents, and other stakeholders was initially challenging, requiring incentives to increase response rates. This limited the depth of analysis in certain sections of the report.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Engaging with all relevant stakeholders, particularly smaller businesses and certain educational institutions, proved difficult due to time constraints and availability issues.
- **Resource Constraints:** The potential implementation of a WIL program was heavily constrained by available resources, both in terms of funding and the capacity of local businesses to support placements.

## Limitations

- **Scope of Analysis:** The analysis was specific to the Barwon Region, meaning that some findings and recommendations may not apply to other areas. Additionally, since there are no existing WIL programs in the Barwon Region, outcomes from metropolitan programs may not be directly transferable to a regional setting.
- **Survey Sample Size:** The relatively small sample size of survey respondents limits the generalisability of the findings. While the insights gained are valuable, they may not fully represent the views of all young people and parents in the region.
- **Compressed Project Timeframe:** The time constraints of the project limited the opportunity to thoroughly engage with all potential stakeholders.

# Recommendations



The consultations and analysis identified several opportunities and recommendations for improving workforce development in the Barwon Region.

## 1 Focus on Improving Existing Work Experience Programs

Rather than launching a new WIL program, the findings suggest enhancing the existing school-based work experience programs in the Barwon region. This may include:

- Developing a centralised system to manage placements effectively, ensuring that all students have access to meaningful work experience opportunities.
- To better align with students' needs, feedback suggests that extending the duration of work experience placements is crucial for them to fully grasp their career interests. Therefore, the focus should be on increasing placement duration and broadening program options.
- A call to action to local businesses and vocational partners in the Barwon region to assess and enhance their work experience programs. Their involvement is crucial in shaping meaningful opportunities and contributing to the professional growth of our community.

## 2 Strengthened Industry-Education Partnerships

Stronger partnerships between industry and educational institutions can help ensure that training programs are responsive to the evolving needs of the labour market. These partnerships should focus on industries with the highest demand, such as healthcare, construction, and technical trades. This could include:

- Co-designed curricula
- Industry-led workshops
- On-the-job training opportunities i.e. certificate completion

## 3 Increased Visibility of Career Pathways

Improving the visibility of career options and pathways available in the Barwon Region can help students make more informed decisions about their education and career choices. This could involve:

- Expanded opportunities for attendance at career expos
- Industry presentations in schools
- Development of online resources that highlight local job opportunities

## 4 Enhance Career Guidance Services

Improved access to career guidance services is essential for helping students explore and understand the various career pathways available to them. This should encompass more personalised career counseling, greater exposure to diverse industries, and enhanced access to information about local job opportunities.

An important aspect of this initiative will be collaborating with the Victorian Department of Education to ensure their support and involvement in driving these efforts forward within schools.

## 5 Provide Financial Support for Students

To make work experience and training programs more accessible, financial support should be provided to students, particularly those from low-income backgrounds. This could include scholarships, subsidies, or government-funded initiatives that reduce the cost burden on families.





# Team reflection

- Effective project planning was essential to delivering the project on time. Assigning each team member a key deliverable, including related stakeholder engagement activities, proved successful.
- Clearly defining the problem statement and testing assumptions was crucial. For instance, we discovered that young people often value a 'gap year' to enhance their well-being, earn money, or travel, which was an important consideration.
- We learned the importance of thoroughly scoping the project from the outset. Engaging our project sponsors early on and securing their agreement on the project scope set clear, mutual expectations for deliverables.
- Engaging a wide range of passionate stakeholders was necessary but challenging due to time constraints. We faced unexpected barriers, such as career advisors' limited availability during school holidays.
- Additionally, offering incentives significantly increased survey response rates, demonstrating the effectiveness of this approach.



# Conclusion

The Barwon Region is grappling with substantial workforce challenges, especially in fulfilling the demand for skilled labor in critical industries. Although a work-integrated learning program holds promise for the region, the current analysis indicates that implementing such a program may not be feasible in the short term due to financial and logistical limitations.

Instead, this report recommends focusing on improving existing school-based work experience programs, strengthening industry-education partnerships, and providing financial support to students. These measures are likely to have a more immediate and impactful effect on addressing the region's workforce needs.

By implementing these measures, the Barwon Region can better equip its youth for the workforce and ensure local businesses have access to the skilled talent they need to succeed. To advance this effort, the project team will organize a local forum with businesses, vocational providers, and representatives from the Department of Education to galvanise action and drive progress in this area.

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