

‘Should we make a TikTok?’

**Insights into how young people use
online information about jobs**



Acknowledgment of Country

Social Ventures Australia acknowledges and pays respect to the past and present traditional custodians and elders of this country on which we work.

'After the Rains' by Richard Seden for Saltwater People 2024

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Executive Summary

In its *Rebuilding the Career Ladder program*, SVA works with employers to help them attract and retain young people - particularly those who struggle to find good quality employment. In the course of this work, we are often asked whether employers should promote jobs on TikTok (or similar) to attract young people to their roles. We thought the best way to approach this question was to seek the views of young people themselves.

This paper reports on the outcomes of two focus groups and a short survey of young people (17-25) about how they use online sources of information (including social media) to look for work and find out what jobs might be like.

Twenty-one unemployed and underemployed Western Sydney youth participated in two focus groups. They were asked for feedback on five examples of video content about jobs. None of the participants in the focus groups had sought job or career information via social media. While some had seen jobs promoted in their social media feed, they tended to treat these with suspicion. Many had had poor experiences with jobs in the past – instances where the reality of a job did not live up to expectations created in the job ad or the hiring process. Therefore, they were wary of anything that looked inauthentic or glossed over the realities of particular jobs.

Of the five videos that were shown, the one that received the most positive feedback showed a manager talking about what the job entailed, being clear about what training and equipment would be provided and describing aspects of the job that would make it difficult for some people (i.e. need to work weekends and nights). Videos that did not explain what the job was in simple terms or that seemed inauthentic were not received well.

A short online survey received 95 responses, the majority from young people who did not have post-secondary qualifications. By far, the most common online sources of job information reported by respondents were job posting sites. They were more likely to report using social media to find out what a job might be like, but job posting websites, company websites and word of mouth were all identified as more common sources of this information. Few respondents were very positive about seeing TikTok content from employers, and a significant minority were negative about sponsored content.

While many young people are open to receiving information via social media or other video content, there is a risk of negative responses if the communications are seen as inauthentic. Video content that includes concrete information about the job, shows a diverse, friendly workplace and welcomes applications from young people has a good chance of being effective – provided it looks and feels authentic.

This project provides insights for employers into what information young people consider important when looking for jobs. After location, young people are looking for a clear understanding of what they will be doing in the job, whether the workplace is supportive, and pay. In the focus groups, many young people had applied for jobs online without success. They found it hard to determine which jobs might be open to their applications and were sometimes quick to assume they would not meet experience or qualifications.

Background

Despite low overall unemployment, many young people find it difficult to find suitable employment. In 2018, the Foundation for Young Australians found that it took on average 2.6 years for young people to move into full-time employment after leaving full-time education (FYA 2018¹). Young people are starting out in lower-skill/lower-paid jobs and ‘climbing the career ladder more slowly’ (Productivity Commission 2020²). Many qualified young people cannot find employment in their field of study. At the same time, employers report challenges in securing labour and skills, including difficulties filling apprenticeships.

Not all young people struggle in the labour market. Factors associated with higher rates of unemployment or underemployment include:

Lower educational attainment (Borland and Coelhi 2022³)

Lower socioeconomic background (Strawa, 2022⁴)

Disability (AIHW 2024⁵)

Indigeneity (Productivity Commission 2024⁶).

One factor contributing to outcomes for young people is access to labour market information. Family and friends remain the most powerful sources of career information for young people (Roberts et al. 2023⁷). Many job opportunities, including entry-level roles and work experience opportunities, are still filled through word of mouth. For those growing up in less well-connected families or locations – for example, people from lower-income families or living in poorer areas – good quality information about available jobs and careers is important to improving access to quality job opportunities. (OECD 2024⁸).

This project was initiated in response to questions from employers about how they can better reach young people with information about jobs and careers and what role social media should play. It has a particular focus on information that is useful for young people who may face labour market challenges, recognising that they are likely to be more reliant on information from outside their immediate networks.

The project used focus groups and an online survey to explore two questions:

Are young people (particularly those struggling to find suitable employment) using social media to find jobs or to gather career information?

What type of content would young people like to see from employers?

¹ Foundation for Young Australians, *New Work Reality*, 2018

² Productivity Commission, *Why Did Young People’s Incomes Decline*, Commission Research Paper, 2020.

³ J. Borland and Coelhi, *The Next Employment Challenge from Coronavirus: How to Help the Young*, *The Conversation*, 2021.

⁴ C. Strawa, *Supporting Young People Experiencing Disadvantage to Secure Work*, Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2022, <https://aifs.gov.au/resources/short-articles/supporting-young-people-experiencing-disadvantage-secure-work>

⁵ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *People with Disability in Australia 2024*, Australian Government, accessed 9 October 2024.

⁶ Productivity Commission, *Closing the Gap Annual Data Compilation Report July 2024*, Canberra, 2024

⁷ Steven Roberts et al., *Young Australians Navigating the ‘Careers Information Ecology*, *Youth 3*, no. 1 (2023): 300–320, <https://doi.org/10.3390/youth3010020>

⁸ OECD, *Challenging Social Inequality Through Career Guidance: Insights from International Data and Practice*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1787/619667e2-en>.

How are young people using online sources to find out about jobs and careers?

SVA used a combination of focus groups and a short online survey to provide insights into how Australian young people use online sources in their job search.

About the Focus Groups

Two focus groups were held with 21 young people aged 17-25 who are not engaged in full-time education or employment and are looking for work. The participants were recruited by two youth organisations: Penrith Schools Industry Partnership YES and OCTEC. Focus groups were held at Fairfield and Penrith in Western Sydney.

Participants were asked about their social media use and experiences with job hunting through online portals. They were shown examples of online job promotion material and asked for their opinions on these.

Accessing information about job vacancies

None of the participants in the focus groups reported actively using social media for job hunting or career exploration. Job posting sites (like Seek and Indeed) were identified as the most often online sources used, with participants reporting that they had been directed to these sites by others. Other approaches to information about jobs included Google searches, recommendations from friends and family, company sites, handing in printed resumes, and (in one case) newspapers.

While all participants used job posting sites, many felt that they were unlikely to succeed in applications using this approach because of the number of other, more experienced applicants:

“You’re competing with so many people that are applying for the same job”.

In response, some participants took their written resumes to employers. While one had succeeded using this approach, others reported that they were turned away and told to apply online. Young people felt their lack of experience made it hard to succeed through online recruitment, but many employers offered no alternative.

What attracts the attention of young people

Focus group participants were asked what they looked for in job postings that might encourage them to apply. Most critical were pay rate, location and hours. Interest in the field of work was also important. In addition, participants spoke about the importance of a healthy and supportive workplace.

“Like if I’m going to get a job, I just want to enjoy the environment that I’m in. If I’m going into a toxic environment, even if the pay is good, it’s not going to be enjoyable.”

We heard about experiences of employers advertising that they had a ‘positive work environment’, but this did not turn out to be offered in practice. Issues with overly hierarchical management and employers’ lack of loyalty were mentioned:

“I worked for them since I was 18 to 21, as soon as I turned 21, that’s when they dropped me. I stopped getting shifts. I stopped getting rosters of all that nature.”

“At the start, the manager was really nice. Then one day he’s like if you don’t get a certain amount [of sales], it was going to be a worse conversation [to be] had.”

One participant spoke about their negative experience of finding employment for a charity. They reported that the job description was misleading and as a result, they felt unprepared for the role:

“[job postings] may look enticing, like very good enticing on the thing. It was on Seek. But when I got there, it was completely different from what I thought it would have been.”

Participants across both groups expressed a desire to find employers who see them as more than just a ‘cog in the machine’. They spoke of wanting to be valued as people:

“They’ll be asking for qualities...”

“They’re telling you they want you to work here. Not just come work for us.”

“It’s something that humanises the job, rather than just basing a sterile description”

Participants told us that an honest understanding of the employer’s ‘offer’ regarding the work environment would allow for better decision-making when applying for jobs and result in fewer mismatches. Many young people seek entry-level jobs requiring minimal to no experience; a list of qualities the employer is looking for would allow the potential candidate to determine whether they would be suitable for the job and vice versa.

Many participants had accessed review of companies from past employees during their job searches. One participant had read bad reviews about a particular organisation before joining. Once they started working there, their experience reflected the reviews, and since then, reviews have been critical to their decision-making. Another participant was sceptical about the reliability of such reviews and spoke of visiting a worksite to check the environment instead:

“You have to go in yourself to see that you can’t just see reviews, you got to see it for yourself. Because, like a lot of the times you go to a place and you can see they’re not enjoying themselves, you can see that they don’t like each other. Like you go to a [fast food outlet], and none of them are talking to each other.”

Authentic footage of employees in the workplace was seen as a valuable way of checking whether a work might be positive:

“I was looking for work, I went onto a website, and it was like the Meet the Team kind of page. And rather than it just being a photo of the person, it was more, like a kind of raw footage of them ... you could actually see their smile and how genuine they were or whether they weren't smiling or whatnot. So, you got to actually get a vibe of what that, what it was, you know, more snippet of what it was like in their company.”

What information young people find useful

Participants identified openness and clarity about what a job entails as key issues. Several spoke of experiences with misleading job descriptions. One participant reported having been unprepared for the skills that would be needed or targets they had to meet to the job effectively – they felt these things should have been clearer in the job ad:

[they can improve by] explaining “this is the minimum, this is what you'll be doing. This is the goals we expect of you. If you are amazing when talking to people and getting people's opinions and perspectives then yes, do this job.”

Another spoke about expecting that their job at a restaurant would be busy, but finding it was slow. Including information about salary was important to focus group participants. One participant spoke about how employers often dodge questions about salary, even at interview stage. This raises alarm as salary is often the first priority when job seeking.

“... they deviate from that point. They kind of then say, oh, well, we can talk about that on the first week, or, you know, we can talk about that once we've nailed down your permanency.”

Some participants mentioned they would like job descriptions to include potential negative aspects—things about the job that would make it unsuitable for some but might be okay for others. Many commented on wanting more representations of diversity, including portraying more young people in the workforce and showing that the workplace is disability-friendly.

Platforms and strategies

Overall, the most prevalent social media platforms used by participants were TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat. TikTok and Instagram were used for entertainment purposes and Snapchat was primarily used to keep in contact with friends. Participants suggested to avoid Facebook as none of the group used it. One commented, “Facebook is something of the past”.

Participants were asked if they had previously seen job ads or career content on their social media feeds. A small number of participants mentioned seeing ‘day in my life’ videos on TikTok and, to a lesser extent, Instagram. Most had seen some job postings on social media platforms, including Facebook and Instagram, but reported these ‘looked dodgy’ and chose to ignore.

Responses to examples

Focus group participants were shown five examples of online content and asked to provide feedback.

The first two videos were 'unauthorised' because they did not appear to be produced by the companies featured in them.

[Video one](#) was a 'Day in the Life' produced by a young woman documenting her day working in tech sales. It included timestamps, the tasks she completed between the time stamps and short descriptions of what she does with video snippets of her at the workplace.[watch the video [here](#)]

[Video two](#) was produced by Getahead – a company that has a job matching app. It shows the creator stopping a young woman wearing an Australia Post uniform on the street and asking about pay, hours and her daily tasks.[watch the video [here](#)]

There was a very positive response to the worker-authored 'Day in the Life' video (Video one). The majority of participants said they would watch videos like this if they showed up on their feed. Participants suggested this is an effective method to give young people an insight into what it's like working at a particular job and mentioned they would like to see similar videos for entry-level jobs. The video provided enough information for those interested to go on and do more research in the field.

“... it's more like key points. ... you'll be doing this, you'll be doing that, and it's not too much information, but it's enough to get you attracted. ... And she also said there are other units in this job that you can do other stuff in it ... you see that, and you're like, oh, I kind of like this. And then you go to the company, and you see more information. So, it's enough of a hook basically.”

Video two also attracted positive responses. Participants commented that it answered practical questions and told potential candidates if the job would suit them or not.

“... if you explain your quotas, like what is required for you to reach, then you can determine, am I, would I be suitable for this job? With the [Australia Post video], I feel like it did explain a lot more; it explains the hours, it explains how much pay is per hour, it explains, you know, what heavy packages you could deliver a day or whatnot...”

Both videos were criticised in one area; that they did not talk about the possible downsides of the job. Participants suggested that because only the positives were highlighted, it might be seen as promotion rather than information:

“... it also feels very romanticised.”

“Yeah, like it's not realistic.”

Participants were divided on which approach was better. Some preferred seeing snippets of a typical day at work, while some preferred hearing the practicalities of jobs. Overall, participants were very positive about the 'Day in My Life' videos, raw footage, and short interviews that provided information about the different careers and occupations.

The next three videos shown to participants were examples of content produced by companies to highlight specific job opportunities in their organisations.

[Video three](#) was a YouTube video produced by Volvo, promoting apprenticeships in diesel mechanics. It appeared on the company website. It featured a young woman undertaking an apprenticeship speaking to the camera in general terms about her enjoyment of the job, the supportive environment, and the challenges she has overcome. All participants responded well to the acknowledgement that difficulties come with the job. [watch the video [here](#)]

“I think an ad actively acknowledging that it can be hard will definitely help humanise it in a way. It won't be easy for everyone.”

In participants' opinion, however, the video failed to describe the job, its tasks and the type of challenges the apprentice encountered. As a result, participants reported they did not understand what was being advertised; they also assumed it was not an entry-level job.

Videos four and five appeared on the TikTok platform.

[Video four](#) showed the manager of a photography company talking about an open position at his company. In the video (that is not highly produced), he talks about the need to work weekends and nights and mentions the role wouldn't suit those who want to socialise at those times. He is clear it is an entry-level job, where all training and equipment are provided. He also provides information as to where the viewer can find out more. The manager is shown interacting with a young woman who appears to be an employee. [watch the video [here](#)]

The video was the most highly rated by participants. It was described as offering more critical information than typically seen in job descriptions. They responded well to its humour (the manager, illustrating that training will be provided, pretends not to know how to use a camera and is helped by his young employee) and felt it suggested the employer was friendly. Some participants mentioned job postings that required undertaking courses out of their own pocket and appreciated the reassurance that all training was provided. The only negative comment was that, at over one minute, the video was long for TikTok. Unless they were interested in the field, they might swipe past it.

[Video Five](#) was seeking applicants for an administrative role in a plumbing company. The video uses the TikTok trend 'Man in Finance' language and rhythm. A young woman says, “I'm looking for a person in admin - office job, packs gifts, so swift”, with employees singing along, having fun in the office. While designed to appeal to the TikTok audience, the video was criticised by participants as 'corny' and giving very little helpful information about the job or the company. [watch the video [here](#)]

“None of that made any sense. Like, looking at that video, no idea what it's about.”

“Like, they tried to be too trendy, and it just ruined the whole video”

Overall, while participants had positive attitudes about career exploration content, most did not see social media as a job-hunting tool.

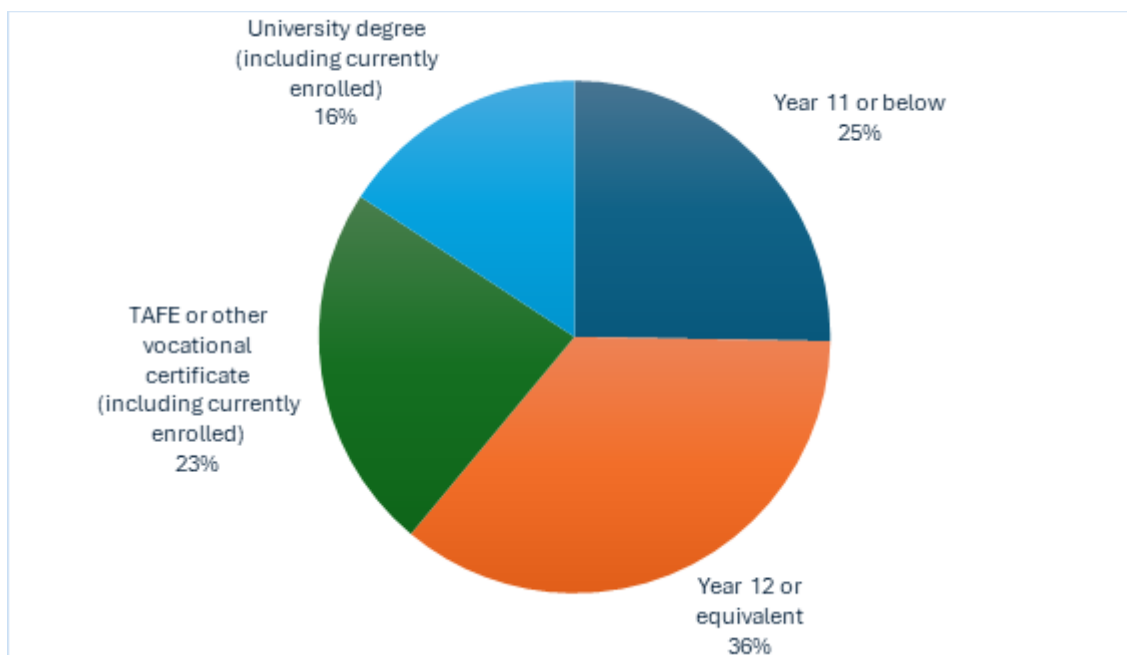
Survey – online job and career exploration

Recruitment approach and profile of respondents

A short survey was created via SurveyMonkey. To target young people who might be at risk of labour market exclusion, SVA purchased 50 responses from non-university qualified Australians aged 18-24 via Survey Monkey's 'Targeted Audience' feature. SVA also promoted the survey through youth organisations and to young people who have engaged with SVA programs. Overall, ninety-five eligible responses were received.

Of these, ten respondents were under 18, and the remainder were between 18 and 25 years old. Fewer than half of the sample had a post-secondary qualification (Figure 1).

Figure 1 - Highest level of education



A substantial number of respondents identified themselves as having struggled to find work (40.86%) (Table 1). Young people with disability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth were well represented among respondents. However, there were relatively few responses from young people living outside capital cities.

Table 1 - Characteristics (optional question)

Do any of the following apply to you? (optional)		
Answer choices (multiple answers possible)	Responses	
Have a disability	29.03%	27
Speak a language other than English at home	12.90%	12
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander	11.83%	11
Live outside a capital city	12.90%	12
Struggled to find work	40.86%	38
None of these	26.88%	25
	Answered	93

Survey findings

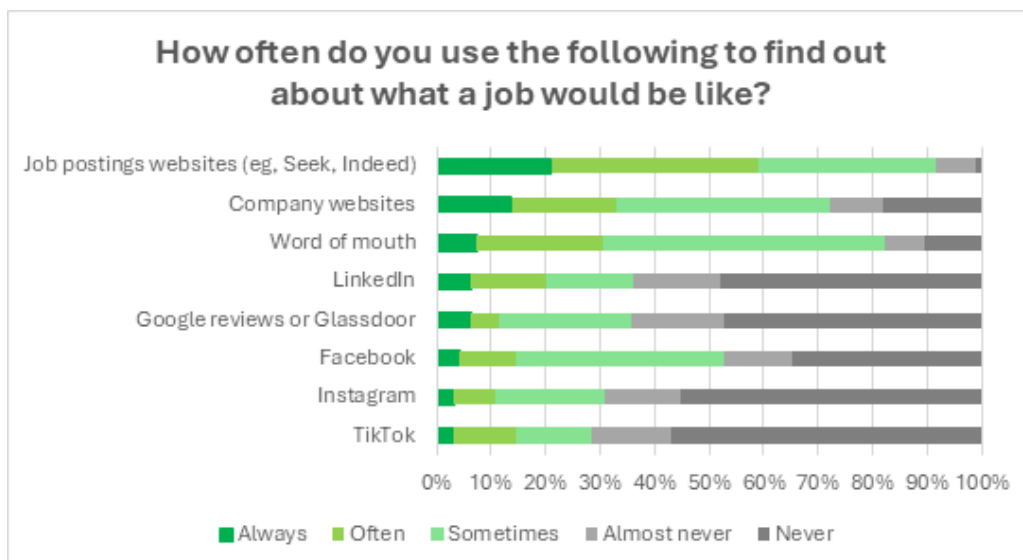
Job posting websites (e.g. Seek, Indeed) were the most frequently identified source of information about job vacancies (Table 2). While national evidence suggests that over 85% of young people use at least one social media site (ACMA 2021), fewer than one-quarter of respondents in this study report using common sites, like Instagram and TikTok, to find job vacancies. LinkedIn was the most likely to be used on social media sites to find out about jobs (at 26.16%).

Table 2 Online sources used to find job postings

Which of the following online sources do you currently use to find out about job vacancies (select all that apply)		
Answer choices	Responses	
Job postings websites (e.g., Seek, Indeed)	83.16%	79
Company websites	31.58%	30
LinkedIn	26.32%	25
Facebook	23.16%	22
TikTok	17.89%	17
Instagram	15.79%	15
	Answered	95

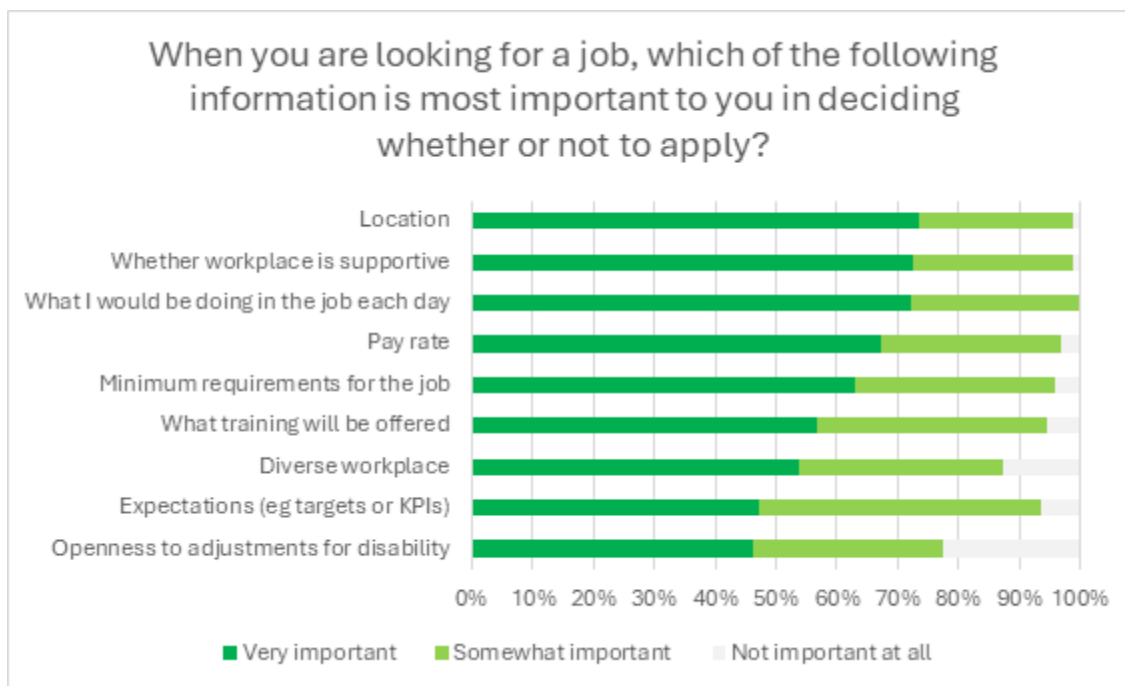
Young people were more likely to use social media platforms to find out about what a job might be like, with over half reporting that they use Facebook at least sometimes (Figure 2). But, again, by far the most used sources of information were job posting websites, with 59% reporting that they use these ‘always’ or ‘often’. Around 30% used company websites and ‘word of mouth’ ‘always’ or ‘often’ to find out what a job would be like. Over one-third used reviews at least sometimes.

Figure 2 Sources use to find out what jobs are like



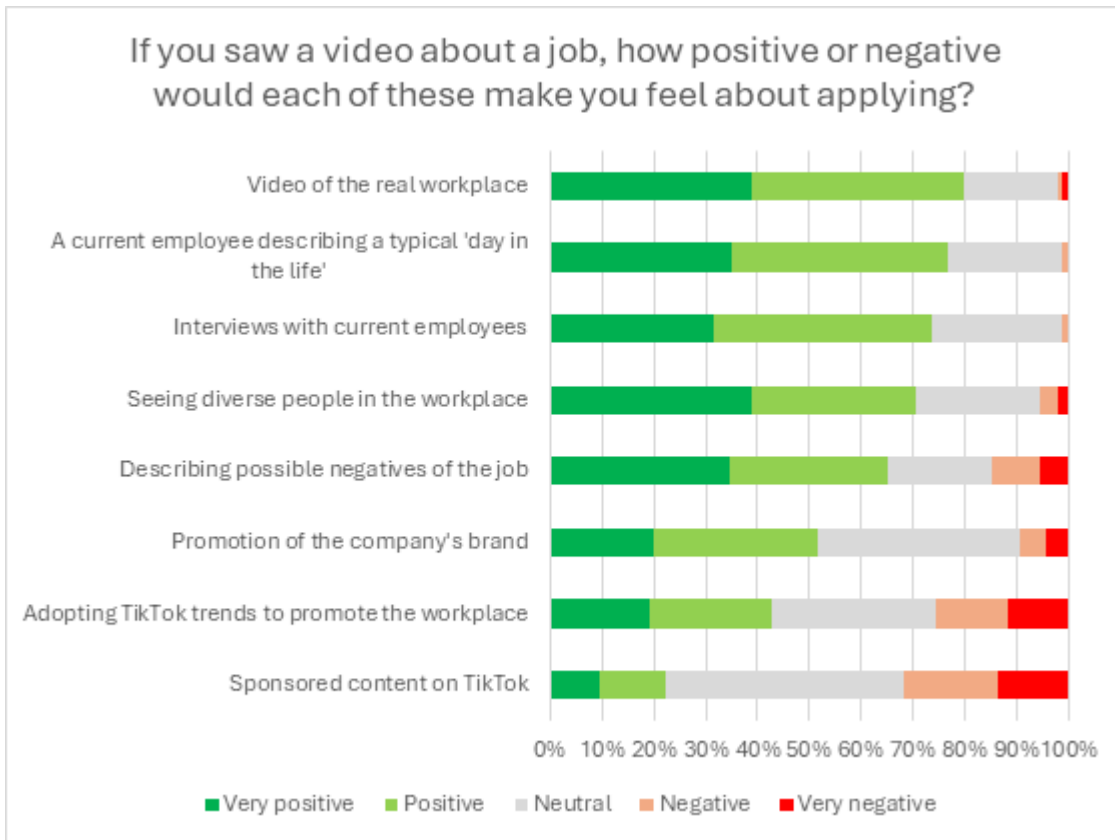
Focus groups were used to generate a list of types of information that might be important to young people in deciding whether to apply for a job. Survey respondents were asked to identify the relative importance of these items (Figure 3). The items identified as most important by most respondents were location (73%), whether the workplace is supportive (73%) and 'what I would be doing in the job each day (72%). While information about workplace adjustments for disability were ranked as important by the smallest number of respondents, it is worth noting that over three quarters of respondents identified this as somewhat or very important – double the number of respondents reporting that they lived with disability.

Figure 3 Most important information in deciding to whether to apply



The potential effectiveness of strategies employers could use was investigated by asking participants how they would feel about applying for jobs depending on different types of video content (Figure 4). Information that featured the real workplace, descriptions of daily work life, interviews with current employees and seeing diverse people in the workplace were viewed overwhelmingly positively. Responses to videos promoting the company brand were less likely to be positively received, while the use of sponsored content on TikTok and the use of TikTok trends were viewed negatively by a significant minority of respondents. Sponsored posts were viewed positively by fewer than one-third.

Figure 4 Attitudes to different types of video content



Discussion

This project highlights the importance to young people of finding employers who are honest, and workplaces that will be supportive of them. Focus group participants repeatedly raised examples where they felt misled about what a job might entail or treated as expendable by an employer once engaged. This reflects findings across other SVA research into the employment experiences of young people¹.

While many young people are open to receiving information via social media or other video content, there is a risk of negative responses if the communications are seen as inauthentic. Video content that includes concrete information about the job, shows a diverse, friendly workplace and welcomes applications from young people has a good chance of being effective – provided it looks and feels authentic.

This project provides insights for employers on what information is essential to young people when they consider job applications. After location, young people are looking for a clear understanding of what they will be doing in the job, whether the workplace is supportive, and pay. In the focus groups, many young people had applied for many jobs online without success. They found it hard to determine which jobs might be open to their applications and were sometimes quick to assume that they would not meet experience or qualification requirements. Employers wishing to attract applications from young people should describe the job and any experience/qualification requirements in plain English, including making it very clear where they are being offered as 'entry-level' roles.



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