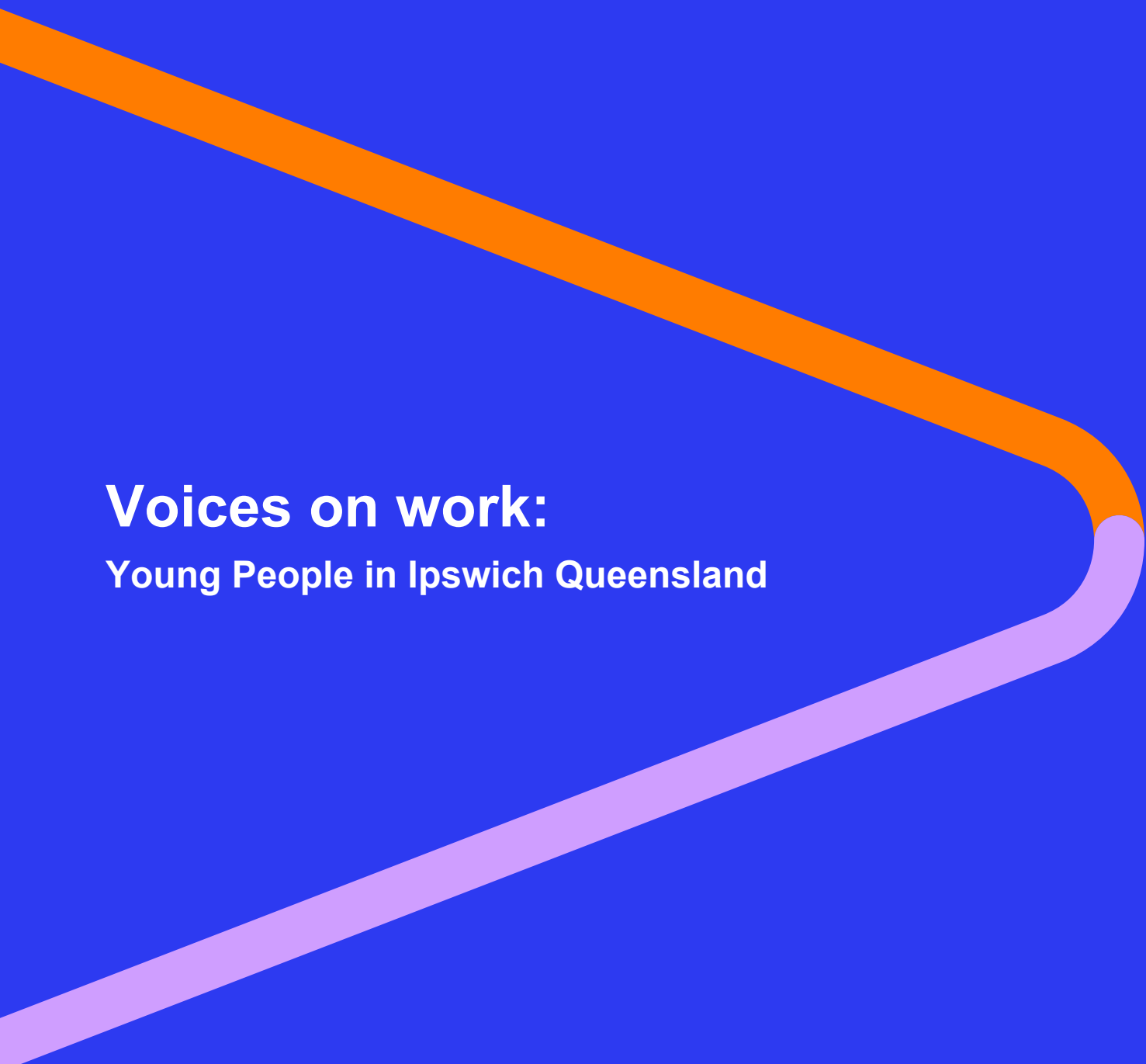


A large, stylized graphic element on the right side of the page. It consists of two thick, curved lines that meet at a point. The top line is orange and the bottom line is light purple. They form a shape that resembles a large, open parenthesis or a stylized 'C' shape, framing the title text on the left.

Voices on work:

Young People in Ipswich Queensland

Date: 20 August 2026



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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This report has been prepared by Christine Han and Ronan Smyth.

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Executive summary

The Ipswich local government area is located in Southeast Queensland, encompassing part of Greater Metropolitan Brisbane and adjacent rural areas. It is one of the fastest growing areas of Queensland. Significant investment and employment growth are projected across manufacturing, health and care, defence, construction, retail, and transport and logistics. The Wivenhoe Local Jobs Plan also identifies entry-level vacancies and areas of skills shortage. Yet youth unemployment remains a persistent challenge.

Drawing on interviews with 19 young people living in Ipswich and surrounding areas, this report explores how these conditions can exist at the same time. More jobs are essential, but employment growth does not automatically translate into opportunities for young people. A job must be visible and understandable, located somewhere the jobseeker can reach, genuinely open to someone at the beginning of a career, and supported well enough to become sustainable employment.

Nine findings emerged from the interviews. Together, they show where employer practice and local workforce initiatives can strengthen the connection between young people and local jobs.

1. A growing local economy can still be difficult for young people to navigate. The range and level of work varied considerably across occupations and locations. Participants could see employment activity around them, but often struggled to identify a realistic route into the work they wanted or to judge which opportunities were genuinely available to them.
2. Transport remains a stubborn barrier, although employers can reduce its impact. Ipswich's dispersed geography and reliance on private vehicles meant that limited public transport routes and timetables restricted where and when some participants could work. Employers can make opportunities more accessible by publishing the exact worksite and likely hours in jobs ads/listings, considering reasonable adjustments around public transport, and asking whether an applicant can reliably meet the roster rather than assuming that reliability requires a car.
3. Finding work also required knowledge of sector-specific recruitment practices that were rarely made explicit. Participants drew on familiar brands, customer experience, and family or community networks to decide where to look. An in-person approach could be effective in hospitality or small retail, while construction, health, administration and technology generally required online, provider or other formal pathways. Clear application instructions from employers, supported by sector-specific guidance from employment services and industry bodies, would make these pathways easier to navigate.
4. Many jobs described as entry level did not provide a genuine entry point. Requirements for formal experience, qualifications and preferred attributes excluded applicants before they had an opportunity to demonstrate their potential. At the same time, capabilities gained through caring, volunteering, informal work, previous employment overseas, management experience and work in other sectors were often overlooked.
5. Recruitment processes frequently created distance between applicants and employers, while offering limited opportunities to demonstrate capability. Non-responses to applications, repeated forms, short-notice contact, one-way video interviews and automated screening left participants uncertain about where they stood and reduced their trust in the process. Digital preferences varied, but many participants wanted at least one meaningful interaction with a person or a practical, role-relevant way to show what they could do.

6. Good management and supportive supervision made a clear difference once young people entered work. In the first weeks of employment, participants benefited from clear instructions, approachable supervisors, constructive feedback and expectations that reflected their level of experience. Where these supports were absent, the ordinary process of learning a new role could be interpreted as underperformance.
7. Participants also drew a clear distinction between obtaining any job and finding work that could be sustained. Reliable hours, correct pay, adequate breaks, safe and inclusive treatment, supportive management and credible opportunities to develop all shaped whether a young person could remain in a role and whether they wanted to do so.
8. The young people interviewed brought different circumstances, strengths and aspirations to work. Study, caring responsibilities, housing, migration, family circumstances, health, neurodivergence and finances affected their pathways in different ways. These experiences could also develop valuable capabilities and perspectives, although conventional recruitment processes did not always make them visible.
9. Training was most useful when it connected clearly to a career and an employer. Many participants had completed, or were undertaking, certificates, courses, internships and other training but still could not find relevant employment. Others knew which career they wanted but lacked reliable guidance about what to study, which qualifications employers valued and where to find trustworthy information. The problem was therefore not simply a shortage of training. It was the weak connection between training, career guidance and actual opportunities with employers.

These findings point to a practical agenda for employers and local partners. Entry roles need to be genuinely accessible, and job advertisements should provide accurate information about location, hours, duties, pay, training and progression. Recruitment should assess relevant capability and recognise transferable skills. Applicants need timely communication, supervisors need to be prepared to support early-career workers, and pathways from schools, TAFE, employment services and community organisations need to lead to real job opportunities.

Local context: employment growth and barriers to access

Ipswich City Council's Economic Development Strategy 2023–2027 described a city of 233,302 residents in 2021, with a median age of 33. It reported 83,540 local jobs and projected substantial employment growth, while youth unemployment stood at 11.5 per cent in July 2022. Manufacturing, health care and social assistance, retail and construction were the four largest industries by full-time employment. The Strategy also reported that 49 per cent of residents worked outside the area and that 75 per cent travelled to work as a car driver or passenger. This provides important context for understanding the labour market young people are trying to navigate.

The Wivenhoe Local Jobs Plan notes labour shortages in health and community care, manufacturing and construction, and the need to promote apprenticeships and traineeships. However, the Plan also identifies a mismatch between the skills and experience sought by employers and those available in the workforce. This report explores this mismatch from the perspective of the young people. It examines how a growing labour market can remain difficult for young people to enter and provides relevant insights for employers to consider.

About this research and analysis

Nineteen young people living in Ipswich and surrounding areas took part in semi-structured interviews between 30 June and 2 July 2026. Participants were recruited via local employment services providers. The group included nine women and ten men. All were under 25. Three participants identified as Indigenous, one was a recent migrant, and four disclosed a disability or health condition. Most had not attended university: one participant had completed a university qualification and another had commenced but not completed university study.

The interviews explored participants' work and study histories, job search and recruitment experiences, transport, supervision, job quality and future pathways. Participants included first-time jobseekers, current and former workers, students and a recent graduate. Alongside paid work, study or jobseeking, many also contributed through volunteering or caring for family members. Participants' employment and study status at the time of interview is summarised in the following tables:

Employment and study status	Number of participants
Looking for work; not studying	13
Looking for work while studying/training	4
Working and studying	1
Studying; not currently looking	1

Time since last paid work	Number of participants
Within 0–6 months	6
Within 6–12 months	6
More than 12 months	1
Never had paid work	5
Currently employed	1

Given the small sample, detailed demographic information is not reported for individual participants. The sample was also purposively selected and should not be treated as statistically representative of all young people in Ipswich. Participant numbers are used throughout the report, and names and other identifying details have been removed in accordance with the participant information and interview protocol.

Finding 1: A growing local economy can still be difficult to navigate

The Ipswich economy is described in official documents as experiencing population, investment and employment growth, but participants experienced the local labour market in a much less uniform way. Different occupations and locations offered different points of entry. In hospitality, a young person might be able to hand a résumé directly to a manager. Industrial and construction workplaces could be visible in the local area but difficult to approach. Health and care roles were easier to identify, although qualifications were often required. Logistics work was concentrated at particular sites and shift times, while specialist office, IT, automotive, music and design roles were seen as limited locally or more concentrated toward Brisbane.

These differences made it difficult for participants to form realistic expectations about where they could begin. They could often see employment activity without finding a role at a level they could enter. One participant seeking IT work found that local vacancies tended to be more advanced, while more junior roles appeared closer to Brisbane. Another could see nearby construction sites but did not know how to access labouring work outside an apprenticeship. A recent design graduate encountered junior roles requiring years of experience, and a participant interested in boilermaking knew of only a few nearby employers, most of which were beyond practical reach.

“Entry-level IT work is inundated with people with master’s levels of education ... I am completely [outmatched] when it comes to the people with master’s degrees going for these entry-level roles.” — Participant 02

“I printed out 200, 300 résumés ... location to location ... I got one response.” — Participant 10

“There are not many opportunities, especially for entry-level jobs ... Maybe it’s more of a systemic issue than any individual company.” — Participant 10

“You’ve got this experience behind you ... but they’re not wanting that; they’re wanting something entirely different. So you’ve then got to navigate your way around what you know to make it to what you can learn.” — Participant 13

Insights for employers

Young people told us they want clearer information about where entry-level opportunities sit within an organisation or industry, and what they need to do to access them. This includes being clear about which requirements are essential from the outset, what will be taught on the job, and what opportunities may be available as they gain experience. They also valued being able to see the range of roles that exist within growing sectors, rather than only hearing that an industry is expanding. For employers, making entry points and progression pathways more visible can help young people understand where they might fit and what a realistic pathway into the sector could look like.

Finding 2: Transport is a significant barrier for many young people

Transport was an important factor for almost all participants, discussed in 17 of the 19 interviews. At least three participants living in outer or smaller townships described particularly limited bus services. In Fernvale, for example, one participant had access to only two morning buses into town and two services back in the afternoon. At least five other participants described public transport as workable only when jobs were located near major transport routes and shifts fell within service times. These constraints could significantly limit the locations and hours of work young people could consider in and around Ipswich. A travel route that worked during weekday daytime hours might not be available for a 5:30am bakery shift start, a late-night finish in healthcare or a weekend job. Where public transport did not align, the alternatives were often costly or difficult to sustain. One participant worked nights while attending English classes in the morning and relied on Uber, with each fare absorbing several hours of wages. Family members sometimes provided lifts, but these arrangements were not always sustainable. The distance people could reasonably travel also depended on the type of work. Participants were more able to justify a long commute for stable, full-time work with career prospects than for a short casual shift.

Access to a car was challenging for many young jobseekers. Only two participants clearly described having their own car, while many others were still learning to drive or working towards a licence. Obtaining a licence did not necessarily resolve the problem, as buying and running a car requires an income. One participant had already obtained her licence and had access to a family car, but could not afford to be added to the insurance and therefore could not use the car independently. For many participants, this created a cycle in which they needed work to afford a car but needed a car to access work.

“It won’t be effective having my Ps if I don’t have a job, and then I can’t get a car.” — Participant 11

“Twenty-eight, thirty [dollars]—you have to work a couple of hours just to pay for the taxi.” — Participant 14

Employer assumptions could create a separate barrier even where travel was manageable. One participant explained that he had reliable transport, including public transport and paid alternatives when needed, but believed employers interpreted not driving as an indication that he would be unreliable. For a fixed-site role, asking about car ownership can therefore exclude a capable applicant before the employer has established whether the person can meet the actual roster.

“I have reliable transport. It may be public transport, but I think they hear that I don’t have a car or I don’t drive, and it’s just a no.” — Participant 16

Insights for employers

Young people told us that transport could constrain the jobs they could consider, even when they were keen on a role. Clear information about the exact worksite, expected start and finish times, and likely shift length can help applicants work out whether they can reliably get to and from work. They also valued employers taking public transport into account when setting rosters, particularly for early starts, late finishes and weekend work. Where driving is not an inherent part of the role, young

people wanted employers to focus on whether they can reliably meet the roster rather than assuming that reliability depends on owning a car.

Finding 3: Young people must navigate unwritten, sector-specific rules

Different employers used different application methods and had different expectations about how candidates should approach them. In hospitality and small retail, applying in person could sometimes be effective, while construction, manufacturing, health and office roles were more likely to rely on online applications, employment services or other formal processes. Young people therefore had to navigate a mix of employer preferences and requirements, often without clear guidance about which approach was expected.

“On Seek, I mainly look for construction jobs ... because you can’t really walk up ... and hand out your résumés.”— Participant 05

“You get more when you actually go up and ask instead of just applying online.”— Participant 08

The two accounts above reflect different recruitment environments. Effective job search required an understanding of how each sector and employer operated. One participant, for example, used Facebook to create paid yard work, distributed résumés in person for hospitality roles and relied on Seek for construction vacancies. The appropriate channel changed with the kind of work being sought.

Participants also tended to apply where they had some basis for understanding the workplace. Household names, experiences as customers, the jobs of friends and relatives, local reputation and online reviews all helped them imagine what the work might involve and whether they would fit. A participant interested in baking approached shops she already knew because she could picture the tasks and pace of work. Another considered care work partly because friends had talked about it. Unfamiliar employers and occupations were harder to assess, even when a participant’s existing skills might make them a good fit.

“[I chose] ones that I know my way around ... I go there all the time.”— Participant 18

“I had to get my mum to do most of the work for me. I don’t know where to look.”— Participant 03

Local networks often helped young people become aware of opportunities or make initial contact with an employer. Participants described finding work through a pub referral, a sister’s connection to a warehouse, neighbours sharing vacancies and relatives making particular occupations more familiar. These connections could be valuable, but access to them was uneven. Young people without similar networks had fewer informal ways to learn about vacancies or how particular employers recruited. Employment services sometimes helped bridge this gap by identifying opportunities and supporting contact with employers, although some referrals were impractical because of distance or did not lead to a response.

Insights for employers

Young people told us that they understood employers may have different ways of recruiting, but this meant jobseekers had to navigate a wide range of expectations and application requirements. Clear instructions about where and how to apply would make this easier, particularly for young people with limited experience of the labour market. They also valued having enough information to understand what a workplace and role would actually be like. Familiar employers, customer experience, local reputation and personal networks often helped participants decide where they might fit. Employers can make unfamiliar roles easier to assess by giving applicants a clearer picture of the work, the workplace and the recruitment process.

Finding 4: Entry-level jobs should provide a genuine entry point

One of the clearest findings was the difficulty of gaining the experience required to begin. Jobs presented as junior or entry level sometimes asked for one, two or even four years of experience. Participants also understood criteria described as desirable to mean that an experienced applicant would probably be preferred. Qualification requirements could unnecessarily screen people out even where the tasks could be learned on the job.

“They want, like, two years’ experience, but I can’t get that experience if I don’t get the work.”— Participant 01

“They say experience isn’t required but is ‘not essential but desirable’, which ... I translate to ‘essential’.”— Participant 16

“I’ve seen all too many junior graphic designer and entry-level designer jobs [saying], ‘You have to have, like, four years’ experience’ ... [That is], by definition, not entry level.”— Participant 19

Participants wanted job advertisements to provide enough information for them to make a realistic decision before applying. This included the exact location, pay, actual duties, the knowledge or credentials required from the outset, and the skills the employer was willing to teach.

“Just detailing everything ... the actual location ... the pay ... the actual thing that you’re doing.”— Participant 06

“I guess something that’s semi-easy to understand, but, like, the job ad tells what it’s entailed ... ‘Here’s what we want you to do.’”— Participant 04

Many participants already had skills, qualifications and work-related experience, yet still found it extremely difficult to secure entry-level work. The sample included a former fast-food manager, a graphic-design graduate with internship experience, a family carer with several years of care and administration-related capability, a volunteer with almost three years of sailing experience, multilingual migrants, long-term retail and community volunteers, a young person who created paid yard work through Facebook, and participants with qualifications in IT, hospitality, construction, health administration, cookery and bakery. The issue was not that young people lacked capability. It was that entry-level recruitment often recognised only experience that closely matched the advertised role. Informal work, transferable skills, caring experience, volunteering and experience gained in other sectors could be overlooked when they did not align with a specific local job title. As a result,

some entry-level jobs did not function as genuine entry points. They continued to favour applicants who already had the kind of experience the role was meant to provide.

One participant's first paid job in a distribution centre provides a useful contrast. The employer recruited her without previous paid experience, provided three days of task training and then reinforced her progress through direct supervisor support and feedback. Her six-month search had been difficult, but once employed she found the work manageable. This example shows how a role can provide genuine entry when selection focuses on the capacity to learn and the workplace supplies the training needed to perform.

"We had three days for training ... it's my first job ... [some days] I did well and [my supervisor] came and told me, 'You did well.'"— Participant 14

Insights for employers

Young people told us that they appreciated entry-level roles that provided a genuine starting point. They understood that some requirements are essential, but were frustrated when jobs described as entry level still expected substantial prior experience or qualifications that could reasonably be learned on the job. They also wanted employers to recognise a broader range of experience and capability. Skills gained through caring, volunteering, informal work, previous employment overseas or work in other sectors were not always recognised when they did not closely match the advertised role. A clearer distinction between what applicants need to bring from the outset and what can be learned on the job would help make entry-level opportunities more accessible.

Finding 5: Recruitment often creates distance rather than opportunities to demonstrate strengths

Many participants experienced recruitment as a one-way process. They invested considerable time in preparing tailored application materials and sharing personal information, sometimes including recorded video responses, yet often received little information or no reply from employers. Silence could follow an application, an induction or even arrangements for an interview. Some systems also required applicants to re-enter information already provided in their résumé, while short-notice interviews could be difficult or impossible to attend for those relying on public transport. These practices added to the burden of applying without necessarily giving employers a clearer picture of the applicant's capability.

"You're, like, the first of 25 applicants ... for one role. It becomes a numbers game. And with a numbers game, you're most likely going to lose."— Participant 02

"They contacted me saying that they would like to have an interview ... I still haven't heard anything back ... I just felt like it was a bit of a waste of time."— Participant 19

Some participants had encountered recruitment processes with little or no live interaction with a human recruiter. These included one-way video interviews, where applicants recorded answers to set questions without speaking to an interviewer, and automated interviews where questions were delivered by a pre-programmed bot. Participants who had experienced these formats were generally negative about them. They described feeling uneasy or awkward speaking to a camera, missing the interaction of a conversation and having no opportunity to ask questions or explain their answers. For

some, this made it harder to show their personality and capability and left some participants feeling disrespected.

“If you’re using a bot, I’m using a bot. Bot on bot; human on human.”— Participant 12

“The AI interviews ... [are] the worst, just taking any human out of the interaction.”— Participant 12

At the same time, participants did not view all digital tools negatively. Online job searching and standard online applications worked well for some participants. One participant seeking administrative work found online applications straightforward and saw computer-based screening as appropriate for computer-based roles. Participants could also use AI positively themselves: one used it to help draft and tailor a résumé. Their experiences therefore differed depending on what the technology was being used for and what that particular stage of recruitment required.

Preferences also varied between young people. Some were comfortable with online applications and interviews, while others felt they could present themselves better through face-to-face conversation or by doing something practical. Even participants who were confident with technology could feel discouraged by a recruitment step that felt unclear, impersonal or poorly matched to the job. What mattered was whether the format used at each stage gave applicants a fair opportunity to engage with the process and show what they could do.

Participants also suggested more useful ways for employers to assess capability. These included role-relevant scenarios, short sample tasks, carefully designed trials and genuine conversation to share previous experience. Generic group exercises were seen as a weak indication of how someone would perform in the job. One participant with almost three years of sailing experience found it difficult to promote himself in an interview and believed that completing a task would give him a fairer opportunity to show what he could do.

“If there was an interview where they gave you a scenario and you had to work it out ... that could probably be better because then it’s an actual showing of the person’s skills and their willingness to learn.”— Participant 01

“When I’m given the [task], I can show how well I can handle it.”— Participant 17

Insights for employers

Young people told us that recruitment gave them the best chance to show their capability when they knew what to expect and had a fair opportunity to demonstrate what they could do. They were frustrated by lengthy application processes, repeated requests for the same information, short-notice requests and long periods of silence. They also appreciated recruitment processes that included some meaningful human interaction or a job-relevant way to demonstrate capability. While participants differed in how comfortable they were with digital tools during recruitment, many were less positive about one-way video interviews or automated screening when these processes felt impersonal or gave them no opportunity to ask questions or explain their experience.

Finding 6: Good managers and supportive supervision help young people succeed

Participants described good management in practical terms. Effective supervisors took the time to introduce new workers to the workplace, explain tasks clearly, answer questions, notice when someone was struggling and provide useful feedback. They also created an environment where young people could admit mistakes and ask for help without fear of being judged. Rather than expecting first-time workers to understand workplace conventions immediately, they provided the guidance needed to learn. Participants linked this support to greater confidence, stronger performance and a greater willingness to stay with the employer.

“They need to be ... eased into the work ... gradually show them.”— Participant 09

“If you can be more yourself, you get the job done better ... it makes it more of a positive environment.”— Participant 13

The strongest examples of onboarding involved practical support that was introduced gradually. A former young manager described giving new workers a tour of the workplace, explaining uniforms and clock-on systems, demonstrating tasks, using visual guides, assigning crew coaches and providing immediate correction and encouragement. A first-time distribution-centre worker received three days of training, while a sailing volunteer progressed from a small vessel to larger ones as his knowledge and confidence grew. A retail participant similarly wanted several days alongside an experienced colleague before being expected to work independently. When this support was missing, the normal process of learning could be treated as poor performance. One participant who had worked in a call centre felt that a month of formal training was expected to produce the fluency of someone with two years of experience. Complex customer calls could also delay lunch and reduce measured productivity, creating tension between providing good service and meeting throughput targets. Participants were not arguing against clear standards. Their concern was that expectations should reflect the complexity of the work and how long someone had been in the role.

“They expected that someone who trained for a month would have the experience of someone who’d been there for two years ... [They should give] more flexibility, more understanding, especially when it comes to how long someone’s been in a role.”— Participant 16

“Walk me through the job—every single thing I need to be doing ... Everything needs to be laid out, so it’s understandable for me to know how the company works.”— Participant 19

Participants themselves did not equate support with an absence of accountability. They accepted that workers have responsibilities and that poor conduct may have consequences. What they wanted was a clear explanation of the standards, training appropriate to the work, time to improve and feedback that reflected their stage of learning.

Insights for employers

Young people told us that good supervision made a real difference when they were starting a new job. They valued managers who explained tasks clearly, were approachable when questions came up, provided useful feedback and gave them time to learn the role. They also appreciated expectations that reflected their level of experience. Participants did not expect standards to be

lowered, but wanted managers to recognise that new workers may need time, guidance and practice before they can perform at the same level as someone who has been in the role for much longer.

Finding 7: Getting a job is not the same as finding good, sustainable work

Many participants were willing to consider work outside their preferred occupation, particularly when they needed income or experience. Even with this flexibility, however, the jobs available to them did not always provide the basic conditions of decent work. Stable and sufficient hours, correct pay, reasonable breaks, safe working conditions, supportive management, respectful treatment and genuine opportunities to develop all shaped whether a job could support greater independence and whether a young person could see a future with the employer.

Casual and seasonal employment was a recurring source of uncertainty. Several participants described Christmas-casual roles where shifts simply stopped. One participant only learned after following up that a change in management had effectively ended her employment and that she would need to apply again. Others received very limited or unpredictable hours. Another participant challenged the idea that young people prefer casual work: she wanted part-time or full-time employment but was offered casual work or nothing, and argued that people are more likely to leave when the hours or treatment do not meet their needs.

“I was employed and you don’t even tell me I’m not employed anymore? ... It’s unprofessional.”— Participant 08

“I’m looking for part-time, full-time, anything I can get. And all I’m being offered is casual or nothing ... If they’re not getting the shifts or the amount of hours that they want, they’re going to go find another job.”— Participant 11

Participants also described problems with pay and unlawful conditions. These included underpayment, unpaid hours and difficulty taking breaks. One participant challenged an employer after receiving payment for four hours of a seven-hour shift. Another, who had migrated to Australia, reported being paid well below the lawful minimum. Another participant recalled being denied a meal break while a more senior manager was able to take one.

Management and workplace culture could be as influential as pay. Many participants valued mental-health support, the freedom to be themselves, fair allocation of work and alignment between personal and organisational values. In one workplace, gendered allocation of tasks and sexist comments from the manager made a participant uncomfortable, while co-workers created an informal support network in the absence of management support.

“I would go with the other one where they are good [but pay] a bit less ... Good communication with the staff and the manager; everyone’s nice to each other.”— Participant 05

“It depends on the values and beliefs of not only the employer, but the employee ... The more the values align, it’s so much easier.”— Participant 13

Insights for employers

Young people told us that they were often willing to consider work outside their preferred occupation, particularly when they needed income or experience. Even so, they still valued the basic conditions that made work sustainable, including reliable hours, correct pay, a safe and respectful environment. They also appreciated clear and respectful communication about the work itself. If casual or seasonal work was coming to an end, they wanted to be told directly rather than left without shifts or explanation. Where flexibility was needed, they valued clear communication about hours and expectations. Young people were more likely to see a future with an employer when the role offered a reasonable degree of stability, respect and opportunity to grow.

Finding 8: Young people bring diverse experiences, strengths and aspirations

Although participants were similar in age and lived in or around Ipswich, their employment needs and preferences were quite different. Some wanted full-time work as soon as possible, while others needed part-time hours so they could continue studying at TAFE. Some were open to casual work as a way to gain experience or try a particular sector, while others were looking for more stable employment. Participants were also at different stages in thinking about their future. Some had a clear occupation in mind and were actively trying to enter that field. Others were still working out what suited them through courses, volunteering and different work experiences. One participant had a strong interest in automotive work and was determined to pursue it.

“I’ve always grown up around cars. I’ve, from a very young age, my mom is a car person. ... I just love the whole aspect of cars, the sounds, the modifications, everything, learning how they work, being able to get my hands dirty ... just learn how everything goes and all that stuff just intrigues me. ... If I’m doing an apprenticeship, I feel like the further I get with an apprenticeship, it will open up so many pathways for me. I could be a drag race mechanic ... I could be in a shop, I could have my own business ...” — Participant 11

Even with clear goals, participants’ lives outside work also shaped what kinds of employment were realistic for them. The interviews included young people with long-term caring responsibilities, disrupted housing, recent migration, English-language study, university and TAFE commitments, disability and health conditions, social anxiety, neurodivergence and financial pressure. Moving home could disrupt local networks and require time to adapt. Study or care commitments could make rigid rosters difficult to manage. For some participants, anxiety also affected how they experienced recruitment. A format that made it difficult to perform well did not necessarily mean the person lacked capability; a more accommodating format could give them a better chance to demonstrate what they could do.

Caring responsibilities also show how these circumstances could develop valuable skills that were not always recognised by employers. . One participant wanted to move into the health sector but had limited formal experience because he had spent five or six years helping to care for his grandmother. Even after completing a Certificate III in health administration, he was still finding it difficult to enter the field.

“I’ve got transferable skills ... but they’re not all in my resume ... I’ve got skills both from obviously looking after my grandmother and [my call-centre work] with sensitive information and everything ... but ... they want someone who can jump in tomorrow and do the job.” — Participant 16

The interviews also highlighted strengths that could easily be overlooked when employers make assumptions based on age or personal circumstances. Participants spoke about bringing new perspectives, attention to detail, self-taught technical and digital skills, multilingual capability, community knowledge, caring experience, initiative and a willingness to learn. Across these varied experiences, a consistent message was that employers should assess each person on their skills, potential and ability to do the job, rather than treating age, formal qualifications or circumstance as a proxy for capability or commitment.

“People are just people as well. Like, just being young doesn’t make a difference ... it should be the way a person is. ... It shouldn’t be based off, okay, you’re young, ... [it should be based off that] you’re eager to do this, how about we try this? ... If [young people] walk in and go, hey, I want this job, I want to be able to do this, this and this, it should be based off of, okay, you’re determined, you seem ready, let’s try!”— Participant 13

Insights for employers

Young people showed us that, while they shared some common experiences, they were at different stages of life and had different goals and preferences. Some wanted full-time work as soon as possible, while others needed employment that could fit around study, caring responsibilities or other commitments. They appreciated employers taking the time to understand the individual rather than making assumptions based on age.

Finding 9: Training is most effective when it connects to a career and an employer

Participants had already invested considerable effort in preparing for work. Many of them had undertaken training in areas including IT, hospitality, construction, health administration, boilermaking, cookery, bakery and music production, as well as driving lessons, white cards and other short credentials. Training could help make career options clearer. One participant interested in automotive work, for example, was able to identify several possible pathways after attending a TAFE orientation. Courses and volunteering also gave some participants a chance to test whether a particular type of work suited them.

The difficulty often came after the training. Participants had developed skills and, in some cases, gained practical experience, but this did not always lead to paid work. One participant completed introductory training in boilermaking and welding but was still unable to secure an apprenticeship or related industrial work. Another completed introductory bakery training and had support from an employment services provider and recommendations from a teacher, but had not received any response to their applications. A design internship brought positive feedback, but no job followed. There were similar gaps in other pathways. Employment services sometimes referred participants to vacancies that were too far away to be practical. A supported IT traineeship provided useful experience, but the participant still faced the challenge of securing a role afterwards. Across these examples, participants had completed training and built experience, but the connection between that preparation and an actual job remained weak.

“Everyone wants lovely trained young people, but they’re not really prepared to give them the time of day ... and do the training.”— Participant 02

“They’ve attempted to try and get me an apprenticeship ... My bakery teacher has recommended me to many bakeries ... Nothing yet.”— Participant 18

“The ones that say, like, ‘training provided’ ... ‘work with us to grow your career’—I just lean more towards those ones.”— Participant 15

“That might make you stay at a company.”— Participant 07, on visible development and progression

Insights for employers

Young people told us that training was most valuable when they could see how it connected to a real job or career pathway. Many had already completed courses, certificates, internships or other preparation, but still found it difficult to move from training into paid work. They appreciated employers being clear about what training was actually needed for a role, what could be learned on the job, and what opportunities might follow.

Employer Action Framework

Stage	Good practice	Stronger practice
Design the job	Set only genuinely essential requirements, with clear hours and lawful pay	Create some roles for people without prior experience, check that rosters are workable with local transport, and show where the role can lead
Advertise	Clearly state the duties, pay, hours, location, employment type and application process	Show what the job is actually like, explain what will be taught, advertise through more than one channel, and reach young people through local schools, TAFE and community organisations
Assess	Acknowledge applications, give reasonable notice, explain the process and timeframes, and let applicants know the outcome	Offer accessible ways to participate, use relevant tasks or scenarios, and consider paid trials where the applicant is doing productive work
Start	Provide a clear induction, safety information, task training, regular check-ins and a named supervisor	Pair new workers with an experienced colleague, provide a clear first-week plan, and increase responsibility gradually as confidence and capability develop
Manage	Set clear expectations, provide lawful conditions and useful feedback, and make it easy to ask for help	Adjust expectations to experience and time in the role, build supervisors' capability in mental health and inclusion, and have regular development conversations
Retain and progress	Communicate clearly and predictably about shifts, performance and ongoing work	Show the skills people are developing, make internal progression visible, and connect workers to further training and career pathways

Conclusion

The interviews show that young people in and around Ipswich are willing to work, gain experience and build their careers, but the path into sustainable employment is often difficult to navigate. Participants had to work out where suitable jobs were available, understand different recruitment processes, judge whether transport and rosters were workable, interpret unclear selection criteria and find ways to demonstrate skills and experience that were not always recognised. These challenges could arise at different points, from searching and applying for work through to starting a job and trying to stay and progress. Creating employment opportunities therefore needs to go hand in hand with making those opportunities genuinely accessible to young people.

Employers and local partners can make a practical difference at many of these points. Genuine entry-level roles, clearer job information, better recognition of different forms of experience, more responsive recruitment, supportive supervision and stronger links between training and real vacancies would all help. Together, these changes would give more young people a fair opportunity to contribute and develop, while helping local growth and workforce demand translate into sustainable employment in Ipswich.

References

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