



Secondary school (pre-career) research

The National Careers Institute (NCI) partnered with the Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) to examine young Australians’ career journeys and identify initiatives to support young people to make well-informed career choices. The key objective of the research was to explore young people’s career knowledge, their career decisions, and the context of their decisions. Through the research, trends in new and existing evidence were examined. We investigated what young people know about their career options, who their key career influencers are, and identified their key moments of choice and inspiration.

Moments of choice / moments of inspiration

This project built upon previous research conducted by BIT in the UK in 2016 in their Moments of choice project, which focused on identifying key moments of choice and moments of inspiration in young people’s career decision journey.

Moments of choice are key decision points (e.g. elective subject selection or work placements) which can have a large influence on future career pathways; some choices can expand or narrow down career options. Engagement with information tends to increase around these moments.

Moments of inspiration are events that can spark or introduce the thought of going down a particular career path. These moments tend to occur spontaneously and incidentally, such as through social or professional connections, or through contact with particular communities or industries. Young people tend to prioritise information obtained through these informal channels.

Introduction to behavioural insights (BI)

Moments of choice are a key part of young people’s pre-career journeys. Each choice represents an important behaviour, which has the potential to open up or narrow down future career options and can influence the career choice that young people make. Therefore, it is important to take a behavioural approach when understanding and developing solutions to support young people in making well-informed career decisions.

Insights from behavioural science (including psychology, sociology and behavioural economics) highlight how our decisions and behaviours are often not the result of conscious, deliberative thinking (**system 2**). Instead, many everyday behaviours are influenced by mental shortcuts and ‘fast thinking’ (**system 1**).

Behavioural insights (BI) refers to the practical application of findings from the behavioural sciences to develop solutions which are aligned with how people actually behave in real-world contexts.

SYSTEM 1

Intuition & instinct

95%

Unconscious
Fast
Associative
Automatic pilot

SYSTEM 2

Rational thinking

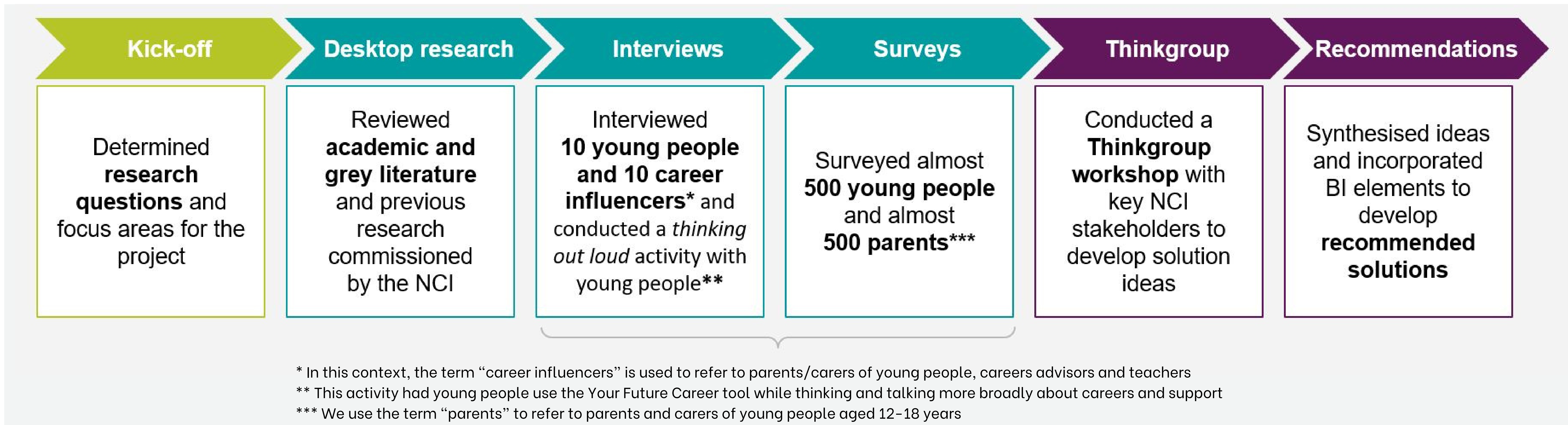
5%

Takes effort
Slow
Logical
Lazy
Indecisive



Source: Daniel Kahneman

Research methodology



Australian moments of choice and moments of inspiration

Summarised below are the key moments of choice and inspiration, as well as common behavioural drivers and barriers that Australian young people face in their pre-career journey. This summary is intended to be illustrative only and content has been adapted from the BIT Moments of Choice Report and research findings.

Moments of choice



Which school subjects to put effort into



Choice of Year 10 work experience



Choice of elective subjects (Year 9 & Year 10)



Choice of senior school subjects (Year 11 & Year 12)



Choice to work while at school



Preferences of careers and pathways are often set early (which can be self-reinforcing and persist over time)



Post-Year 10 decision:

- Continue to Year 11
- Pursue other study
- Pursue work/apprenticeship



Post-Year 12 decision:

- Uni / other study
- Work / apprenticeship
- Disengagement

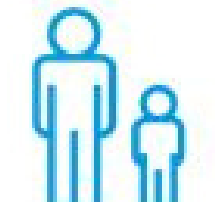
Moments of inspiration



Interactions with and between adults



Ability to imagine a future self in a particular role



Childhood engagement with workers that influence perceptions of that career



Promotion of careers or pathways (e.g. career expos, open days for institutions)



Careers depicted in TV and other media



Exploration of requirements for post-high school pathways (e.g. ATAR requirements and uni courses, or certifications/licences required for particular jobs)

Behavioural drivers and barriers

Stereotypes & beliefs

Gender, socioeconomic and cultural stereotypes

Teachers & other adults

Classroom interaction and judgement of a child’s capability

Academic performance

Influences interests and available options / pathways

Enjoyment / interests / passions

Influences aspirations

Family & peers

Occupations, attitudes toward learning/work and interests

Employers & industry

Knowledge of careers, access to work / influencers working in that industry

Personality / identity development

Changing identity, confidence, and optimism

Career education / engagement

Career advice and support in navigating pathways

Career information seeking behaviours

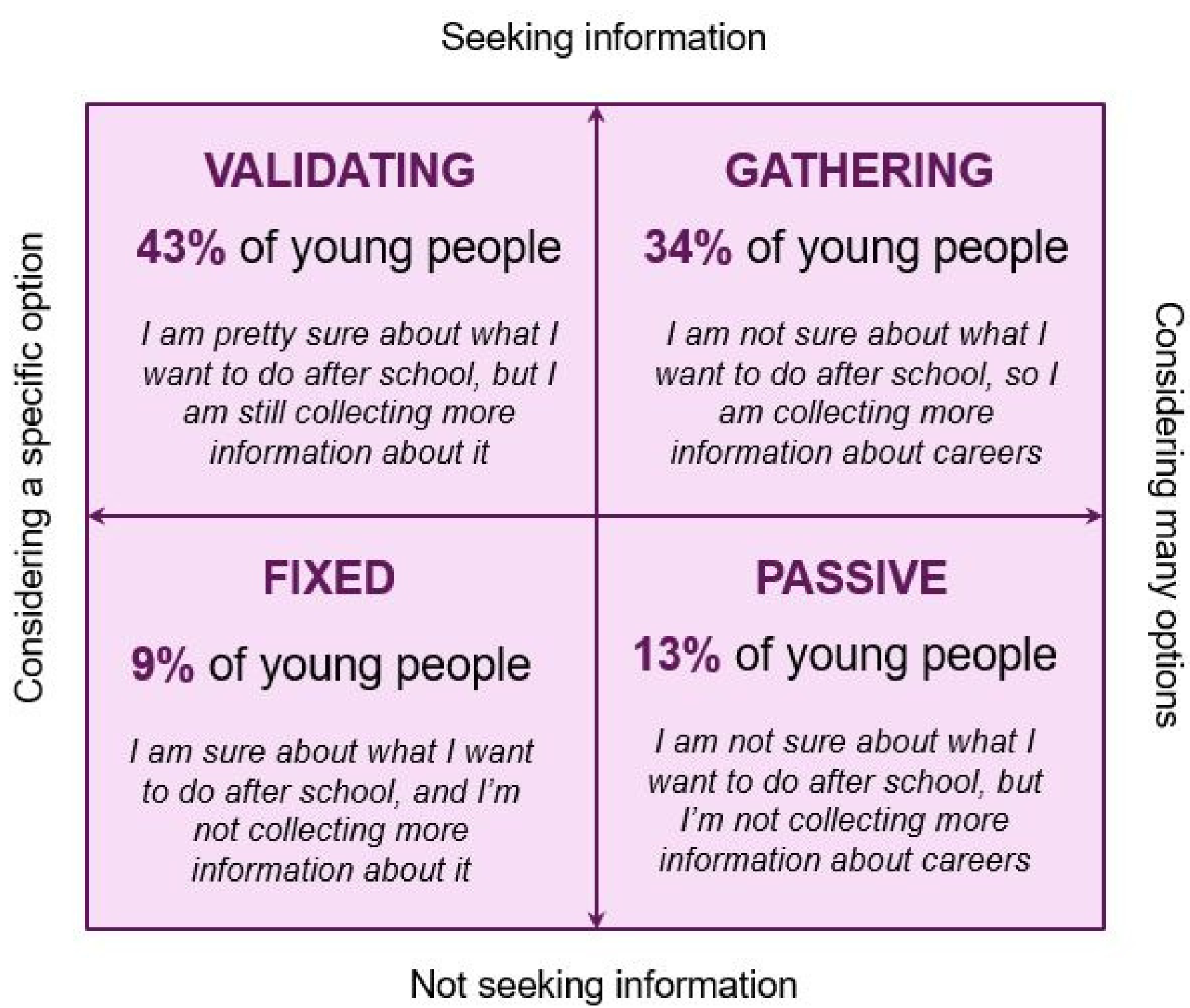
Commonalities in survey responses, indicated there were 4 groups most young people fell within: **Validating (43%)**, **Gathering (34%)**, **Fixed (9%)** and **Passive (13%)***.

Most young people surveyed in this research sample were likely to be in either the **Validating** or **Gathering** groups. Most young people reported they are currently collecting more information about careers, either to validate an existing choice or to help them decide.

Young people tend to be open to learning more about the industries they reported knowing relatively most about. Among the industries listed in the survey (mining, digital, health, agriculture, manufacturing, and construction) young people most frequently report being open to learning more about the Health sector, followed by the Digital sector. The average young person also feels they know more about these two sectors than the other industries.

Knowledge and interest appear to be associated, however, it is unclear if young people know more about these two sectors because they are interested in them (**interest → collect information → knowledge**), or because they know more about them (**receive information → knowledge → interest**), or both.

*Only 1% of young people were disengaged (e.g., *I have no idea about what I want to do after school, and I'm not interested in collecting any information about it*). Disengaged young people would likely completely avoid engaging with information, while 'passive' young people may engage with the minimum information required to make a choice (e.g., subject selection).



Challenges and opportunities

The research highlighted a number of challenges and opportunities to be addressed, in order to support young people to make well-informed career decisions. Below are suggestions and ideas aligned to each of the challenges and opportunities.

1. Without experiential careers learning, young people may only consider a limited range of jobs.

Young people benefit from face-to-face interactions with experienced workers, they found the interactions inspiring and informative. However, these opportunities are often fleeting and incidental.

Work experience programs have significant potential to inspire young people, but the quality is variable - for example issues were raised regarding lack of hands-on experience and limited opportunity to get a feel for the day-to-day reality of the job.

Young people find inspiration in extracurricular activities and interests, while some young people felt that part-time jobs helped them in making career decisions. Others mentioned they found inspiration from movies and tv shows.

2. Young people find it challenging to access quality careers information and guidance when they need it.

Career guidance experience varies but can be effective when implemented well. Young people who had benefited from personalised careers guidance were supported in choosing elective subjects or provided access to inspiration experiences. However, many young people struggle to access quality advice when they need it.

Younger students and senior high school students receive less careers information and guidance and can feel unsupported. Young people feel that this makes it harder to make decisions such as choosing the right university or TAFE course.

Career decisions can be informed by interests. Young people know more about industries they are more open to, and enjoyment and interest are key factors that influence their career decisions.

3. Teachers and careers advisors have a scarcity of time and need better training and resources.

Time and resources are the biggest issue for teachers and career advisors. Teachers often have a full teaching curriculum and don't have time to engage in incidental conversations about careers with their students.

Teachers and careers advisors would like enhanced tools and training. Career advisors use tools to match young people's interests and skills to curriculum / elective subjects and careers. Teachers feel that professional development opportunities would help them understand the current career landscape and build their confidence to provide reliable careers guidance.

School environments can be overly focused on grades. Opportunities for young people to explore their interests are often limited by the experiences available at school, such as elective subjects, which often don't represent the full diversity of career opportunities available in later life.

4. Parents find it challenging to navigate career information and enable "moments of inspiration".

Parents are the biggest influencers, yet they underestimate the influence they have.

Parents need more support from schools, especially when their children are in Years 7-9. Parents' guidance can be limited by their personal experience and lack of current careers knowledge. Parents often seek further knowledge by conducting careers research on behalf of their children but find it challenging to source reliable and accurate careers information online. There is an abundance of online careers information, yet websites can be challenging to navigate, with multiple websites providing different and sometimes conflicting information.

The family environment exposes young people to opportunities to learn about careers. Parents and immediate family play a key role in enabling opportunities for young people to learn about different jobs and careers. Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are often exposed to fewer opportunities to learn about careers through their family environments.

Findings and recommendations

Finding 1: Young people need to understand the range of career pathways available and have access to experiential leaning.

Young people strongly benefit from experiential learning opportunities which allow them to meet professionals and gain insight into the day-to-day realities of jobs. However, parents and schools can struggle to create these opportunities, especially since the onset of COVID-19.

Recommendation: Advocate for and/or support the development of engaging careers information and experiential learning opportunities, to ensure young people are aware of all career pathways available to them.

Finding 2: Young people should receive tailored and timely careers information and guidance.

When young people have access to quality careers information and guidance, they feel more supported in making decisions which impact their future careers. Careers information should be personalised and informed by their interests, as young people are more likely to engage with information so they can have effective conversations with their children about careers and create intentional opportunities to learn about careers via activities and social networks. More support is needed for disadvantaged families who have fewer opportunities and resources to enable these experiences.

Recommendation: Develop innovative and holistic approaches across government and non-government sectors to provide tailored and timely career information and support to young people.

Finding 3: Schools need to have the tools, information and resources to provide effective careers information.

Teachers and careers advisors play a pivotal role matching young people's interests, hobbies and goals to career pathways. However, they often lack the time, tools and training to engage young people in tailored careers conversations and to provide in-depth guidance. Fit-for-purpose tools and careers information, informed by what careers advisors and teachers need, would help them to provide more effective career guidance and reach more students, including those who may be less likely to proactively seek support.

Recommendation: Connect teachers and careers advisors to resources that support them in providing timely careers information, and advocate for workforce planning changes and upskilling opportunities to support schools' careers knowledge.

Finding 4: Parents need to have the information and opportunities required to support their children's pre-career journey.

Parents have the biggest influence on young people's career decisions, but the potential benefit of their impact is not being fully realised. Parents need support in locating reliable and current information so they can have effective conversations with their children about careers and create intentional opportunities to learn about careers via activities and social networks. More support is needed for disadvantaged families who have fewer opportunities and resources to enable these experiences.

Recommendation: Lead the development of innovative approaches to connect parents to timely and tailored careers resources, so that parents can have more effective careers conversations and create careers learning opportunities for their children.