



## Work trials and work experience

### Perspectives from the Survey of Employers' Recruitment Experiences

#### RESEARCH FINDINGS:

- Almost 1000 employers in regional Victoria and New South Wales were asked about their involvement providing work experience and work trials. Fieldwork occurred in November 2016, well before the introduction of the Youth Jobs PaTH program
- While 43 per cent of employers surveyed had hosted work experience or a work trial in the past 12 months, the majority of placements were for students
- Only 7 per cent of surveyed employers had hosted job seekers
  - Most employers hosting job seekers conducted work trials or had a work experience placement arranged by an employment agency
  - Work experience and work trials for job seekers were most common in the Accommodation and Food Services, Retail and Manufacturing industries
- In addition to meeting their recruitment needs, many employers offered work experience to help job seekers begin a career in the sector and to educate people about their industry
  - Some employers also mentioned that financial incentives helped to offset the costs associated with hosting disadvantaged job seekers
- Employers value candidates who listen, are interested in the role, enthusiastic, have a strong work ethic, and have good communication skills

#### Background

Quantitative data on the prevalence of work experience in Australia is limited, and available research tends to focus on the perspective of the individual undertaking work experience. To better understand employer perspectives, almost 1000 employers were asked about their recent involvement in providing work experience, including the skills and personal qualities they seek in a work experience candidate. The questions about work experience were included in the *Survey of Employers' Recruitment Experiences* in the South Coast of Victoria, New England and Northwest, and Central West NSW Employment Regions.

Employers were asked if they had hosted a work trial or work experience in the past 12 months. Work trials are used to test out the suitability of a job seeker to fill a particular vacancy, while work experience provides job seekers or students the opportunity to gain skills and experience. In practice, however, placements can be difficult to categorise as they provide participants with both skills development and potential job opportunities (either immediately or in the future). This classification ambiguity has resulted in work trials and work experience being grouped together for the majority of analysis in this paper<sup>1</sup>.

Fieldwork was carried out in three Employment Regions in November 2016, well before the introduction of Youth Jobs PaTH. Paid and unpaid placements were both in scope, but information on whether the participant was paid was not collected.

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<sup>1</sup> Separate estimates on the incidence of work trials and general work experience for job seekers are provided in this report, but estimates should be treated with caution.

## What proportion of employers provided work experience or a work trial

Overall, 43 per cent of employers provided some kind of work experience (including work trials) in the previous 12 months.

Most employers who had provided work experience had hosted students (36 per cent of surveyed employers), while 7 per cent had hosted job seekers.

Larger businesses were more likely to have hosted someone for work experience. Less than one quarter of businesses with fewer than five employees provided work experience, compared with more than half of businesses with ten or more employees.

There were no significant differences in the proportion of employers who had offered work experience between the three surveyed regions, but there may be regional differences in other areas, for example in capital cities.

While work experience was common in a wide range of industries, there was considerable variability in the extent to which employers hosted job seekers (see Table 1 below). Employers in Accommodation and Food Services, Manufacturing and Retail Trade were the most likely to host job seekers, while those in Education and Training were most likely to host students.

**Table 1. Proportion of employers hosting work experience (including work trials) in the past 12 months, key industries:**

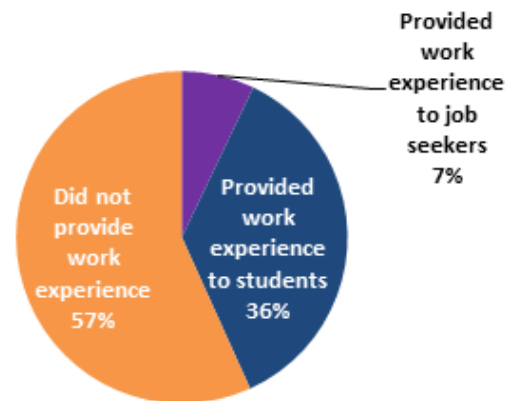
Industry	hosted work experience	Who did work experience?	
		Job seeker	Student
<b>All industries</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>36%</b>
Accommodation and Food Services	39%	16%	23%
Manufacturing	43%	10%	33%
Retail Trade	39%	10%	32%
Education and Training	68%	10%	60%
Construction	55%	4%	51%
Wholesale Trade	36%	4%	33%
Health Care and Social Assistance	54%	3%	51%
Professional, Scientific and Tech. Services	57%	2%	51%

Note: Some employers did not distinguish between job seekers and students, while others gave more than one response, so sub-totals may not sum to total.

While often difficult to categorise, employer feedback was used to assess the primary focus of work experience placements for job seekers. Of the 7 per cent of surveyed employers who hosted job seekers in the past 12 months approximately:

- two thirds conducted work trials aimed at testing the suitability of a job seeker for a particular vacancy; and

**Figure 1. Employers who hosted work experience (including work trials) in the past 12 months**



- one third provided work experience focussed on exposing job seekers to workplace expectations and developing their skills in the sector.

Table 2 in the Appendix provides estimates of the incidence of work trials and work experience for job seekers in selected industries.

Work experience to secondary and tertiary students was provided by 36 per cent of employers in the past 12 months. An estimated 29 per cent of all surveyed employers had hosted secondary students, while 11 per cent hosted tertiary students (university or TAFE)<sup>2</sup>. Work experience for secondary school students was common across most industries. Work experience for tertiary students, however, was concentrated in Healthcare and Social Assistance, Education and Training, and Professional, Scientific and Technical Services (see Table 3 in the Appendix).

### **How were work trials and work experience placements organised?**

The majority of work experience placements for job seekers were organised:

- through an employment agency, with the majority initiated by someone from the agency approaching the employer;
- as a work trial for job seekers applying for advertised vacancies; or
- following the employer being approached by a job seeker enquiring about opportunities in the business.

A small number of work experience placements were arranged through other third parties, such as employees or clients, who organised work experience for a friend or family member.

Most work experience provided to students was arranged through an educational institution.

### **What motivated employers to host work trials and work experience?**

While most employers who hosted job seekers were looking to potentially hire them, employers identified a range of other motivations contributing to their decision to offer work experience, including:

- to contribute to the community or the individual (e.g. by giving disadvantaged job seekers a chance);
  - a number of employers who had been approached about potential opportunities in their business appreciated the interest and initiative shown by job seekers.
- to enable interested persons to try out the industry or occupation, and to assist them to enter the industry;
- having a personal connection to the person, such as being the relative of an employee; and
- financial incentives such as wage subsidies arranged through employment agencies.

Many employers who hosted students for work experience wanted to expose young people to their sector, and often used work experience to identify future staff for their business.

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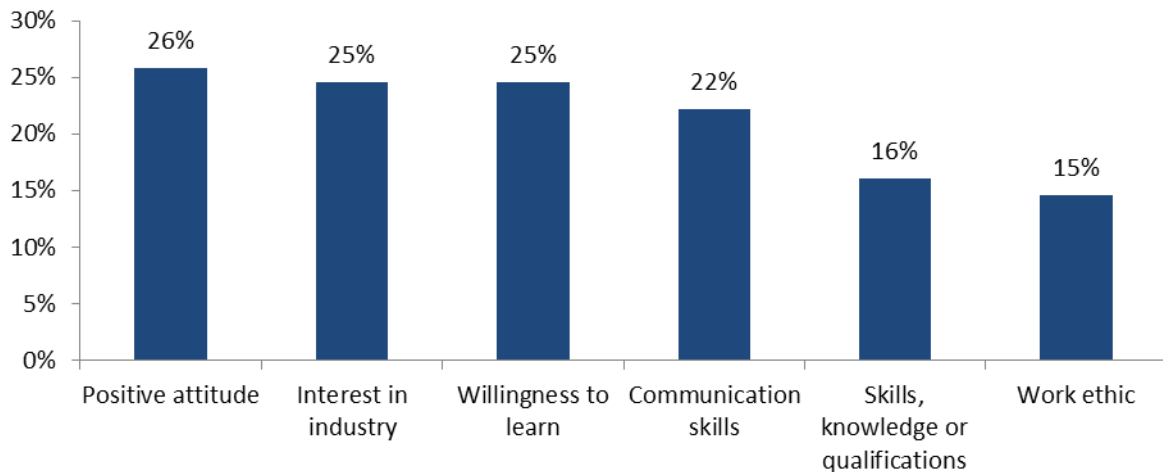
<sup>2</sup> Some of these employers hosted both secondary and tertiary students so the sum of those who hosted secondary school students and those who hosted tertiary students is larger than the total who hosted students.



## What characteristics do employers look for in a work experience candidate?

Employers were asked about the characteristics for which they were looking in a work experience or work trial candidate. Employers who had conducted a work trial or work experience in the past 12 months most commonly said that an interest in the industry and personal attributes such as good communication skills, a willingness to listen and learn, a positive attitude and good work ethic were the most important characteristics in a work experience candidate.

**Figure 2. Desired characteristics in work experience and work trial candidates<sup>3</sup>**



Employers who had recently hosted students for work experience required similar characteristics to those who had recently hosted job seekers. The one main exception was that employers who had hosted a work trial were more likely to require the candidate to already have skills, qualifications or technical knowledge relevant to the position. This result is not surprising given the basis of a work trial is to test the candidate's suitability for a position in their business.

About one in eight employers who had not provided work experience in the past 12 months stated they would not host someone for work experience. Most common reasons for this were:

- occupational health and safety requirements;
- other regulatory requirements, such as background checks and licensing requirements;
- no suitable tasks and duties for a work experience candidate; and
- they would only take on fully qualified persons.

Only two of the almost 400 surveyed employers who had hosted work experience in the past 12 months stated that they would not provide work experience in the future.

<sup>3</sup> Employers who had hosted work experience in the past 12 months. Some employers provided multiple responses.



## Appendix

**Table 2. Proportion of surveyed employers conducting work trials and hosting job seekers for work experience, key industries**

Industry	Work trial	Work experience	Job seeker total
<b>All industries</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>7%</b>
Accommodation and Food Services	9%	4%	16%
Manufacturing	6%	3%	10%
Retail Trade	5%	3%	10%
Education and Training	5%	5%	10%
Construction	3%	1%	4%
Wholesale Trade	3%	1%	4%
Health Care and Social Assistance	2%	1%	3%
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	0%	2%	2%

Note: Some employers did not distinguish between work trials and work experience, while others gave more than one response, so sub-totals may not sum to total

**Table 3. Proportion of surveyed employers hosting secondary and tertiary students for work experience, key industries**

Industry	Secondary Students	Tertiary Students	Student total
<b>All industries</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>36%</b>
Education and Training	35%	30%	60%
Construction	48%	6%	51%
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	36%	21%	51%
Health Care and Social Assistance	27%	37%	51%
Manufacturing	32%	1%	33%
Wholesale Trade	26%	9%	33%
Retail Trade	32%	2%	32%
Accommodation and Food Services	21%	3%	23%

Note: Some employers did not distinguish between secondary and tertiary students, while others gave more than one response, so sub-totals may not sum to total

