

The Evidence Behind

UNIQ *you*

How career exposure, role models and real-world conversations expand girls' career aspirations.

Girls can't aspire to careers they have never seen.



Australia faces growing workforce shortages across industries critical to its future prosperity, including construction, engineering, energy, technology and advanced manufacturing. At the same time, women remain significantly underrepresented across many of these sectors.

Research consistently demonstrates that young people's career aspirations are shaped by the opportunities they see, the people they encounter and their understanding of the world of work. When students have limited exposure to diverse careers and pathways, aspirations can become narrow and disconnected from labour market opportunities.

UNIQ You was established to help address this challenge by connecting girls with female role models working in industries where women remain underrepresented. Through real-time virtual career conversations, girls gain access to authentic stories, pathways and experiences that help make future opportunities more visible, relatable and achievable.

This paper explores the research underpinning the UNIQ You model and examines how the experiences of students, educators and Advisors in 2025 align with the broader evidence base.

CAREER ASPIRATIONS ARE NARROWING

What the Research Says

Young people's career aspirations are often narrow, unrealistic and distorted by gender and social background.

— OECD, *Dream Jobs? Teenagers' Career Aspirations and the Future of Work* (2020)



Research from the OECD shows that many young people aspire to a relatively small number of occupations despite significant changes in the labour market and growing demand across emerging industries.

The OECD has found that career aspirations are increasingly disconnected from workforce needs, with many students having limited awareness of the breadth of occupations available to them. Young people frequently rely on familiar occupations they encounter through family, friends and media, leaving many industries and career pathways effectively invisible.

This challenge is particularly significant for girls considering careers in industries where women remain underrepresented. If young people do not see careers represented in their everyday lives, they are less likely to consider them as realistic options for themselves.

What the Research Says

Students consistently described discovering careers they had never previously encountered through UNIQ You conversations.

I didn't know that her job existed until I watched that week.

— Student, Byford Secondary College



There's lots of different jobs that they talked about that I didn't know existed, so obviously that fostered my curiosity.

— Student, Byford Secondary College

THE WORKFORCE CHALLENGE

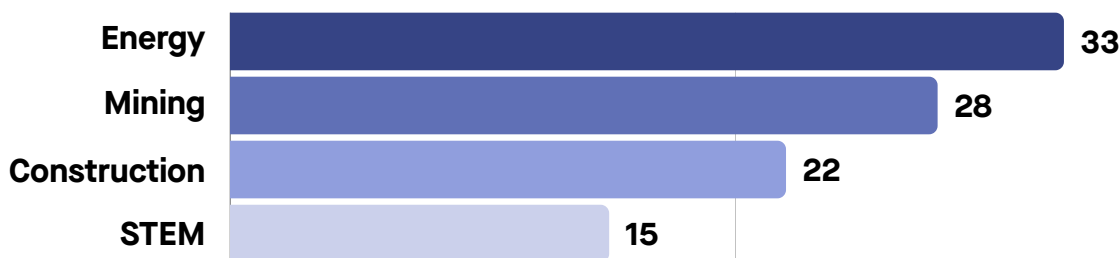
What the Research Says

Australia faces persistent workforce shortages across a number of industries critical to future economic growth.

According to Jobs and Skills Australia (2024), many technical, trade and engineering occupations continue to experience ongoing skills shortages. At the same time, women remain significantly underrepresented across many of these sectors.

Women in Australia's Workforce

Percentage of women in industries



UNESCO's Cracking the Code (2017) found that gender stereotypes, social norms and a lack of visible role models continue to influence girls' participation in STEM education and careers.

These patterns highlight the importance of ensuring girls have opportunities to explore a broad range of future pathways before career decisions begin to narrow.

Why This Matters

Addressing workforce shortages is not simply about creating jobs; it is also about expanding awareness and participation.

Building more diverse talent pipelines requires ensuring young people can see themselves in industries they may not traditionally associate with people like them.

THE POWER OF ROLE MODELS

What the Research Says



In a nutshell, students cannot be what they cannot see.

— OECD, Dream Jobs? Teenagers' Career Aspirations and the Future of Work (2020)

Research consistently demonstrates that role models influence aspirations, self-belief and career decision-making.

Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1994) identifies observational learning and self-efficacy as key influences on career interests and choices. Seeing someone similar to yourself succeed in a field can significantly influence beliefs about what is possible.

Research by UNESCO (2017) and Microsoft/KRC Research (2017) similarly demonstrates that exposure to relatable role models can help challenge stereotypes and encourage participation in industries where women remain underrepresented.

What We Heard in 2025

Students frequently described the value of hearing directly from women working in careers they had not previously considered.



When they're talking to you it's very personal, it makes you feel more welcome and it's like you know them already.

— Student, Genazzano FCJ College

Educators reinforced the importance of representation and visibility.



You can't be what you can't see and this service bridges that barrier.

— Educator, San Damiano College

Advisor reflections highlighted the value of representation from their perspective.



I like doing UNIQ You because there isn't a lot of women of colour in my role and in STEM in general... so I feel like for me that fits an important role model role to be visible.

— Trang Pham, UNIQ You Advisor from Aurecon

Together, these reflections demonstrate how role models help transform unfamiliar careers from abstract concepts into achievable possibilities.

THE JUST LIKE ME EFFECT

Research suggests that career education is most effective when it is authentic, relatable and grounded in real-world experiences.

At the heart of UNIQ You is a simple principle: girls are more likely to consider new possibilities when they can see someone like themselves already succeeding in those spaces.

UNIQ You's model is built on creating "Just Like Me" connections between girls and Advisors. A girl with potential meets a woman working in an industry she may never have considered.

Through a real conversation, she gains insight into pathways, challenges, opportunities and lived experiences. Careers that once felt unfamiliar become more visible. Possibilities become more tangible. Future pathways become easier to imagine.

By connecting girls with women who share similar interests, experiences or backgrounds, careers become more relatable, achievable and accessible.

This model helps translate research into practice by creating meaningful moments of connection that expand awareness and challenge assumptions about who belongs in particular industries.

FROM RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

Evidence from 2025

Research consistently demonstrates that exposure matters.

UNIQ You's findings from 2025 reinforce this evidence.

91% of girls discovered
a role they had never
heard of before

52% of girls felt better equipped
to ask questions about
career pathways

Students described increased curiosity, confidence and willingness to explore future opportunities.

I found that my first ever session I didn't ask any questions but the more sessions I do, the more questions I will ask.

— Student, San Damiano College

When I heard that there was a lot more jobs that I'd never heard about, I started researching them.

— Student, Palmerston College

Speaking to the advisors gave me more confidence to talk to different people and to talk to my friends about different pathways.

— Student, Genazzano FCJ College

Educators observed similar outcomes.

Hearing how their pathways are so varied helps our students see there's not one linear pathway.



— Educator, Genazzano FCJ College

These findings suggest that career conversations do more than increase awareness. They encourage curiosity, challenge assumptions and provide students with greater confidence to explore future possibilities.

LOOKING AHEAD

Australia's future workforce depends on ensuring all young people have access to the information, networks and role models needed to make informed decisions about their futures.

Building diverse talent pipelines begins with awareness.

Before girls can pursue opportunities, they need to know those opportunities exist. Before they can imagine themselves in a career, they need to see people like themselves succeeding within it.

The evidence suggests that exposure, representation and real-world career conversations can play a meaningful role in broadening aspirations and supporting career readiness.

By connecting girls with women working across industries where women remain underrepresented, UNIQ You helps make future opportunities visible, relatable and achievable.

As one Advisor reflected:



I wish that I had something like this when I was in high school. I would have really had a different career trajectory if I'd been aware and confident to go into these industries.

— Rose Pedler, UNIQ You Advisor from Rio Tinto

The research is clear: career aspirations are shaped by exposure, role models and real-world experiences.

When girls can see what's possible, their futures expand.

This is the evidence behind UNIQ You.

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