

Career Aspirations of Young Boys and Girls

By Faye Williamson

An Australian Institute of Family Studies report released earlier this year, has surveyed over 3,000, 14-15 year old boys and girls in a quest to find out their future career expectations.

Overview

Among the 14-15 year olds who responded to the study 59% said they knew what career or occupation they would like to have, 14% said they did not know and a further 27% did not know how to answer the question.

The desired occupations were varied, although of the children who stated an occupation, 59.7% stated an occupation classified as professional or manager. A further 16% stated an occupation classified as technician or trade, 13.9% a service or miscellaneous (e.g, sales, clerical) and 10.5% in sports or performance arts.

Career aspirations by gender

Boys were somewhat more likely than girls to know their desired occupation (61% compared to 57%), but gender differences were more apparent when looking at the types of jobs desired.

- The job most desired by boys were those in the engineering and transport professional category but this was rarely mentioned by girls.
- 1 in 10 boys desired a job in ICT, this was also rarely mentioned by girls. The ICT category captured general responses that indicated wanting to work in information technology or as a computer programmer, as well as responses such as “games developer”, “Youtuber” and “Apple Genius”.
- Technician and trade jobs, specifically in construction and automotive trades were commonly named by boys.
- Sports jobs were also in the “top ten” for boys, but not girls. These included jobs such as personal trainer, as well as professional footballer.

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For girls, the most commonly named occupation (doctor, dentist or other health professional) was also in the boys’ top ten. Also on both lists were performance arts and production (5% of boys and 7% of girls) and professional design, planning or architect (5% of boys and 6% of girls).

Occupations that were only in the girls’ top ten were:

- Education professionals (11%) and legal or social professionals (11%)
- Personal service (which included hairdresser and beautician) were chosen by 7% of girls
- Nursing (including midwifery) was selected by 7% of girls and a further 6% chose jobs under health and welfare support and care
- Another 6% of girls specifically referred to vet as their preferred occupation
- Media, literature or arts jobs were chosen by 5% of girls.

Top ten ranked occupation categories of 14-15 year old boys and girls who state a desired occupation

Boys	(% of the 1,006 boys of stated occupation)
Engineering and transport professional	(14%)
ICT professional	(10%)
Construction technical/trade	(9%)
Automotive technical/trade	(8%)
Sports	(6%)
Doctor, dentist or other health professional	(6%)
Protective services	(6%)
Professional design, planning or architect	(5%)
Science professional	(5%)
Performance arts and production	(5%)

Girls	(% of the 911 girls who stated occupation)
Doctor, dentist or other health professional	(13%)
Educational professional	(11%)
Legal or social professional	(11%)
Personal service	(7%)
Performance arts and production	(7%)
Nursing professional	(7%)
Health and welfare support and care	(6%)
Professional design, planning or architect	(6%)
Vet	(6%)
Media, literature or arts professional	(5%)

Education expectations

Overall, of the 14-15 year old boys, 21% expected to complete school only, 22% expected to complete a trade or technical qualification, 27% expected to complete a bachelor degree and 39% expected to complete post-graduate qualifications.

“Talking to peers was more common for girls (75%) than boys (63%).”

Of the girls, 18% expected to complete school only, 12% to complete a trade or technical qualification, 37% to complete a bachelor degree and 33% to complete post-graduate qualifications.

Relatively high percentages of boys and girls who expected to achieve no post-secondary qualifications were undecided about their desired career (47% of boys and 55% of girls).

Among boys who expected to only complete secondary education the top desired job was ICT professional. For girls who expected to only complete secondary education the top three desired jobs were performance arts and production, protective services and health and welfare support and care.

Adolescents were most likely to know what occupation they wanted if they expected to achieve a trade or vocational qualification. This is likely to be a reflection of understanding that they would enter a specific job through apprenticeship or vocational training.

Adolescents with post-graduate aspirations were the most likely to desire professional and managerial jobs.

Jobs in sport were in the top ten for all boys and jobs in performance arts were in the top ten for boys and girls across all groups of education expectations, except those expecting to achieve trade or vocational qualifications.

Academic achievement

For boys, higher achievement on any of the NAPLAN scores was associated with being more likely to aspire to a professional or manager job. Boys with the lowest scores were least likely to have an unknown career aspiration, instead having a much higher likelihood of aspiring for a technician or trade role.

For girls, unlike for boys, the likelihood of desiring a professional or manager job did not increase with higher achievement scores



in numeracy. Girls with lower NAPLAN scores more often said they would like a job in services or miscellaneous. Girls with the highest achievement scores were the most likely to say they did not know what career they would like.

Who do adolescents talk to about their future careers?

The 14-15 year olds were asked who they talk to about plans for the future, and specifically asked whether they talk to parents, friends, teachers, school career counsellors or other.

- Most boys (88%) and girls (86%) said they talk to their parents.
- Talking to peers was more common for girls (75%) than boys (63%).
- Talking to teachers was similar for boys (29%) and girls (32%).
- A little over 1 in 10 boys and girls (12-13%) talked to school guidance or career counsellors.
- A small percentage (3-4%) talk to 'other' people (such as grandparents and siblings). ■

Source: 'The career aspirations of young adolescent boys and girls' part of 'The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children' by Growing Up Australia, published by the Australian Institute of Family Studies.