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**SUMMARY PAPER**  
**ATTRACTION AND**  
**RETENTION OF YOUTH**  
**TO THE BUILDING AND**  
**CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY**  
**MAY 2024**



University of  
South Australia

This paper, prepared by **Dr Tracy Vo**, CITB's Industry Research Analyst, summarises the key findings of the research project "Attraction and Retention of Youth to the Building and Construction Industry", conducted by the **University of South Australia** in partnership with CITB.

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## PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The project aimed to better understand influences on attraction and retention of youth to the building and construction industry, through investigating three questions:

- *What is the public perception of working in the construction industry, specifically the views of parents and youths?*
- *What are the reasons why youths choose to stay (motivators) or leave (attrition) the construction industry?*
- *How does the impact of different reasons vary, as a function of the characteristics of the individual, their personal circumstances, and their job?*

To answer these questions, the project was divided into two studies.

## STUDY 1:

### PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF WORKING IN THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

#### SCOPE AND APPROACH

This study surveyed public perceptions towards the construction industry, with two samples, including youths ages 18-25 and parents of youths.

The survey was completed with 840 youths between the ages of 18 and 25 years old, as well as 150 parents with children in years 10 through 12, drawn from across South Australia. Survey questions included demographic information, attitudes towards future employment, and perceptions of the construction industry and different career pathways available within it. The parent group reported their perceptions of their child when answering these questions.

#### FINDINGS

##### *General Interest in Pursuing Careers in the construction Industry*

##### *Preference of working in construction industry*

The study finds that both youths and parents have moderate awareness of various construction occupations. Male youths and their parents have strong interest in pursuing careers within the industry, but female youths and their parents have significantly lower interest. 31% of male youths in the sample indicated interest in pursuing careers in the construction industry, compared to only 12% of female youths.

Figure 1- Top industries preferred to work by male youth and parents with a male child

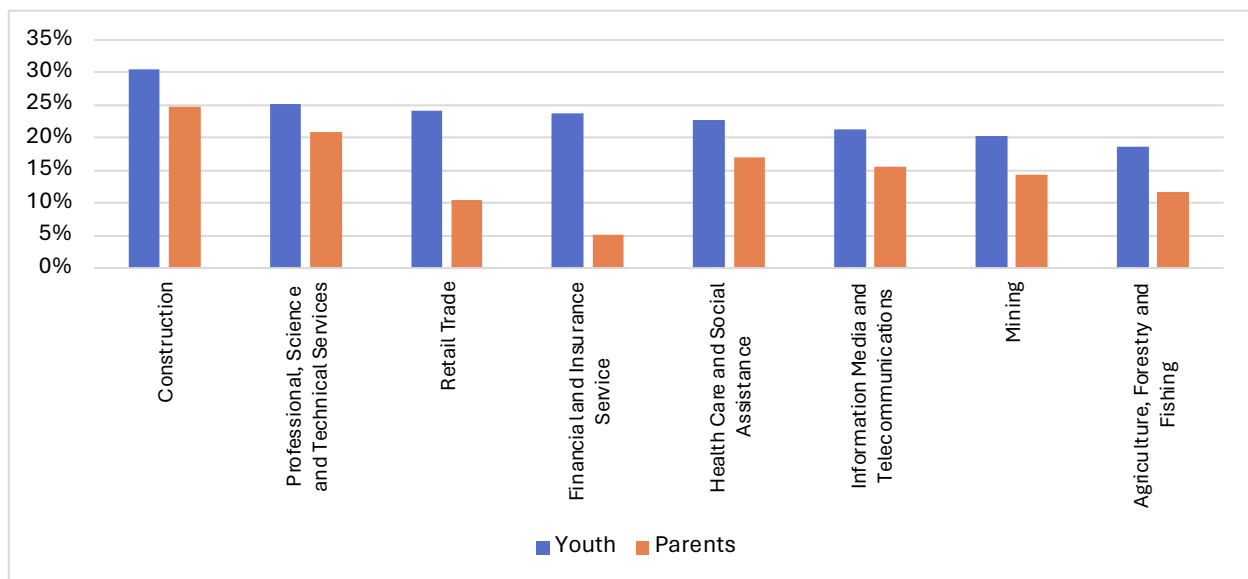
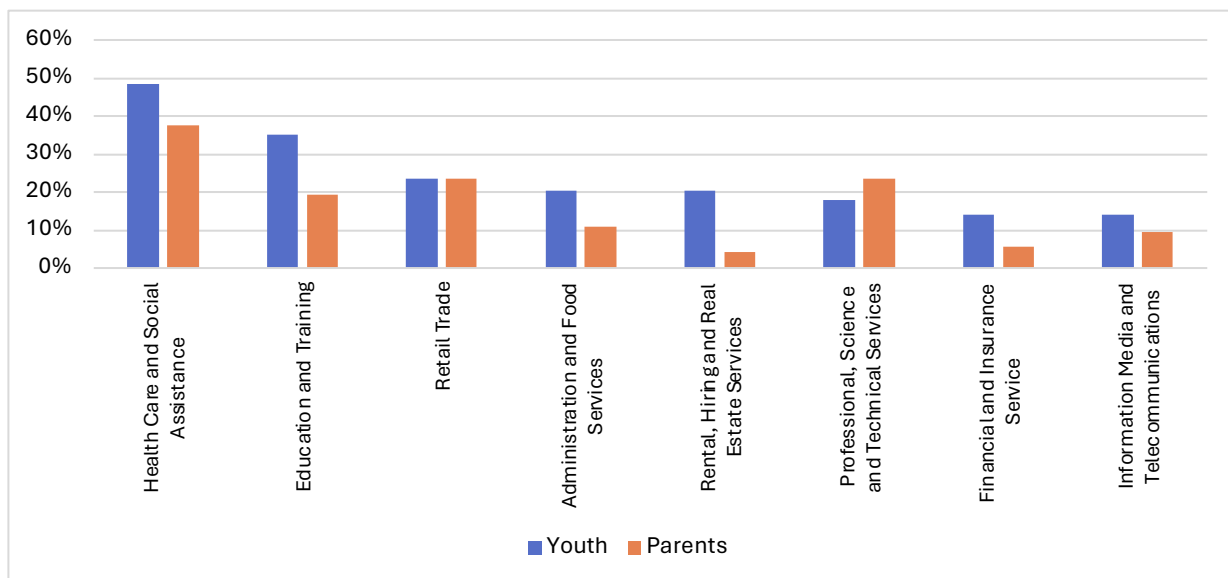


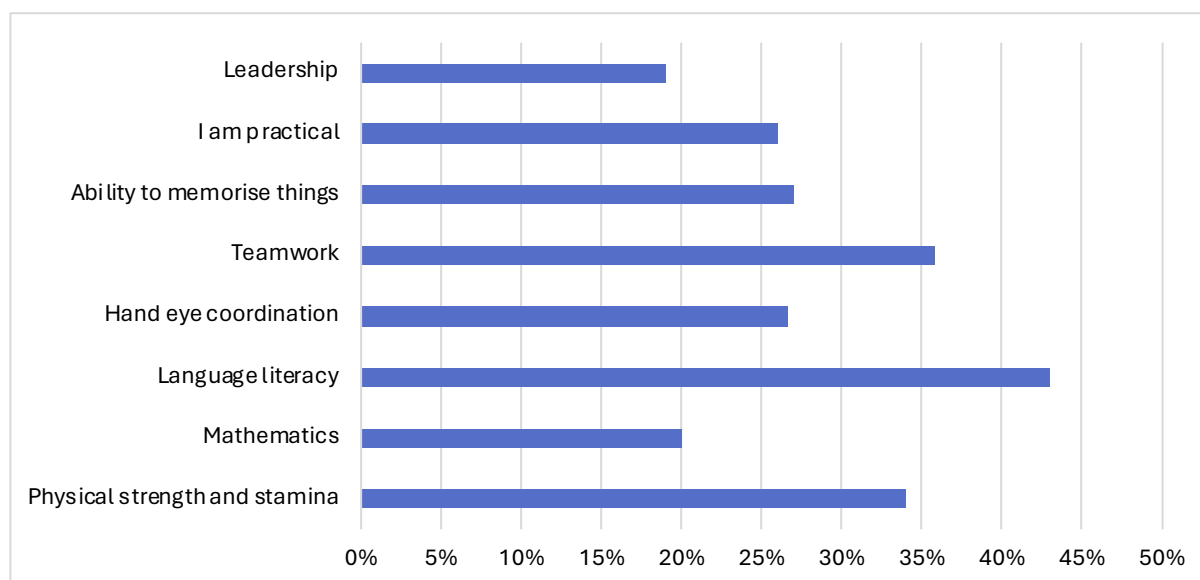
Figure 2- Top industries preferred to work by female and parents with a female child



Moreover, the study assessed the possibility of considering a career in construction industry and individual skills. It finds that youths that have high physical strength and stamina, enjoy being active, have good hand eye collaboration, good mathematical skills and teamwork are more likely to consider careers in the

construction industry. Together, these findings suggest that work in the construction industry is perceived as being physical, collaborative, technical and creative, and the industry at present attracts youths that are good at these skills.

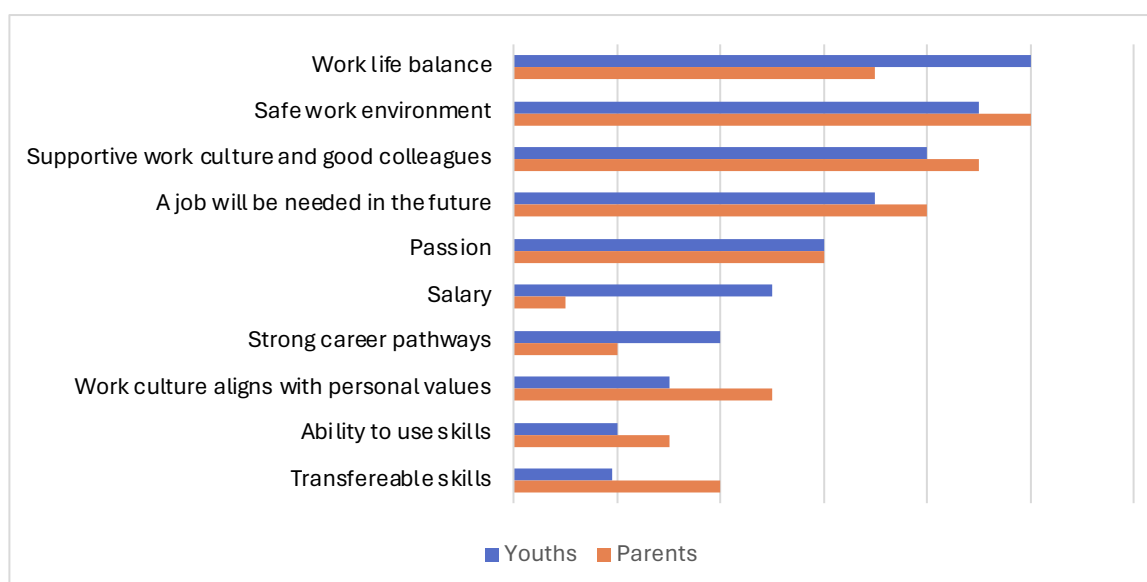
Figure 3- Individual self-assessment skills and possibility of considering a career in the construction industry



#### *Perception of Careers in the Construction Industry*

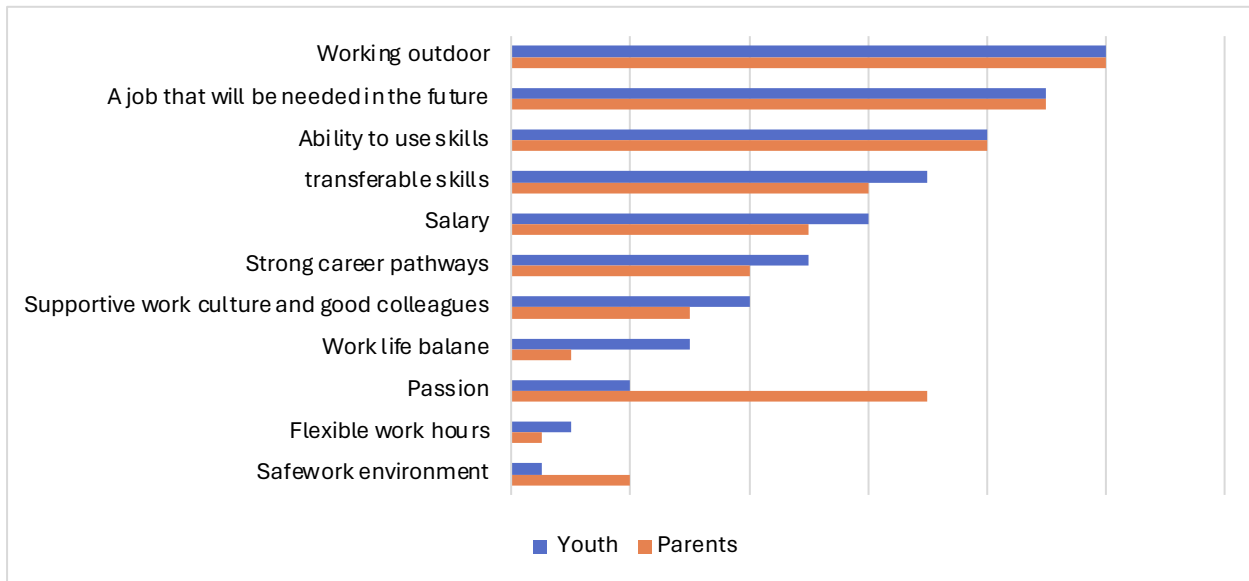
Respondents were asked to rate the importance of different factors when considering future employment opportunities. Youths rank “work-life balance” and “safe work environment” as their top priorities, and both factors are highly important to parents as well.

Figure 4- Ranking of important factors impacting on future employment choices



When asked about their perceptions of the same factors in the construction industry, both groups strongly associate the following aspects with careers in the construction industry: “working out door”, “a job that will be needed in the future”, “ability to use skills”, “transferable skills”, “strong career path- ways” and “salary”, indicating that occupations in the construction industry are perceived to teach valuable work-related skills that are expected to be in high demand in the future, and likely to support positive long-term career-related outcomes.

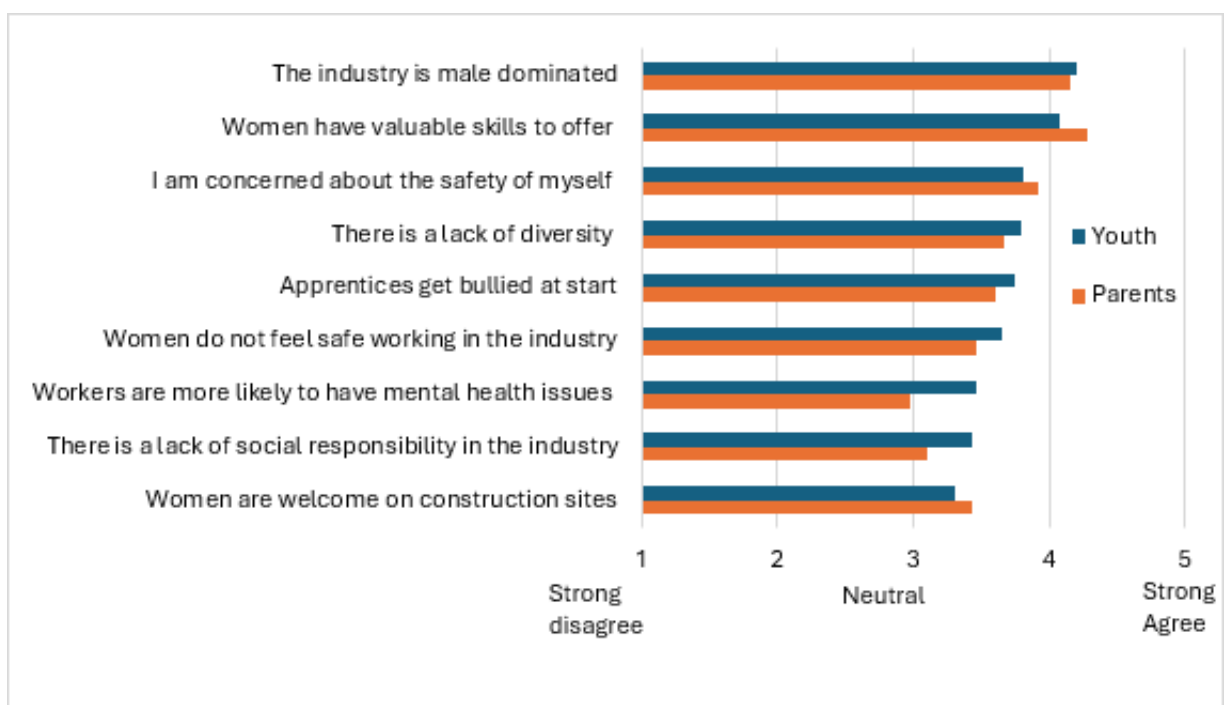
Figure 5- Perception of career pathways in the construction industry in terms of factors impacting on career choice



However, both youths and parents weakly associate “work culture aligns with my personal values”, “safe work environment” and “supportive work culture and good colleagues” with careers in the construction industry, suggesting that the work environment at construction-related occupations is perceived as less welcoming and more hostile than other industries. In fact, when asked

about human relation in the construction industry, more than half of the youths and parents moderately or strongly agree that “apprentices get bullied when they start out in the industry”, “women do not feel safe working in the construction industry”, “there is a lack of diversity in the construction industry” and “the construction industry is male dominated”.

Figure 6- Opinion about human relations in the construction industry



## Preferences for Different Occupations within the Construction Industry

The study presented to respondents eight hypothetical career pathways in the construction industry (Figure 7). The pathways differed in terms of multiple attributes, such as occupation type, nature of work, education and training requirements, current supply and future demand, and expected annual baseline salary. For each scenario, respondents were asked to select their preferred career pathways, and if they would select their preferred pathway if it were available to them in real life.

	Engineering	Construction management	Surveying	Architecture and design	Estimating	Administration	Trades	Construction Labourers
<b>Work environment</b>	Indoor and outdoor	Indoor and outdoor	Outdoor	Indoor and outdoor	Indoor	Indoor	Outdoor	Outdoor
<b>Type of work</b>	Non-physical	Non-physical	Physical and non-physical	Non-physical	Non-physical	Non-physical	Physical	Physical
<b>Type of collaboration</b>	Working with others	Working with others	Working with others	Individual	Individual	Individual	Individual	Working with others
<b>Qualifications / pathway options</b>	Bachelor	Bachelor	Bachelor	Traineeship	Certificate	Bachelor	Apprenticeship	Certificate
<b>Course or Employment requirements</b>	ATAR score: 75	ATAR score: 70	ATAR score: 70	ATAR score: 65	Literacy and Numeracy Skills level 4	ATAR score: 70	Literacy and Numeracy Skills level 4	Literacy and Numeracy Skills level 4
<b>Current skills supply</b>	Shortage	Shortage	No shortage	No shortage	No shortage	No shortage	Shortage	Shortage
<b>Future demand for this type of work</b>	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Strong	Strong	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
<b>Annual base salary</b>	\$70,000	\$70,000	\$70,000	\$70,000	\$70,000	\$70,000	\$70,000	\$70,000

In general, youths are significantly more interested in pursuing white-collar occupations in the industry. Architecture, design and administration are the two most preferred occupations within the construction industry. Conversely, blue-collar occupations, such as trades and construction labourers, are the least preferred (Figure 8).

Using statistical calculation, the study found that these occupations would need to pay roughly \$30,000 more in annual baseline salaries, for them to be competitive with white-collar occupations in administration and architecture and design.

Figure 8- Estimated of probability of accepting one of the hypothetical occupations in the construction industry

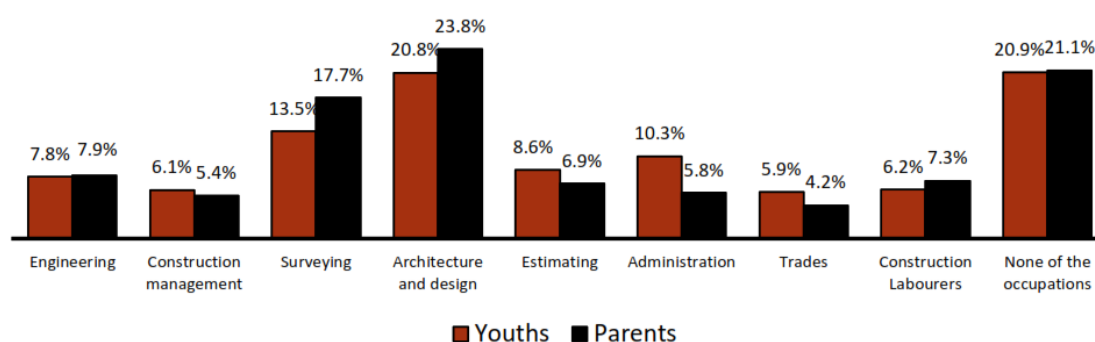
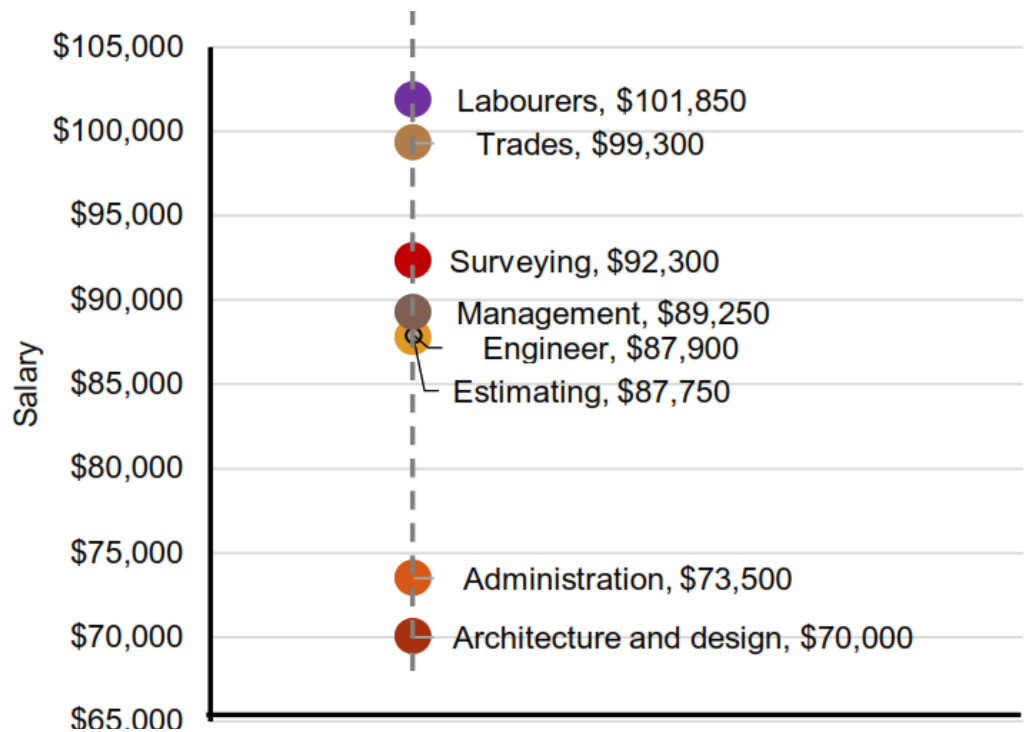




Figure 9- The salary threshold needed in all other career pathways to achieve an equal likelihood of acceptance as the architecture and design role



In short, when considering a career choice in the future, youth concerns more about work life balance, working environment such as safety and support from colleagues. Youth's perception about career in the construction industry is the career needed in the future with transferability skills and the industry is suitable for active, practical persons. However, both the youth

and parents have poor perceptions of the working environment in construction industry which can limit industry attraction. About different career pathways in the industry, architecture and design and administration are the most preferred occupations in the sector. Youths need a pay of roughly \$30,000 more to work as trades and labourers instead of architecture and administration.



# STUDY 2:

## SURVEY OF APPRENTICES IN CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

### SCOPE AND APPROACH

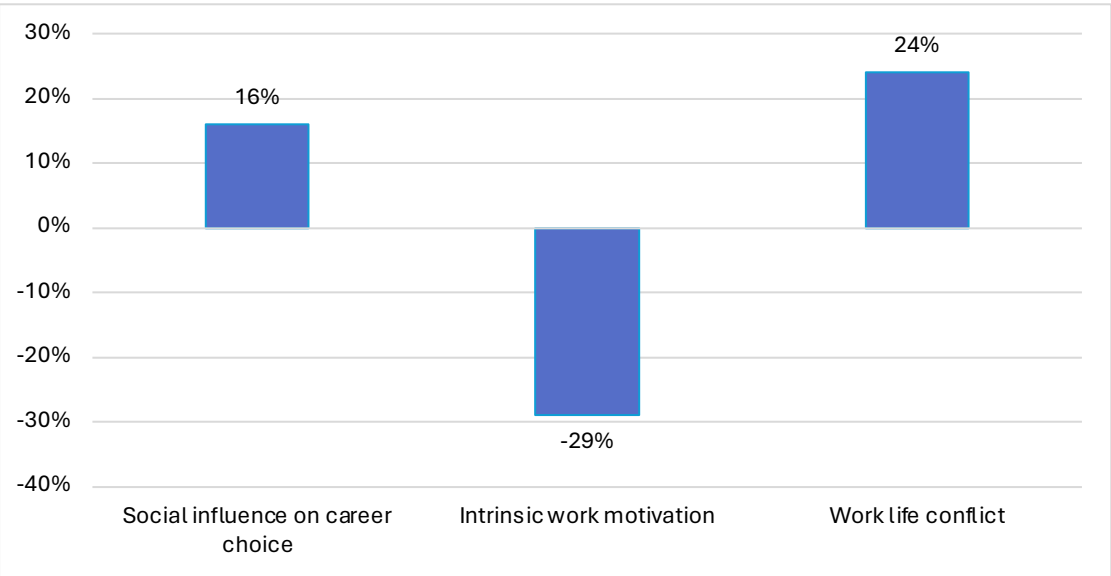
The second study surveyed first year apprentices in the construction industry to capture apprentices' perceptions of job characteristics in their construction work environment that may affect their turnover intentions in the early stages of employment. The study surveyed total 272 apprentices in 2 Times: Time 1 included apprentices within their first 6 months of their apprenticeship and Times 2 surveyed apprentices within 12 month of their apprenticeship.

### FINDINGS

Three factors are important to turnover intention of apprentices within 6 month of employment (Figure 10). Intrinsic value retain youth in the industry by reducing the turnover rate by 30%. In contrast, social influence on career choice increases turnover possibility by 16%. This may imply a degree of career regret, due to perceptions held by apprentices about how other people view the choice of pursuing a career in construction. In other words, if important people, particularly close family members show disapproval about a youth's career

choice, the youth may experience some degrees of career regret, which is a risk factor for turnover intention. The third factor is work-life conflict which increase the turnover intention by 24%. This result suggests that youths prioritise the importance of balancing their time spent on work and other life domains. Interestingly, other characters (e.g., gender, age, education, training opportunities, organisational support and coworker support) were unrelated to apprentices' turnover intention.

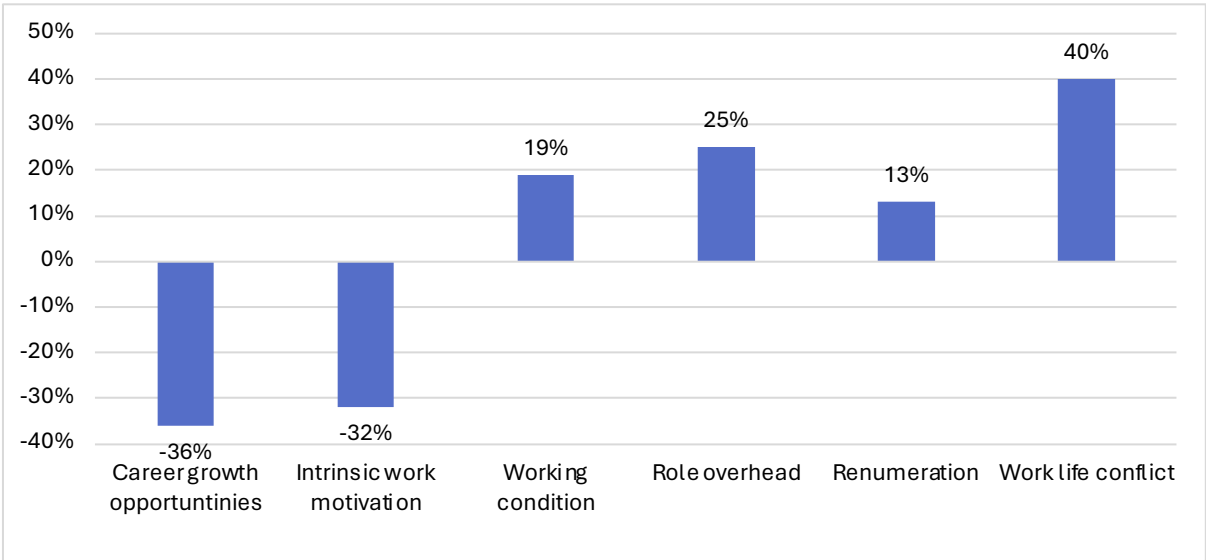
Figure 10- Factors impact on turnover intention of youths within 6 months of apprenticeship





When finishing 6 month of apprenticeship, social influence on career choice does not impact on youth's turnover intention anymore. This suggests that apprentices may feel more confident about their career choices beyond 6 months of employment. Working condition, role overload, remuneration and work life conflict now are reasons why youth want to stop their employment. In contrast, career growth opportunities and intrinsic work motivation are factors retain youth in the industry. A likely explanation for this is that young workers at the early stage of their career might attach high importance to the professional development potential of their jobs when making career decisions.

Figure 11- Factors impact on turnover intention of apprentices within 12 months of apprenticeship



It is noticeable that apprentices of both times are happy with their wage and feedback at work (Figure 12 and Figure 13).

Figure 12- Pay satisfaction by construction apprentices

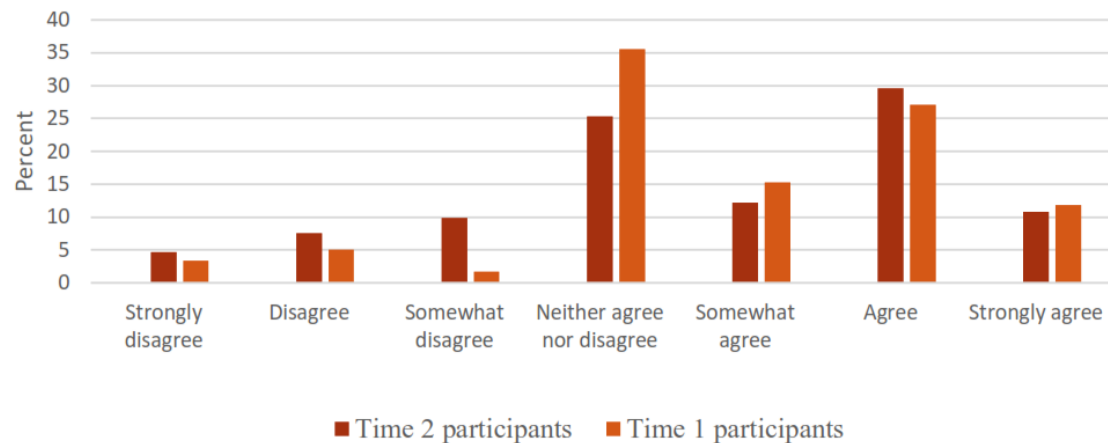
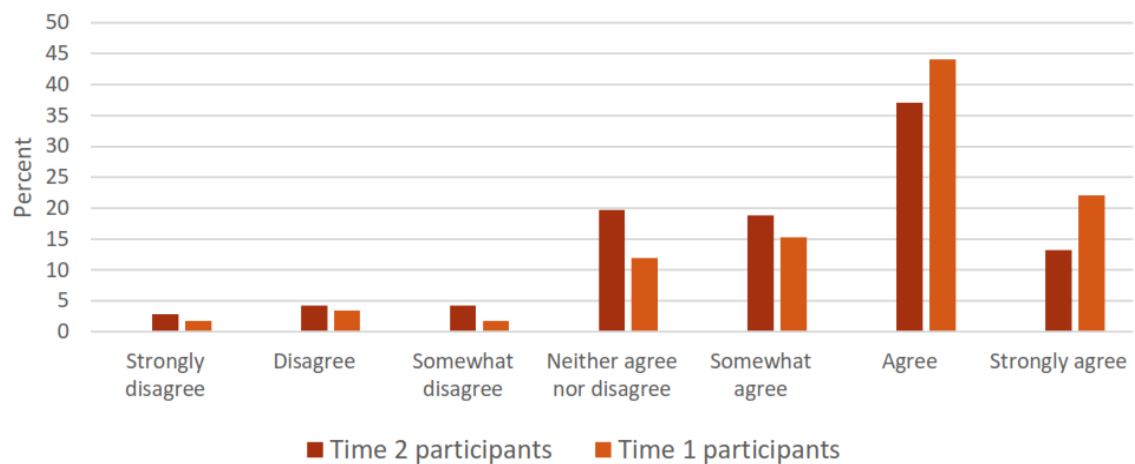


Figure 13- Feedback satisfaction by construction apprentices



In short, the second study suggested three important factors relate to turnover intention of apprentices in the construction industry. The first factor is opinion of other people when making career choice such as parents, family members, teachers, and peers to have accurate information and not be making judgements based on outdated and misinformed perceptions about the construction industry. It is critical to assist parents/family members to have a better understanding about the nature of construction jobs so they can properly advise their children about career options, and when making decisions to enter the industry. Second, the study found that role overload is an important driving force for employee turnover. It is vitally important that the

construction industry addresses the excessive workload assumed by young workers. Furthermore, perceived career growth opportunities are also important for apprentices, particularly as they gain more experience during the first year of employment. Finally, youth placed a strong emphasis on work-life balance. When youth perceive that work significantly interferes with their personal lives, they are less likely to be interested in pursuing and engaging in construction careers. Youth need to be informed about expectations and the realities of work hours. However, flexibility from organisations about work scheduling and work hours is highly valued by youth and may be a key consideration to attracting and retaining youth in the construction industry.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

## COMMUNICATION STRATEGY:

Public information and education programs need to be used to generate greater positive awareness of careers in the construction industry, and to help change perceptions of the same. These programs need to emphasise key benefits of careers in the construction industry, such as the opportunity to learn useful and valuable skills that are transferable across industries, will be in demand for a long time, and offer attractive salaries. These programs also need to showcase the variety of occupations available within the construction industry, in terms of the nature of the work and the required skillsets.

## WORKING REGULATION:

Development and enforcement of workplace regulations needs to be strengthened to ensure a safe working environment for all workers. A significant proportion of youths and parents in the study expressed concerns regarding workplace safety, especially for female workers, as well as the issue of bullying faced by apprentices when entering the industry.

## SUPERVISION:

It is critical that supervisors are prepared with teaching methods that facilitate positive and corrective learning experiences on the job. It is important that apprentices experience sense of challenge that is balanced by supportive and progressive opportunities to gain new skills, in both the school and on-site training environment. Supervisors and co-workers have mentorship roles but may require additional training to incorporate teaching methods with the technical aspects of trades.

## INTRINSIC MOTIVATION:

Building intrinsic motivation through helping individuals to feel informed and engaged in workplace learning may reduce their turnover intention. Again, this can be done through career growth opportunities, appreciate apprentices' daily works.

## WORKING CONDITION:

Changes to the nature of work that offer increased flexibility and improved work-life balance could help attract young workers to the industry.





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