

# Early Careers Programs in a Changing Market



Australian  
Association  
of Graduate  
Employers



# AAGE INSIGHTS

# The early careers landscape

Average number  
of graduate roles  
offered per  
employer stable at  
52

23% Increase in  
Average Grad  
Applications per  
Employer compared  
to 2024

9.4% Increase in  
Average Intern  
Applications per  
Employer compared  
to 2024

16% of interns apply for 20+ roles

28% of graduates apply for 20+ roles

Data sourced from the 2026 AAGE Employer  
and Candidate Survey Insights Reports

Job  
Oppor  
EMPLOYM  
Accounting  
Administrative/De

## Challenges encountered by employers during the 2027 graduate recruitment campaign

n=128\*



\* number of employers who reported encountering one or more challenges

Data sourced from the 2026 AAGE Market Snapshot Survey Report

# KEY CHALLENGES IN THE MARKET

## Forecasting graduate roles & workforce planning

10%

of employers determine their graduate requirements **after the campaign has started**.

Source: 2026 AAGE Employer Survey

## Rising use of AI in job applications

42%

of candidates used an AI tool **during recruitment** — up from 27% in 2025.

Source: 2026 AAGE Candidate Survey

## Candidate readiness to use AI

1 in 3

candidates don't feel well prepared to use AI tools, yet **70%** use it for interview preparation.

Source: 2026 AAGE Candidate Survey (n=926)

## Candidates keep their options open

1 in 4

candidates keep applying after accepting an offer; multiple-offer acceptance was **up from 9% in 2024 to 17% in 2025**.

Source: 2026 AAGE Candidate Survey

# THE GRADUATE EXPERIENCE

Strong wellbeing and support, with clear opportunities to build core skills.



## What graduates rate highly

**89%** say their graduate program is better than expected.

**86%** feel supported to maintain a healthy work/life balance.

**85%** feel backed by their manager when work problems arise.

**85%** have autonomy in how they do their work.

**90%** had requested working-arrangement changes accommodated.

Source: 2026 AAGE Graduate Survey



## Where employers want more support

**Top gaps:** self-management, time management and communication.

**31%** have faced challenges with professionalism and work expectations.

**Future focus:** critical thinking, problem-solving and resilience.

**1 in 10** graduates need more support to be fully work-ready.

**Managing graduates:** supervisors most want support with time and workload pressures, onboarding and training, expectation-setting, and feedback conversations.

Source: 2025 AAGE Graduate Supervisor Pulse Check

# KEY TRENDS IN THE MARKET

## A wide variety of early-career programs

97%

of organisations offer a graduate program, and **67%** offer intern or vacation programs.

Source: 2026 AAGE Employer Survey

## Investment in graduate development

\$4,500

average spend per head on graduate training, with **three in four** employers investing up to \$5,000 each.

Source: 2026 AAGE Employer Survey

## Graduates plan to stay — and know why

76%

of graduates expect to stay **3+ years**, with pay and benefits (43%) and career progression (38%) the top retention levers.

Source: 2026 AAGE Graduate Survey (n=3,266)

## Early ID programs are expanding

50%

of graduates begin their job search before their final year, as employers increasingly explore **early ID programs**.

Source: 2026 AAGE Candidate Survey



Australian  
Association  
of Graduate  
Employers

# Pathways and Purpose.

FROM FIRST ROLE TO  
LASTING IMPACT.

**2026 ANNUAL GRADUATE RECRUITMENT  
AND DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE**

11TH - 12TH NOVEMBER 2026,  
HILTON SYDNEY



# CONNECT WITH AAGE



**Website:** [www.aage.com.au](http://www.aage.com.au)

**Email:** [info@aage.com.au](mailto:info@aage.com.au)

**LinkedIn:** <https://www.linkedin.com/company/aage>

**Events:** <https://www.aage.com.au/upcoming-events>