Inquiry into school to work transition – Submission to the Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training (Commonwealth)

July 2017

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of New South Wales

FEDERATION OF PARENTS AND CITIZENS ASSOCIATIONS OF NEW SOUTH WALES

Introduction

The Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales (P&C Federation) is thankful to the Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training for this opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry into school to work transition. P&C Federation supports the position of individual educational and developmental needs met by a range of differential services expressed through appropriate and well-planned curricula, programs and environments conducted by sensitive and well-trained personnel in conjunction with parents[1] and families. It is essential that school staff, parents and the Government work in partnership to ensure that the needs of each student in the Public Education system are met.

The core belief of P&C Federation is that the education of our children and youth are the most fundamental means of ensuring individual and collective success and, as a result, our greatest national resource.

P&C Federation's response to this inquiry is guided by the principle that a fundamental purpose of school education is to lay the groundwork for success and fulfillment in students' post-school lives, and that preparing students for the transition to post-school life is therefore of central importance.

Terms of Reference

1. **Measurements of gain in school and how this contributes to supporting students to prepare for post-school education and training;**
2. **Opportunities to better inform and support students in relation to post-school education and training, including use of employment outcomes of students who undertake school-based vocational education or post-school tertiary pathways;**
3. **Other related matters that the Committee considers relevant.**

P&C Federation acknowledges that by all measures, the bulk of Australian students are engaged in employment or study within several after leaving school. For example, a 2012 study by Deloitte Access Economics found that 82% of school leavers in Australia were making good transitions, 14% were making mixed transitions and just 4% were making poor transitions.[2]

Nonetheless, among the 18% not making good transitions, numerous relevant factors were identified including:

- **Not completing Year 12** – 80% of Year 12 completers had a good transition, compared to 62% of early leavers.

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[1] "Parent" refers to anyone with legal care of a child, such as a parent, carer or legal guardian

[2] Deloitte Access Economics Pty Ltd. 2012. *Youth Transitions Evidence Base: 2012 Update*. 19 November. "Good transition" is defined as individuals who over three or four of the four years since leaving school have been fully engaged in either full- time work, full-time study at or above Certificate III level or a combination of part-time work and part-time study at or above Certificate III level. "Poor Transition" is defined as individuals who over three or four of the four years since leaving school are unemployed, not in the labour force, or have only part time work (where they have been seeking additional work or additional hours), or some combination of these. "Mixed transitions" is defined as individuals over four years following school who have two of the good transition outcomes and two of the poor transition outcomes.

- **Not working part-time while at school** – 77% of early leavers had a good transition if they worked part-time during school, compared to 49% if they did not work during school. This advantage was smaller, but still present, among Year 12 completers.
- **Indigenous background** – 65% of indigenous students had a good transition, compared to 82% of non-indigenous students.
- **Having a disability or special needs** – 71% of students with a disability had a good transition, compared to 82% of students without a disability.

Other correlates with successful school to work transitions include literacy and numeracy levels and socio-economic background.

P&C Federation believes there are several inter-connected approaches that could be implemented to improve the school to work transitions of these groups: incorporation of non-technical skills in school education, mandatory provision of work experience opportunities in schools, and more structured relationships between schools and local businesses.

<ins>Incorporation of non-technical skills in school education</ins>

Reinforcing the importance of career-oriented programs in schools is analysis by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) which generally found a 3-4% advantage in numerous areas for students who undertook Vocational Education and Training (VET) in schools. For instance, whilst 63% of males who did not go into higher education were fully employed five years after completing school, this figure was 66% for those who undertook VET in school. Similarly, among females who did not go into higher education, there was a 49%-46% advantage for those who undertook VET in school (Figure 1).[3] The number of students potentially impacted by such differences is in the tens of thousands, and highlights the benefits of gearing school education toward future employment. However, outside of VET courses, the preparation of students for post-school life varies greatly between schools, teachers and states/territories. P&C Federation believes preparing students for their post-school lives is a central tenet of school education generally, and to this end the instruction of generic non-technical skills should be incorporated in the National Curriculum for schools throughout Australia in a standardised and consistent way.
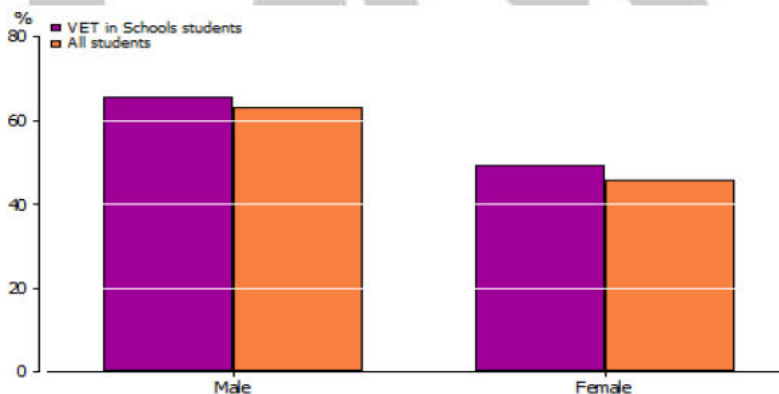

Figure 1: Proportion of Year 11 students in 2006 that did not go on to higher education, and were employed full time in 2011. Source: ABS 2014

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[3] Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). 2014. *Outcomes from Vocational Education and Training in Schools, experimental estimates, Australia, 2006-2011*

The concept of 'non-technical skills' is highly broad and dependent on context, but may include skills such as general problem-solving, communication, self-motivation and digital literacy. Although these skills are beneficial in virtually any line of work, they may be especially valuable to those who lack formal training in specialised fields, as may be the case with some groups listed above. This is because non-technical skills can be utilised advantageously in a wide variety of contexts, and may thereby compensate for lack of technical knowledge or specialised training. Moreover, considering the steady trends away from long-term permanent employment and the higher likelihood that modern employees will hold numerous jobs and careers throughout their working lives, non-technical skills may benefit students by fostering flexibility and adaptability.

The central challenge with current efforts to incorporate such skills in school education is that there is little consistency in how schools develop and measure these skills. There are numerous commendable frameworks to incorporate these skills in schools, including *The Australian Blueprint for Career Development, The Australian Core Skills Framework* and *The Core Skills for Work Developmental Framework*. However, an examination by the Department of Education and Training (the Department) concluded that there is a wide variance across Australia in how and to what extent schools apply these frameworks (if they do so at all).[4] As the implementation of these frameworks is entirely at schools' discretion, there is essentially no consistent way to measure the development of non-technical skills, and assessing the effectiveness of policies in these areas is therefore exceedingly difficult. In its consultations with education and employment stakeholders, the Department identified numerous reasons for the reluctance of some schools to incorporate these skills in their education, including lack of understanding among teachers in how to incorporate these skills and a strong distinction between ATAR/tertiary preparation and vocational training (with the latter sometimes seen as inferior by teachers/schools).

Similar issues arise with the implementation of general capabilities in the Australian Curriculum. General Capabilities is made up of seven components: Literacy, Numeracy, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Capability, Critical and Creative Thinking, Personal and Social Capability, Ethical Understanding and Intercultural Understanding.

These seven capabilities were embedded in the Curriculum to foster general competencies and learning skills to supplement knowledge-based studies. However, there are no consistent means of assessing students' abilities in these skills, with the National Curriculum stating simply that "*Teachers are expected to teach and assess general capabilities to the extent that they are incorporated within each learning area.*"[5] The most extensive integration of these skills in school education has been implemented in the state of Victoria, which adopted the conceptual position that these capabilities "*are a set of discrete knowledge and skills … and students benefit from explicit instruction in these areas*".[6] To this end, the state revised its curriculum in 2015 to allow for students' performance to be assessed against these general capabilities up to Year 10. Four of the seven capabilities (Critical and Creative Thinking, Ethical, Intercultural, and Personal and Social Capability) are considered sets of

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[4] Department of Education and Training. 2016. *Everybody's Core Business - Research into the non-technical capabilities needed for successful participation in work or further study: Final Report*. October.

[5] Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). 2013. *General Capabilities in the Australian Curriculum*. January. Page 5.

[6] Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority. 2015. *Victorian Curriculum F–10: Revised curriculum planning and reporting guidelines*. December. Page 12.

knowledge in their own right, while the other three capabilities (Literacy, Numeracy and ICT Capability) are applied across the curriculum. These capabilities are applied differently between three stages (prep-Year 2, Years 3-8 and Years 9-10), and constitute core strands for all learning programs.

With this in mind, P&C Federation recommends the Department increase the role that non-technical skills occupy in national education. Crucially, this must be accompanied by means to measure students' performance in these areas in a standard and nationally consistent way, as this will allow for the effectiveness of these skills in education to be tracked and assessed. The implementation of the General Capabilities in the Victorian curriculum provides a viable model for how non-technical skills may be effectively incorporated into school curricula throughout Australia, and P&C Federation urges the Department to implement a comparable system at a national level. This would represent a clear improvement over the ad hoc and unmonitored way such skills are currently instructed, and would serve as a promising means of boosting skills necessary for the workforce.

Mandatory provision of work experience

A period of work experience in school provides opportunities for students to gain some early preparation for a workplace environment or the nature of a particular industry. As noted earlier, working during high school has been linked to more successful transitions to employment after school, a conclusion reached by numerous other research studies.[7] The curricula of all states and territories offer opportunities for student work experience, generally in Years 9 or 10, provided permission is granted by parents/carers. The length of these work placements can vary, though is generally at least for one-week duration. Students undertaking a VET course frequently must undertake mandatory work experience as part of their course. Outside of VET courses, school-organised work placements are largely at the discretion of individual schools.

Considering the value of work experience during school years, P&C Federation suggests the Government could take a further step of either making work experience mandatory for all students aged between 14-16 years (including for students not undertaking a VET course), or at least making the offer of work experience mandatory for all schools. This may be particularly valuable in light of the declining proportion of young people engaged in employment: the number of 15-24 year olds in only full-time employment declined from 26% in 2005 to 20% in 2014, while those engaged in only full-time study rose from 25% to 31% in this period.[8] The number of 15-19 year olds engaged in work only or both work and study has also declined (Figure 2), and increased work experience could provide these young people with an early taste of working life that they may otherwise lack.

Precedents for this exist in other jurisdictions: until 2012, it was mandatory for school students in England to undertake work experience by the age of 16. After this requirement was removed from the English curriculum in 2012, a survey by Barclays Retail and Business Banking in 2013 found that 87% of 14-25 year olds supported the reinstatement of mandatory work experience for school students.[9] Similarly, a 2015 survey by the British Chamber of Commerce found that 73% of British education

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[7] E.g. Pinquart et al. 2003. Self-efficacy and successful school-to-work transition: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, Vol.63(3): Pages 329-346

[8] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). 2015. *Australia's Welfare 2015*.

[9] Barclays Bank. 2013. Nine in 10 young people believe work experience should be mandatory. 17 June

leaders and 82% of business leaders supported mandatory work experience for school students up to the age of 16.[10]

Alternatively, the Government could implement the mandatory offering of work experience options by schools combined with the optional uptake of this offer by students who are interested to test out the market and gain real life experiences. P&C Federation urges the Standing Committee to consider these options as viable pathways to prepare students for school to work transitions as much as possible.

It would also be beneficial for this work experience to count towards the students' assessment, based on factors such as feedback from employers and student reflections of their experience. It would also be advisable to allow for sufficient preparation prior to commencing any work experience. Moreover, a common drawback of work experiences is that students are often delegated mundane tasks, and efforts should be made to ensure that students' work experiences are as fulfilling as possible. For example, it may be possible to require employers to provide a specified mentor for a student, and for the mentor to provide the student and school with some expected tasks or outcomes prior to commencement.
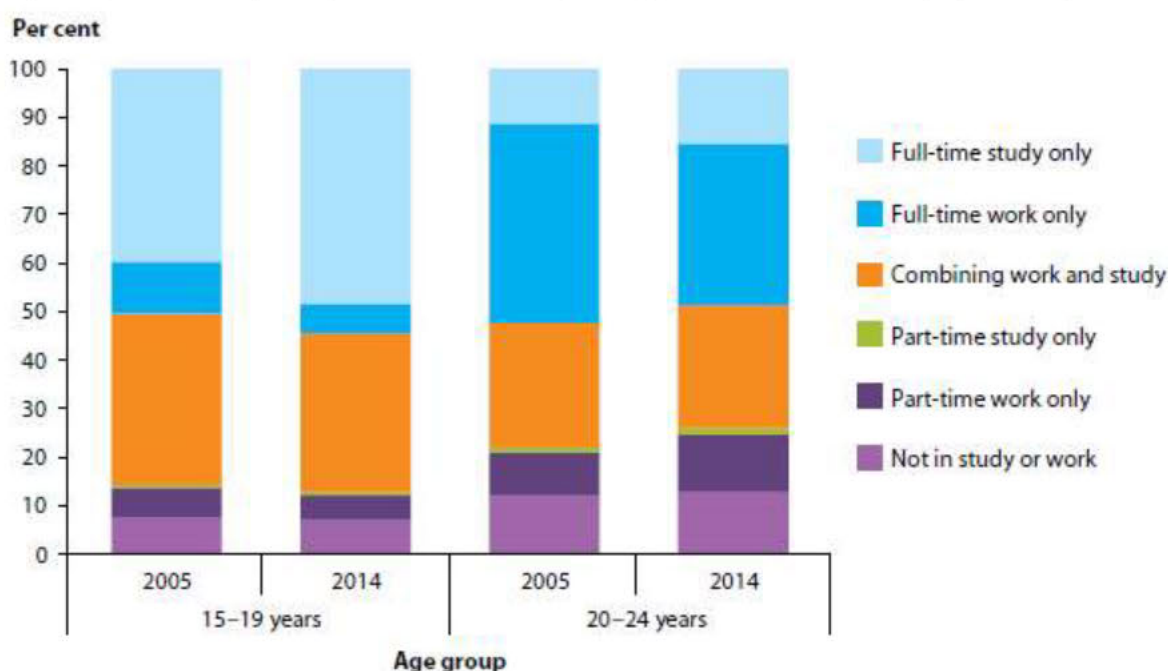

Figure 2: Participation in education and/or employment among young people aged 15 to 24, by age group, 2005 and 2014. Source: AIHW 2015

Relationship of schools with local businesses

P&C Federation believes schools should develop relationships with local businesses and initiate regular visits by recruitment officers, mentors, human resources managers etc. as guest speakers or mentors. They could advise students with resume writing, conduct sample interviews, practise salary negotiations, discuss OHS requirements, explain work ethics etc. There is currently little connection

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[10] British Chamber of Commerce. 2015. *Businesspeople and education leaders: Make under 16 work experience a national priority.*

between life at school and life as a working adult. Students are alienated from real life situations as they oscillate from school to home and vice versa. Regular, ongoing and efficient business mentor programs, combining onsite and offsite sessions, could provide students with an essential connection to life outside school and prepare them for their transition to a successful and fulfilling work life.

Other Approaches

P&C Federation believes the above measures are promising avenues for improving school to work transitions for under-performing young people generally. However, there are groups struggling with school to work transitions at comparatively higher rates for whom additional approaches may be necessary.

Students with a disability/special needs

Education provision to students with a disability or special needs face numerous challenges that may impact later school to work transitions. For instance, students with a disability or special needs may require additional supports due to behavioural or learning difficulties, and such resources are not always available. Moreover, a 2016 examination of educational provisions for students with a disability or special needs by the NSW Auditor-General found that mainstream teachers are not always trained in how to handle such students, and there is a widespread perception among parents and educators that students with a disability or special needs experience disproportionately high rates of suspension.[11] These factors may impact such students' educational performance throughout their schooling years, making it more likely they will subsequently struggle with school to work transitions.

P&C Federation has previously filed a submission on these matters to the NSW Inquiry into the provision of education to students with a disability or special needs.[12] Some recommendations to this inquiry included:

- Increasing the ratio of school counsellors to students in government schools;
- Systematically monitoring trends in the overall educational performance of and supports provided to such students;
- Undertaking a review into disciplinary practices applied to such students.

P&C Federation reiterates that such measures could boost the educational performance of students with a disability and special needs, thereby raising their likelihood of achieving successful school to work transitions.

Indigenous students

Monitoring trends in school to work transitions of indigenous students is difficult due to higher drop-out rates before Year 9.[13] Nonetheless, on the assumption that better educational outcomes improve

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[11] Audit Office of NSW. 2016. Supporting students with disability in NSW public schools, 12 May

[12] P&C Federation. 2017. *Submission to Inquiry into the provision of education to students with a disability or special needs*

[13] Deloitte Access Economics Pty Ltd. 2012. *Youth Transitions Evidence Base: 2012 Update*. 19 November. Page 28; Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood (SCSEEC).2014. *Evaluation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010-14*

the likelihood of successful school to work transitions, some measures correlated with improved educational outcomes for indigenous students include:

- Fostering a school culture that incorporates indigenous student identity;[14]
- Boosting the engagement of indigenous families/communities in indigenous students' education;[15]
- Including indigenous perspectives in curriculum (e.g. incorporating indigenous language comprehension).[16]

It has also been noted that efforts to boost indigenous educational outcomes often do not distinguish sufficiently between indigenous students in regional and metropolitan areas, and those in remote areas.[17] Such distinctions are necessary due to the unique challenges facing indigenous students in remote areas compared to those in more populated areas.

Non-metropolitan students

Students outside metropolitan areas face challenges directly related to their increased remoteness including:

- Less industries and job opportunities relative to metropolitan areas
- High costs of travelling to complete work experience, higher education and other activities relevant to a successful school to work transition.

P&C Federation encourages several actions to be implemented to mitigate against these factors:

1. **Establish a subsidy to cover travel and accommodation costs for non-metropolitan students when undertaking work placement**. As there may be relatively fewer options for work placement in rural and remote communities, students may be required to travel large distances to gain work experience in certain industry fields during school, which is a cost to families in regards to transport and accommodation. A subsidy to cover these costs would bridge this inequity between metropolitan and non-metropolitan students.

2. **Invest in industry in non-metropolitan areas to expand opportunities for young people in these areas.** This would create more opportunities for young people to be able to remain in their communities and near their families after they complete their schooling, thus boosting rural and remote communities as viable economic centres in their own right.

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[14] Ockenden 2014. *Closing the Gap - Positive learning environments for Indigenous children and young people.*
[15] National Curriculum Services. 2012. *Success in remote schools: a research study of eleven improving remote schools*
[16] Doyle and Hill 2008. *Our children, our future—achieving improved primary and secondary education outcomes for Indigenous students: an overview of investment opportunities and approaches*
[17] Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood (SCSEEC).2014. *Evaluation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010-14*