1

Introduction

There is much more that needs to be done in schools, local communities and at a government level if we want to improve children and young people's well-being. A shift towards seeing school and work as complementary, rather than in conflict, is the first step in creating better pathways for young people between school and work.[1]

The changing nature of youth transitions

1.1   For today's young Australians, transitions from the compulsory years of secondary school to the next phase of their lives are significantly more complex than for previous generations. It is no longer appropriate to view youth transitions as a direct passage from secondary school into employment or further education, as today's young Australians are increasingly pursuing more flexible options which often involve combining school with part-time (or casual) work.

1.2   While the types of jobs occupied by those combining school and work are not always reflective of their long-term career aspirations, this employment can nonetheless provide many strategic benefits that help young people to better manage the transition from school to work.

---

1   NSW Commission for Children and Young People, *Submission no. 33.1*, p. 8.

1.3   Participation in part-time work, however, can also have a detrimental impact on students. For example, there is evidence which suggests that as a student's working hours increase beyond an initial threshold, there is a reduced likelihood that they will complete Year 12.[2]

1.4   Improving education and transition outcomes for young Australians is a key component of the Australian Government's education reform and social inclusion agenda. The Foundation for Young Australians noted 'the last two economic slowdowns hit those in transition the hardest.'[3] The prevailing economic climate emphasises the need to provide support for young people, who can be particularly vulnerable in such times.

1.5   The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) recently agreed to a series of measures to address rising unemployment, some of which include:

■ bringing forward COAG's 90 per cent Year 12 or equivalent attainment rate target from 2020 to 2015;

■ halving the gap for Indigenous students in Year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rates by 2020; and

■ halving the proportion of the population aged 20-64 without qualifications at the Certificate III level or above by 2020.

1.6   Two initiatives established by COAG to support these measures are:

■ a **Compact with Young Australians** to increase young people's engagement with education and training pathways; and

■ a **National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions** to pursue long term reform of schooling through collaborative efforts with the states and territories, to improve educational outcomes.[4]

1.7   The Compact with Young Australians comprises a National Youth Participation Requirement to make participation in education, training or employment compulsory for all young people until they reach age 17. This requirement will commence from 1 January 2010 and will be implemented by all states and territories.

---

2   See M. Vickers, S. Lamb and J. Hinkley (2003) *Student Workers in High School and Beyond: the Effects of Part-Time Employment on Participation in Education, Training and Work,* LSAY Research Report No 30, Melbourne: ACER, p. v.

3   Foundation for Young Australians, *Submission no. 26,* p. 7.

4   Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 'Youth Attainment and Transitions', <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Youth/YouthAttainmentandTransitions/Pages/Home.aspx>. Accessed 22 September 2009.

1.8   Following COAG's commitment to a National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions, a range of youth, transitions and career programs currently offered by the Australian Government are being evaluated with a view to being consolidated and streamlined in partnership with the states and territories.[5] Where reference is made to Australian Government programs concerning youth and transitions, programs should be considered in this context.

1.9   The national focus on lifting retention rates comes at a time when more and more secondary students are combining their school with part-time jobs and working longer and later hours. Mr Angelo Gavrielatos, Federal President of the Australian Education Union, stated:

> What we have seen is the development of two areas that do not necessarily intersect and that pose certain contradictions for us— namely, the need for higher retention, to year 12 or equivalent, recognising the importance of that for the individual child or student and for the economy, but also the fact that students are working longer hours as a consequence of a more deregulated labour market and retail environment.[6]

1.10   The inquiry therefore sought to examine practical solutions to assist students to more effectively balance their study and work commitments to help them to achieve positive post-secondary school outcomes.

Referral of the inquiry

1.11   On Monday 13 October 2008 the Minister for Education, The Hon Julia Gillard MP, asked the Committee to inquire into and report on *combining school and work: supporting successful youth transitions*.

1.12   The committee was asked to focus on:

- providing opportunities to recognise and accredit the employability and career development skills gained through students' part time or casual work;

---

5   Full details on the National Partnership are available from COAG's website at: <http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2009-07-02/docs/NP_youth_attainment_transitions.pdf>. Accessed 23 September 2009.

6   Mr Angelo Gavrielatos, Australian Education Union, *Transcript of Evidence*, 2 February 2009, p. 16.

- identifying more flexible, innovative and/or alternative approaches to attaining a senior secondary certificate which support students to combine work and study;

- support that may be required to assist young people combining work and study to stay engaged in their learning, especially where work and study intersects with income support;

- the potential impact on educational attainment (including the prospects for post-compulsory qualifications and workforce productivity); and

- the effectiveness of school-based training pathways and their impact on successful transitions, including opportunities for improvement (particularly in relation to pathways to employment for disadvantaged young people).

Conduct of the inquiry

1.13   Following referral of the inquiry on 13 October 2008, an advertisement calling for written submissions appeared fortnightly in the *The Australian* during the subsequent four months. Information on the inquiry, including terms of reference and advice on making a submission was available on the committee's website.[7] The inquiry was also advertised through a mail out to various stakeholders, including peak bodies and organisations, and state and territory governments.

1.14   62 submissions, including three supplementary submissions, were received and these are listed at Appendix A.

1.15   Seven exhibits were received and are listed at Appendix B.

1.16   13 public hearings were conducted in: Canberra (seven), Adelaide, Perth, Burnie, Melbourne, Brisbane and Port Kembla. A list of witnesses who attended these hearings is included in Appendix C.

1.17   In recognition of the importance of engaging directly with students, the inquiry sought feedback from students through an online survey and through a series of public forums conducted in secondary schools across the country.

---

7   <http://www.aph.gov.au/edt>.

Online student survey

1.18   In addition to the existing body of research on students combining school and work, particularly that conducted through the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY)[8], an online survey sought direct feedback from secondary school students which was available via the committee's website. All Members and Senators were informed about the student survey and encouraged to promote the inquiry to secondary schools in their electorate.

1.19   Through the survey, information was sought on the working arrangements of students, the impact of these work arrangements on their schooling, the benefits they gain from their part-time work, and the extent to which schools and employers offer flexibility to assist them to combine school and work. A copy of the printable version of the student survey is included in Appendix D.

1.20   Responses were received from 2,765 secondary students across the country. Of these respondents, 1,722 were engaged in some form of work outside school.

1.21   32 responses were received from students who attend school each alternate fortnight because they are engaged in school-based apprenticeships which facilitate their engagement in work placements. Due to the potential for these responses to distort data concerning the working hours of students combining school and work, they were excluded from Figures 2.2 and 3.2.

1.22   The feedback from all schools and students who participated in the survey is greatly appreciated and contributed substantially to the report.

School visits / student forums

1.23   The inquiry received invaluable assistance from six secondary schools which agreed to accommodate public hearings and student forums on their premises:

- Para Hills High School (S.A.);

- Leeming Senior High School (W.A.);

---

8   Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) is a research program that tracks young people as they move from school to post-school destinations. On 1 July 2007, the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) was contracted to provide analytical and reporting services for LSAY for the next three years. The LSAY analytical and reporting services were previously provided by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) jointly with DEEWR between 1995 and 2007.

- Tasmanian Academy – Hellyer Campus (Tas.);

- Holmesglen Vocational College (Vic.);

- Craigslea State High School (Qld); and

- Illawarra Senior College (NSW).

1.24   Student forums conducted in these schools were attended by delegations of students from neighbouring schools, with participants from approximately 40 secondary schools involved in proceedings (see Appendix C). The committee is grateful to all schools who attended these hearings and thanks students for sharing their experiences.

Scope and structure of the report

1.25   VET in schools and school based apprenticeships and traineeships are significant in the context of successful youth transitions, and these issues have been researched and reported on extensively in recent times. The inquiry therefore focused primarily on examining practical issues affecting students who are engaged in part-time work outside school hours. The structure of the report reflects this approach.

1.26   Chapter two describes the characteristics of students who combine school and work, including hours worked, reasons for working and the types of work undertaken.

1.27   Chapter three examines the impact of students' part-time work on educational achievement and Year 12 completion. This chapter identifies a range of positive aspects that students gain from working part-time, but also considers how having a job can affect available study time and completion of homework. This chapter also looks at the extent to which schools are aware of their students' participation in work outside school and the degree of flexibility schools offer in recognition of students' work commitments.

1.28   Chapter four considers strategies to recognise and/or accredit generic employability skills acquired by students through their part-time work.

1.29   Chapter five identifies some of the challenges students can encounter in the workplace and looks at some measures to provide assistance to young workers. Often students' part-time jobs represent their first exposure to the workplace and young people can encounter difficulties in negotiating with their employer. Problems can also arise from a student's lack of

understanding about their rights and responsibilities. This chapter also considers the issue of how many hours of part-time work is appropriate for a full-time student.

1.30   Chapter six focuses on the changing nature of senior secondary education certificates which are offering increased flexibility to provide options which cater to both academically-oriented and vocationally-oriented students. This chapter also considers the effectiveness of vocational education and training in schools.

1.31   While the inquiry did not examine issues concerning students at risk in great detail during hearings, these issues were addressed in a number of submissions. Chapter seven presents evidence on measures to support attainment and successful transitions for disadvantaged students and those at risk of disengaging with their education.

Definitions

1.32   For the purposes of this report, where reference is made to students combining school with part-time work, 'students' refers to students participating in secondary education or equivalent.

1.33   'Part-time work' refers to students participating in any form of paid employment (unless stated otherwise), and includes those students engaged as casual employees.