

AUSTRALIA'S YOUTH: REALITY AND RISK

Executive Summary

Dusseldorp Skills Forum

In Cooperation With

Australian Council for Educational Research

Brotherhood of St Laurence

Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Melbourne

Monash University-ACER Centre for the Economics of Education and
Training

National Centre of Social and Economic Modelling, University of Canberra

National Centre for Vocational Education Research

National Institute of Labour Studies, the Flinders University of South
Australia

March 1998

INTRODUCTION

Twelve months ago the Dusseldorp Skills Forum sought the cooperation of seven of Australia's leading research organisations in a quest to understand as fully as possible the learning and working circumstances of 15-19 year olds. All agreed to work to common formats with mutually agreed research briefs. They shared their data, insights and conclusions in what has been a quite unique collaborative venture.

For all concerned this project has been driven by a shared desire to promote and support a better informed and consequently more substantive public policy debate on the learning and work situation of young Australians. This desire is reflected both in the detailed research and the rigorous process adopted.

On 11 November 1997 the respective researchers presented their work to policy makers from around the country in Parliament House Canberra. Since then, brief responses to these papers have been provided by representatives from industry (Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the Business Council of Australia), the labour movement (ACTU and the Evatt Foundation) and the community sector (Australian Youth Policy and Action Coalition, and ACOSS).

Finally, the Dusseldorp Skills Forum has mined this wealth of material to prepare a policy paper analysing the collective work and putting forward several potentially significant policy responses. In essence this paper posits a way forward in terms of the broad directions -and key elements- for developing a more appropriate public policy response to the realities and risks confronting young Australians.

While the complete set of research papers, comments and the subsequent analysis is contained in the full report, *Australia's Youth: Reality and Risk**, this Executive Summary is offered as an introduction to that more detailed and substantial body of work.

* *Australia's Youth: Reality and Risk* is the first in a proposed series of annual reports addressing the learning and work situation of young Australians. This project is convened by the Dusseldorp Skills Forum in cooperation with:

- Australian Council for Educational Research
- Brotherhood of St Laurence
- Centre for the Study of Higher Education
- Monash-ACER Centre for the Economics of Education and Training
- National Centre of Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM)
- National Centre for Vocational Education Research
- National Institute of Labour Studies

Further information and copies of *Australia's Youth: Reality and Risk* are available from the Dusseldorp Skills Forum: phone (02-9267 9222), fax (02-9267 7882) or email (info@dsf.org.au). The full set of documents are also available on-line at the DSF website <www.dsf.org.au>.

AUSTRALIA'S YOUTH: REALITY AND RISK

Youth Management to Youth Development: the Fundamental Shift

The story that emerges from the pages of *Australia's Youth: Reality and Risk* is disturbing. It clearly reveals that the shadow of marginalisation engulfing 15-19 year old Australians is larger than generally understood and growing. It does point to rigidities in policy and institutions which are in important respects failing to meet the demonstrable needs of our youth. It raises serious questions not only as to the current priorities in the allocation of public resources but also whether we are seeing increased public expenditure, where it exists is being matched with increased access to and opportunities for learning or work.

Yet this report is not a finger-pointing exercise. Indeed, genuine intent of the successive Commonwealth and State governments that have carried the direct responsibility for tackling the changed circumstances of young Australians in the rapidly changing world of the 1990s is not questioned. The question this report does ask and begins to answer is not "who is to blame?" but rather "what is to be done?".

In essence, *Australia's Youth: Reality and Risk* presents a strong case for a fundamental shift in public policy from youth management to youth development. The future demands of us a genuine confidence in the abilities, talent and goodwill of young Australians: the task is to provide the environment (policy and resources) which nurture those abilities and deliver the opportunities for them to develop fully.

The Dusseldorp Skills Forum argues that this new research points to the key elements of the required shift as being:

1. an absolute priority for all marginalised young people - not only the unemployed but also those who are outside the labour force but not studying, and those in precarious part-time work.
2. recognition of the pressing need to better address the phenomenon of early school leavers, including through a genuine "guarantee" backed by the resources needed to make it work (one option being a common entitlement as outlined below).
3. a stronger emphasis upon demand-side policies in the labour market.
4. reform of upper secondary schooling, based upon a vision for the student majority.
5. a shift in the priorities of vocational preparation from what has failed to achieve greater youth participation (apprenticeships, traineeships, TAFE) to what has (school-industry programs).

The case for young Australians is not made at the expense of older unemployed Australians. It does however recognise that ensuring that our young people do make a successful transition from school to full-time work or full-time study is a critical factor in their own future economic security and personal well-being. It is at the same time a most sensible investment in Australia's economic and social future.

"Youth Unemployment" is Less than Half the Story

The very real difficulties young people now confront are frequently encapsulated in the public mind, as much as in policymakers' priorities, in the phrase "youth unemployment". However, youth unemployment is only half the problem and certainly less than half the story.

Snapshot 1996

- there were 1,271,800 young Australians aged 15-19
- 187,700 (some 15%) of these young people were neither in full-time work nor in education
- of these 187,700 an estimated 70% (over 130,000) had not completed Year 12

The evidence tells us that for every young person who is looking for work, at least one more can be found who is not counted in the official statistics on employment but who is not involved in full-time work or full-time study.

Moreover around 9 per cent of the total youth population are locked into marginal activities fairly consistently for up to three years. This is a group who, by the age of 19, have not participated in higher education, apprenticeships or training, have been unemployed for at least a third of their time since leaving school, and are unemployed or in part-time work at the age of 19.

As disturbing as these statistics are, it is generally agreed that if anything they understate the extent of marginalisation.

A Peculiarly '90s Situation

The situation in 1996 is not unique. Indeed, the value of this body of research in part is due to the timescales used which allow comparisons of over longer periods.

Many key indicators of the situation of young people in learning and work during the 1990s either show no progress, a reversal of improvements

observed in the 1980s, or indicate a deterioration at an accelerating rate in their position in relation to other groups in society.

On the indicator that has been of most concern to policy makers - youth unemployment - the 1990s have shown no real improvement: the long term trend has been upwards, even if it is currently trending downwards. Youth unemployment has certainly fallen from its 1992 peak, but in 1996 was no lower in real terms than it was at the beginning of the decade.

The research presented in *Australia's Youth: Reality and Risk* indicates that the continuing deterioration of young people's circumstances in the '90s is at odds with previous decades, for example:

- the rate at which full-time employment has fallen for teenagers in the 1990s has been far greater than the rates of decline observed either in the 1970s or the 1980s;
- there has been a growth in the number of non-students and of school leavers involuntarily found in insecure part-time work not linked to training or education. In this respect, the 1990s again differs from previous decades, in which growth in part-time teenage employment occurred largely among students;
- the fall in school retention and participation during the 1990s (detailed below) is doubly striking, as it has occurred in the face of a continued fall in full-time employment opportunities. As a consequence it is not possible to argue that young people have been attracted out of school by an expanding labour market. In this respect the experience of the 1990s is in marked contrast to the experience of the 1970s and 1980s.

The '90s have seen a significant decline in the ability of post-school employment to act as a stable stepping stone to adult working life. This is reflected both in the nature of the work as well as in the changing quantity of work available to teenagers, for example:

- it can be seen in the rising number of teenagers who are not studying but are employed part-time.
- it is evident in the growing number of teenagers who leave school and proceed directly to insecure part-time jobs that rarely involve any formal training.
- the number of 15-19 year old wage and salary earners who received in-house training more than halved between 1989 and 1993, falling from 147,000 to 65,000.
- it is also evident in the changing composition of the full-time jobs that young people obtain: a noticeable shift in the nature of work for young people from better paid and more highly skilled jobs towards those that pay less well and require fewer skills. The result has been a noticeable fall in young people's earnings from full-time work.

- there is as well a marked drop in young people's earnings from part-time work.

The Situation for Early School Leavers

One of the most striking stories to emerge from the collective research on which this report is built is the particular impact these developments have had upon early school leavers.

In spite of the priority given to boosting school retention rates (as reflected in the nationally agreed Finn targets) there has been a significant fall in the holding power of Australia's schools. While this has been most evident at Year 12, it can also be observed at Years 10 and 11. The Year 10 retention rate has fallen below 1990 levels, the Year 11 retention rate is below the 1991 level, and the Year 12 retention rate has fallen to 1991 levels.

The implications of this become clearer when considered alongside the fact, as noted above, that of the 187,705 15-19 year olds in 1996 estimated not to be in full-time work and not in education, ABS labour force data suggests that 70 per cent had not completed Year 12.

There are additional indicators of the heightened impact of the '90s upon early school leavers:

- full-time employment among those under the age of 18 fell by 51 per cent between 1990 and 1996, but by 41 per cent among 18-19 year olds.
- those who have not completed Year 12 are more likely to enter part-time work unlinked to study than are Year 12 leavers.
- the incidence of marginalised activity (i.e. unemployment, part-time work not linked to study, or no education or labour market involvement at all) is more than twice as high among early leavers as it is among those who have completed Year 12.
- early leavers are more than three times as likely to be engaged in marginal activities for extended periods than are those who have completed Year 12.
- the fall in incomes from full-time work has been particularly large among 16-17 year olds, and the fall in incomes from part-time work has been particularly great among 16-17 year old males.
- only a third of those who leave school prior to Year 12, compared to two-thirds of Year 12 leavers, enter further education and training.

The VET Gap

The '90s have seen significant growth in vocational education and training (VET) and TAFE enrolments. Between 1990 and 1996 the number of students in this sector grew by some 40 per cent. Yet despite a clear priority for youth, all of the growth in the sector has gone to adults:

- between 1990 and 1996, the proportion of 15-19 year olds taking part in vocational education and training remained largely unchanged at around 20 per cent. This is essentially the same level observed among the age group in the mid 1980s
- between 1990 and 1996, some minor increase in participation rates by 18 and 19 year olds was recorded. However, this small lift in participation in vocational education and training was not sufficient to offset declining participation by younger teenagers or to affect the overall youth participation rate.

The expansion of employment-based structured training through apprenticeships and traineeships, rather than full-time institution-based vocational education, has been a key objective of successive Commonwealth governments, with the full support of State governments, since the mid 1980s. It has been seen as a key strategy in increasing young people's access to vocational education and training and in combating the difficulties that they face in the labour market.

Yet, here again, young people have not been significant beneficiaries of any such expansion:

- apprenticeship commencements by 15-19 year olds plummeted during the 1990s, falling by 21,592 or 44 per cent between 1989-90 and 1996.
- between 1989-90 and 1996 traineeship commencements by 15-19 year olds grew by 45 per cent from 13,247 to 19,253 - less than a third of the fall in apprenticeship numbers.
- the total number of structured training commencements (apprenticeships plus traineeships) by 15-19 year olds fell by 15,586 or 25 per cent over the period.

The modest absolute but substantial proportional growth in traineeship commencements by 15-19 year olds co-existed with a dramatic expansion in access to traineeships by adults. A program intended to be a new form of entry level training for youth has rapidly become an adult training program:

- in 1996 28,157 of those who commenced a traineeship were aged 20 or older, and teenagers constituted only 41 per cent of all trainees.
- data for the financial year 1996-97 show that 45 per cent of trainees are aged 21 years and over with 26 per cent aged 25 years and over (Allen Consulting Group 1997:8).

The decline in apprenticeship opportunities is likely to be a substantial part of the explanation for the shift towards shorter course enrolments by young people during the 1990s. In 1990 72 per cent of all vocational education and training (TAFE) enrolments by 15-19 year olds were commencing enrolments, indicating that the courses lasted for only one year or less. By 1996 this had risen to 80 per cent, indicating a declining role by the sector in providing extended and broad-based preparation for working life, and a growth in provision of courses of a short and more specific nature.

In contrast to these trends, growth in school-industry programs, in which young people acquire recognised vocational skills in a combination of the workplace and the school, has been rapid during the 1990s. Between 1995 and 1996 alone, there was a jump from 46 per cent to 62 per cent in the proportion of Australian schools offering these programs. From a starting point of zero at the beginning of the 1990, now some 12 per cent of Year 11 and 12 students take part in these school-industry programs.

The Higher Uptake in Higher Education

Whereas the pathway from school to work weakened for young people during the 1990s, and became even more fragile for those not completing Year 12, the pathway from school to higher education strengthened.

Indeed broad government policy objectives for participation by young people in higher education appear to have been achieved. This is in contrast to the inability to meet such targets for the labour market, vocational education and training, and to schools.

During the early 1990s the Commonwealth placed a policy priority on school leaver entry and the research shows that there has been a significant rise in university participation by those under the age of 20 during the 1990s:

- between 1990 and 1996 the proportion of 17-19 year olds enrolled at a university rose from 15.2 per cent to 18.0 per cent.
- the growth in participation was particularly great among females, rising from 17.5 per cent to 21.3 per cent compared to a more modest rise from 13.0 per cent to 14.9 per cent among males.
- most of this growth occurred among older teenagers. Among 19 year olds in 1996, a record level of 30.4 per cent of females and 21.8 per cent of males were students in higher education.
- between 1991 and 1996 the proportion of Year 12 leavers who proceeded directly to university rose from 41.7 per cent to 44.2 per cent.

Growth in university participation by those under the age of 20 coincided with even greater growth in adult enrolments. Consequently, those under the age of 20 fell from 33.4 per cent of all higher education students in 1990 to 27.1 per cent in 1996.

Personal Incomes and Educational Expenditure

Detailed papers on “Youth Incomes” and “Expenditure on youth education and training” are included in *Australia's Youth: Reality and Risk*. Both are sobering in the issues they raise but for different reasons.

On the question of youth incomes we learn, for example, that:

- many 15-19 year olds have no income at all and are dependent on their parents. This proportion increased significantly between 1982 and 1994-95.
- the average income of those 15 to 19 year olds receiving some income was \$150 a week in 1994-95, and had fallen significantly in real terms since 1982.
- incomes of all part-time workers in the 15 to 19 population (including students) fell by nearly 30 per cent between 1982 and 1994-95. The incomes of full-time workers also fell, but by much less than part-time workers. There was a big drop in the number of 15 to 19 year olds working full-time.
- teenage unemployment has increased and the proportion of teenagers with no income has also increased, as the eligibility criteria for government payments have become more stringent. For those unemployed 15 to 19 year olds receiving an income, real income levels have fallen slightly since 1982.

The information on expenditure on education and training, on the other hand, points to real increases:

- overall there has been an increase from 5.2 percent to 5.5 percent of GDP in the six years to 1995-96
- proportionally the increase is largest in private expenditures but nearly 90 percent of all outlays are still financed by governments
- most of this expenditure does go on the education of young people (though not 15-19 year olds exclusively).

The emerging issues here, however, are those concerning the adequacy of the current resources, the allocation of the existing resources and the associated need to assess the outcomes.

It is apparent, for example, that in terms of the stated goals of increased participation by young people, the 39 percent growth in real terms in public expenditure on higher education between 1989-90 and 1995-96 has been

accompanied by an increase in teenage participation rates of several percentage points .

At the same time increasing young people's participation in vocational education and training has also been one of the central priorities of government during the 1990s. Between 1989-90 and 1995-96 government expenditure on TAFE increased by 21 per cent in real terms, from \$1.9 billion to \$2.6 billion. Commonwealth expenditure grew particularly rapidly, accounting for 28 per cent of total recurrent expenditure in 1995 compared with only 17 per cent in 1991.

However, as indicated above, the available evidence suggests that little has been achieved in return for this expenditure, when judged against the objective of increased participation by young people.

As already indicated participation rates in schools in each of the years 10, 11 and 12 have fallen from their earlier peaks and all remain short of the stated targets. At the same time, there has been a 17% increase in real terms in government expenditure in the period 1989-90 to 1995-96.

Accepting the Challenge

Having assembled this comprehensive picture of the learning and work situation of young Australians, perhaps the biggest risk we face is to ignore the reality it exposes.

Economic growth and development are clearly essential for creating the preconditions for effective social policies. However, recent history tells us that they cannot necessarily be relied upon to deliver jobs for youth.

Public job creation strategies, by themselves, cannot necessarily be relied upon to foster the skills and qualifications that enable young people to compete for work effectively. The unemployment rate is a poor measure of what is happening to young people and the public policy preoccupation with youth unemployment on the evidence denies us the possibility of a more positive and responsive approach to the situation young Australians face in the '90s.

If we are to seize this opportunity to look afresh at our package of youth policies, this report suggests the following are among the key issues we will need to recognise:

- the problem that young people face in making the transition from initial education to working life: not only to find work but to be able to escape from a cycle of insecure, casual, temporary and part-time work after they leave school. Many drop out completely.

- the growing reliance upon part-time work -and the nature of that work- particularly for those who are not themselves full-time students.
- the question of whether low paid, part-time or temporary employment is a stepping stone to other better paid work or a trap that it is hard to escape from. It very much appears to be the latter: a carousel effect resulting in the “scarring” of the young people concerned.
- the fact that a large group of young school leavers are currently unable to move to adult working life through full-time work or education and training.
- the evidence of a failure by our major institutions - the labour market, education and training - to provide stable work and education and training opportunities for a significant proportion of Australia’s youth. This applies particularly to those early school leavers who are least able to build a secure and stable bridge to adult life.
- the implications of the demonstrable lack of schools’ “holding power”; for example, declining school participation during the 1990s has itself been a factor contributing to Australia’s high level of youth unemployment.
- the substantial advantages to individuals who undertake vocational education, particularly in the initial years of employment.
- the continuing importance of entry level training particularly given that the notion of continual skills upgrading of employees has not as yet become ingrained across industries.
- the need to address the issue of resourcing: who should be paying for education and training and why ? how much should be spent on education and training by government ? have we got the balance right ? are we distributing resources equitably?
- the increasing necessity to look at the connections between education and economic growth and to more fully regard education as an investment.

So What is to be Done ?

The starting point in developing new, more appropriate policy responses is to **see all marginal young people** - not only the unemployed but also those who are outside the labour force but not studying, and those in precarious part-time work - **as a single group** for policy purposes.

This is because for many young people the boundaries between unemployment and other forms of marginalisation are highly fluid. It is further underscored by the fact that the way in which it manifests itself varies widely by age and gender. Moreover, given the evidence, the issue of early school leavers must be addressed as a matter of priority.

In this respect the Dusseldorp Skills Forum in its own contribution to *Australia's Youth: Reality and Risk* outlines a number policy suggestions. However, the Forum urges particular consideration of the following proposals as part of a viable public policy response:

- a common entitlement for early school leavers
- reforms to increase the holding power of our schools
- the creation of employment umbrellas for secure employment

The Forum presents these proposals confident that, as disturbing as the picture may appear, there is good cause for hope. Indeed, properly focused public policy can make a significant difference. The analysis provided in *Australia's Youth: Reality and Risk*, for example, shows that had school participation rates been maintained at their 1992 level, roughly 18,000 teenagers would have been removed from the numbers competing for work. The consequent reduction in the number of teenagers in the labour market would have been translated into a four per cent reduction in teenage unemployment. Rather than the 21.4 per cent rate observed among those neither in school nor in full-time tertiary study in August 1996 the rate would have been 17.4 per cent.

A Common Entitlement for Early School Leavers

Those who leave school before completing Year 12 must be a key target and a clear priority for more effective policies to improve the situation of young Australians in work and learning.

A common entitlement is proposed to deal more effectively with the needs of disadvantaged early school leavers. The entitlement is aimed at those under the age of 20 who have left school without completing Year 12 and who are not in full-time work and not studying. Its maximum value should be set at the public cost, calculated as \$16,090, of providing a young person with a Year 11 and 12 education, a cost that would be incurred in any case by

governments if the young person coming under the scope of the entitlement had decided to remain at school.

Assuming that the cost of the entitlement would, like expenditure upon Year 11 and 12 programs, be spread over a two-year period, the annual cost of an entitlement for early school leavers as defined here would at most be \$1.05 billion per year. On 1996 expenditures it would result in educational expenditure only rising from 4.9 per cent to at most 5.1 per cent of GDP.

The real cost of the entitlement would be far less as it would subsume programs like Work for the Dole, the Jobs Pathway Program and other labour market program expenditure directed at young people.

The fundamental objective of such an entitlement should be to ensure that early leavers either:

- return to school or its equivalent in order to complete Year 12; or
- obtain an education and training qualification that is at an equivalent level such as a TAFE certificate or an apprenticeship; or
- obtain a full-time job that is linked to education and training.

Young people falling within the entitlement should be able to construct flexible personal action plans, should work in conjunction with a community-based mentor or adviser in constructing such action plans, and should be able to spend their entitlements in the settings of their choice.

An essential element would be a school leaver monitoring and tracking service, modelled upon the present Jobs Pathway Program, to ensure that no early leaver is able to fall through the cracks of the labour market without an early intervention and offer of assistance.

Such an entitlement would require substantial institutional changes, which are needed in any case if Australia's performance of the 1990s in preparing young people for post-school life is to be improved.

It will require:

- schools to actively put in place re-entry programs for early leavers, with more flexible ways of completing senior school qualifications.
- a far broader curriculum to meet the interests of a wider range of students otherwise disenchanted by what schools have to offer and by the ways in which it is offered.
- TAFE similarly to seriously examine the relevance and attractiveness of its courses for young people, and to incorporate substantially increased elements of workplace learning into its programs.
- increased emphasis upon community based advisory and information services for young people.

The entitlement would also need to be integrated with the income support arrangements for young people. The Government has stated its intention to introduce by 1 July 1998 a common youth allowance to make income support arrangements for young people simpler and more flexible.

The entitlement for early school leavers, as proposed here, would provide the positive incentive to undertake appropriate further education and training. It would thus complement the perhaps more negative incentive of the threat of withdrawal of income support under the Youth Allowance.

The effective implementation of an entitlement would result in Australia emerging as one of the leading countries of the OECD in its approach to youth policies, rather than, as in the case of vocational education and training at the present, being substantially behind most other countries. In doing so it could profitably learn a great deal from the Nordic countries which, in various ways, have been experimenting with youth guarantees for 25 years.

An entitlement of this nature would be an important signal to Australia's youth that the nation understands and is serious about their needs, as well as being a sensible economic investment in Australia's future.

Reforms to Increase the Holding Power of our Schools

The clear divide between the prospects of those who leave school early and those who complete Year 12 also provides a solid case for reducing the rates of early school leaving. Reversing the alarming fall in school retention rates that has occurred during the 1990s must assume a high national priority. This is unlikely to occur without reforms to the senior years of schooling that are more innovative and imaginative than the minimalist changes that occurred during the 1990s.

A vigorous national debate on the form, structure and function of senior schooling is required, centred around:

- the need for a far broader curriculum
- a more adult learning environment, and more adult learning styles.
- closer connections between the school and its community, including its employer community.
- the creation of senior high schools or colleges as the dominant model of upper secondary schooling, as is common in many other countries, able to offer a wider range of subject choices and a different and more adult atmosphere than can high schools that attempt to cater for the full Year 7-12 range.
- a new priority for guidance, counselling and career advice, particularly for the non university bound.
- monitoring and follow up services for all school leavers.

- increased funding for drop out prevention programs including remediation and early intervention programs.

The provision by employers of high quality structured work placements is, in the Australian context, a key aspect of the reform of upper secondary education to make it more relevant and attractive to students. Employers incur significant costs in providing resources for such placements in the form of mentors and lost productive time spent in training the student on an extended placement.

The external or public good benefits to the economy suggest that government should put in place greater incentives to encourage employers to participate in such programs. If associated with appropriate guidelines, such compensation would be a strong incentive for employers to provide high quality placements for students to enable them to gain substantial credit towards recognised vocational qualifications. Such compensation would need to be administratively simple. It should not be structured in such a way as to be a disincentive to the participation of small business. It could take the form of a direct payment, as now happens for employers training apprentices and trainees, or in the form of a tax credit.

The Creation Of Employment Umbrellas For Secure Employment

Part of the problem of the youth labour market is not so much that young people cannot get jobs, but that many of the jobs that they get are not taking them very far.

The aggregation of small amounts of learning and small amounts of employment, both by single individuals over time and by many individuals at the one time, can allow young people to gain access to better labour market information.

One example is the Hunter Labour Co-op, a not-for-profit temporary employment agency established by the trade union movement in Newcastle in 1986 to provide unemployed people with access to casual work under award wages and conditions. Like group schemes, the Hunter Labour Co-op is the legal employer of the worker, who is then leased out to the host firm. Also like group schemes, the Co-op takes responsibility for all administrative processes and costs such as payroll tax and workers' compensation associated with employment, and guarantees workers their entitlements. Its detailed knowledge of the skills and qualifications of the workers who are on its data base improves the selection process for employers. And workers are provided with better information on the availability of temporary work than they would have access to if relying upon their own resources.

However, unlike group schemes, those on the books of the Hunter Labour Co-op are given no guarantee of continuity of employment during down

time. Nevertheless, roughly a third of those on its books find that they are able to aggregate multiple temporary and part-time jobs into the equivalent of a full-time job.

Such a model, if applied to the youth labour market, could improve the position of many early school leavers. Young people would be in a better position to compete more effectively for part-time work. They would also be able to build better bridges from insecure work to permanent employment.

To help young people specifically, the concept of a labour pool that aggregates employment needs to be supplemented by features such as the development of individual action plans and mentoring by older and more experienced community members. Other features need to be the better sequencing of successive periods of temporary work so that experience can be built upon and translated into learning and the more consistent assessment of the generic employability skills gained in successive periods of temporary work. Portfolio building would also be a key element to record employment experience as well as the specific and generic skills gained through both employment and other activities such as community service.

Such a concept is for young people is not idle theorising. It is currently being piloted on the New South Wales Central Coast. Early experience with it shows that it represents a flexible response at the local level to the needs of youth, and incorporates many of the best features of case management into a business operating on a commercial but not for profit basis.

A Final Word on Accountability

Accountability emerges from this project as a central issue which warrants a serious policy response.

Australia's Youth: Reality and Risk clearly demonstrates the need for a much greater preparedness on the part of governments (and through them related institutions) to establish the measures for youth policy outcomes. Moreover, it is imperative that such measures be subject to independent evaluation. "Accountability" in this sense is not a matter of apportioning blame but rather establishing processes for better ensuring proper assessment of the efficacy of policy and associated programs.

The report puts forward specific set measures relevant to this.

The Finn targets provide some measure of the capacity of young people to improve their chances in the labour market. However, their focus is on educational attainment and participation and not on labour market outcomes. Nor are they in a form that permits international comparison. To monitor the situation that young people face, the Forum proposes three indicators in addition to the Finn targets for 19 year olds. These are:

- the proportion of the population aged 15 to 19 years not in full-time education and not in full-time work;
- the ratio of the unemployment rate among 15 to 24 year olds to the rate among 25 to 54 year olds, and
- the proportion of the population aged 20 to 24 years who have completed Year 12 or a post-secondary qualification.

These indicators also have the additional advantage of permitting ready international comparisons with data produced by the OECD.

As part of its contribution to better informed public policy on youth, the Dusseldorp Skills Forum will be seeking to further develop the use of benchmarks such as these in cooperation with other interested parties.