

Media Release:
August 7, 2003

YOUNG AUSTRALIANS DISADVANTAGED DESPITE ECONOMIC GOOD TIMES

Nearly half a million young Australians risk long term disadvantage when it comes to making a successful transition from school to work.

In the general population, a disturbing 15 per cent of teenagers and 23 per cent of young adults are not in either full time learning or work. For indigenous young people, the picture is dire - 45 per cent of teenagers and 70 per cent of young adults – a level three times higher than non-indigenous young people.

These are among the findings of a major report released today.

How Young People are Faring 2003 is the latest in a five-year series documenting changes in the learning and work circumstances of young Australians. Produced by independent research and policy development organisation, the Dusseldorp Skills Forum, the report contains new analysis developed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services (ATSIS) of the Commonwealth Government.

In contrast to the debate over higher education and the state of Australian universities, the report was released at a national forum in Sydney to address the situation of young people not attaining a basic education and making a successful transition from school.

Report co-ordinator, Dr John Spierings of DSF, says radical changes in the youth labour market place an increased responsibility on individual young people to construct, navigate and be responsible for their own transition.

“The breakdown of school to work contract has resulted in the burden of risk being redistributed,” says Dr Spierings. “Young people without full time work in their first year after school are much less likely to make a successful transition to full-time employment.”

“Mature age workers have benefited to a much greater extent than young people from the good economic times. Over the last eight years full time jobs for teenagers have declined by 15,000 and by 100,000 for young adults. Meanwhile full time jobs for people over 25 have increased by 700,000. Despite the economic good times, the full-time work prospects for young people are shrinking,” Dr Spierings says.

The report highlights a critical need for a genuinely national response. It calls for more decisive steps at the Federal level to lift the completion rate of young people at school or an equivalent in vocational education. It claims the national economy stands to gain a long-term increase in GDP of 0.28 per cent, or an additional \$1.8 billion on the bottom line in current prices, through a 10 per cent lift in the completion rate over the next five years.

Keynote speakers at the forum, attended by representatives of business, government, community and research organizations, were the architects of two of the most significant social reform initiatives to be recommended to the Howard Government.

Patrick McClure, CEO of Mission Australia, chaired the Reference Group on Welfare Reform whose final report, *Participation Support for a More Equitable Society*, was released in July 2000.

Salvation Army Captain **David Eldridge** chaired the Prime Minister's Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce. His landmark report, *footprints to the future*, was released in 2001 after some 18 months deliberation.

Their addresses examined the implications, implementation and impact of their recommendations and reviewed what progress has been made towards a fairer future for young Australians.

Highlights of the report include:

15 to 19 year old teenagers

- 14.9 per cent or 206,000 teenagers were not in full-time education or full-time employment in May 2003, continuing the trend of the past decade
- a quarter of 18 and 19 year olds were not in full-time education or full-time employment in May 2003
- The highest proportion of teenagers not in full-time learning or work are in Queensland, Western Australia and South Australia

20 to 24 year old young adults

- 23 per cent of young adults were not in full-time education or full-time employment in May 2003
- In 2002, 79 per cent of young adults had completed Year 12 or a post school qualification

Indigenous Young Australians

- 45 per cent of indigenous teenagers were not in full-time learning or work in 2001
- Nearly 70 per cent of indigenous young adults were not in full-time learning or work (52 per cent unemployed or not in the labour force) in 2001
- An estimated 45 per cent of indigenous young people aged 15-24 years are receiving a Centrelink income support payment (excluding Abstudy)
- Indigenous young people in urban, regional and remote locations face a level of risk of disconnection from learning and work three times greater than non-indigenous young people

School leavers

- Five months after leaving school, 26 per cent (or 76,100 school leavers) were either working part-time but not studying, unemployed, or not in the labour force and not studying

- 49 per cent of Year 10 leavers or below leavers and 36 per cent of Year 11 leavers were not in full-time learning or work five months after leaving school

Employment

- Full-time jobs for teenagers and young adults have declined by 6.9 and 15.2 per cent since 1995
- Australians aged 15 to 24 years have two and a half times (2.7) the level of unemployment recorded by adults aged 25 to 54 years

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