

Media Release

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'What about me?' Young people miss out in Australia's good economic times

Eleven days from the federal election, a major new report says the number of teenagers not in full-time study or full-time work is the highest than at any time in the last six years.

Australian Idol Shannon Noll may have struck a nerve with his hit song, *What About Me*, according to the report's publisher, the Dusseldorp Skills Forum.

Highlights from the report include:

- 15.5 percent (or 214,800) teenagers and a further 309,000 young adults (22 percent) were without full-time work or full-time education in May this year.
- more than a quarter of all young people experienced a troubled transition after leaving school. In May 78,500 school leavers were not studying and were either unemployed, working part-time or not in the labour force.
- female school leavers not going onto further study are more likely to have a troubled transition than boys.
- young people are now more likely to be in part-time work than ever before. Since 1995 full-time jobs for teenagers have declined by 5,000, and fallen for young adults by 110,000 but grown for people over 25 years by more than 780,000.

The new report, *How Young People are Faring 2004*, reveals disturbing numbers of young people are being left behind, facing insecure employment, and reduced earnings over the long-term, as well as increased likelihood of poorer health and social disadvantage.

But it says there is considerable scope to improve the transition of young people from school to work, and the impact of a number of recent state and Commonwealth initiatives to support school leavers are yet to be felt.

The Forum's Dr John Spierings said "the report does tell us some good news on rising levels of educational attainment by young people, participation in training and a high take-up of vocational opportunities in schools. But it also reminds us again that there are many reasons why that's just not good enough."

"Australia's sustained economic growth has not yet delivered for substantial numbers of young people, has not been enough to lift Australia's comparative international performance in key areas and has not averted the 'skills crisis' now threatening further economic growth," he said.

Apprenticeships

There are substantially more teenagers in New Apprenticeships now than in 1997, when the traditional apprenticeships were merged with traineeships.

However only an additional 10,700 teenagers commenced a trade apprenticeship in March 2003 compared to March 1997. In fact the proportion of teenage apprentices going to a traditional apprenticeship fell from 40 percent in March 1997 to 33 percent in March 2003.

Educational attainment

The report says educational attainment in Australia is increasing. By May 2003 80 percent of young people had completed Year 12 or a post school qualification, and more than half had a trade skill qualification or higher.

But Australia is not improving as quickly as many other OECD countries. ***How Young People are Faring 2004*** points out that in a global economy, it is the *relative* level of education in Australia compared with other countries that is important for economic growth. Australia ranks 18th out of 27 countries in the OECD for the proportion of teenagers not studying or working, and 11th for young adults.

Rodney Tiffen, Associate Professor of Government at the University of Sydney, recently pointed out that this is the 'most generationally divided election in Australia's recent history'.

As young people hit the polling booths on 9 October they could well be humming:

What about me,
It isn't fair
I've had enough, now I want my share,
Can't you see, I wanna live
But you just take more than you give...

How Young People are Faring 2004 can be downloaded from the Dusseldorp Skills Forum website: www.dsf.org.au It is the latest in a six-year series documenting changes in the learning and work circumstances of young Australians.

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HIGHLIGHTS from **How Young People are Faring 2004**

15 to 19 year old teenagers

- In May 2004 84.5 percent of Australian teenagers were in full-time study or full-time work.
- 15.5 percent or 214,800 teenagers were not in full-time education or full-time employment.
- The proportion of teenagers not in full-time study or full-time work has declined only slightly since the recession of the early 1990s and was higher in May 2004 than at any time in the last six years.
- More than a quarter of 18 and 19 year olds were not in full-time education or full-time employment in May 2004.
- The highest proportions of teenagers not in full-time learning or work are in South Australia and Queensland.
- In May 2003 78 percent of teenagers had completed secondary school or a Certificate II or higher compared with 75 percent in 2002.

20 to 24 year old young adults

- 22 percent or 309,000 young adults were not in full-time education and were either unemployed or wanting work, or just working part-time, in May 2004.
- 51 percent of young adults had completed a Certificate III or higher, up from 48 percent in the preceding two years.

School leavers

- 78,500 (27 percent of) teenagers who left school in 2002 were not in study and were either working part-time, unemployed, or not in the labour force in May 2003.
- 39,000 early school leavers (47 percent of Year 10 completers and 36 percent of Year 11 completers) in 2002 were not in study or full-time work in May 2003.
- Female school leavers are more likely to experience a troubled transition from school than male school leavers despite a higher rate of completing Year 12 and higher participation rates in post-school education.
- Prospects of work and further education for early school leavers have changed very little in recent years despite the improving economic conditions—43 percent of early leavers and 19 percent of school completers still experienced a troubled transition in 2003.

Employment and training

- In May 2004, there were 6 and 14 percent fewer teenagers and young adults in full-time jobs respectively than in 1995. During the same period, full-time jobs for other adults increased by 15 percent.
- In May 2004, unemployment rates for Australians aged 15 to 19 years were nearly three and a half times higher than for adults aged 25 to 64 years; and unemployment rates for 20 to 24 year olds were two-thirds higher than for adults aged 25 to 64 years.
- Young Australians without an upper secondary qualification are twice as likely to be unemployed as secondary school completers.
- The proportion of teenage apprenticeship commencements in traditional apprenticeships declined from 40 percent in March 1997 to 33 percent in March 2003.
- 12,500 senior secondary students commenced in a School Based New Apprenticeship in March 2003.
- In 2003, 50 percent of students in Years 11 to 12 were enrolled in a VET in Schools program.
- In the year after completing their qualification, 25 percent of TAFE graduates were not in full-time work or study.