

IT'S CRUNCH TIME



RAISING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND ATTAINMENT - A DISCUSSION PAPER

AUGUST 2007





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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACE	Adult and Community Education
Ai Group	Australian Industry Group
AQF	Australian Qualifications Framework
ATC	Australian Technical College
BSL	Brotherhood of St Laurence
CAA	Careers Advice Australia
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
DEST	Department of Education, Science and Training
DEWR	Department of Workplace Relations
DSF	Dusseldorp Skills Forum
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GTO	Group Training Organisation
IEW	Indigenous Education Worker
LSAY	Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs
NCVER	National Centre for Vocational Education Research
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA	Program for International Student Assessment
POEM	Partnership Outreach Education Model
SWL	Structured Workplace Learning
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
UNESCO	United Nations Education Science and Cultural Organisation
VCAL	Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning
VET	Vocational Education and Training





FOREWORD

A unique conjunction of factors - strong economic conditions and growth into the foreseeable future, Australia's continuing need for a skilled workforce, and the forecast demographic squeeze facing the nation - tell us it is now crunch time to really deliver and to open the doors to greater youth engagement in learning, in the economy and in the society.

In the last year important progress has been made in terms of reducing the numbers of young people not fully engaged in learning or work.

But as this paper notes, a significant number of young people lack basic educational attainments and levels of engagement to adequately cope with the demands being made of them either in the workplace or in the wider society.

Achieving higher levels of youth engagement and skill attainment are worthy goals in their own terms. But they are vital if Australia is to successfully cope with a demographic squeeze resulting from 'baby boomers' embracing retirement; the need to increase the rate of participation in the workforce; and to raise productivity levels to points where they match or exceed our competitors.

Because of Australia's sustained economic achievements over more than a decade the country has a unique opportunity to invest in young people and cement institutional arrangements to ensure that even more young people are engaged, skilled and developed over the long-term.

The Australian Industry Group and the Dusseldorp Skills Forum are releasing this discussion paper to stimulate debate and ideas on how young Australians can be better skilled and engaged.

We hope the paper elicits vigorous public discussion and makes a contribution to the contest of ideas and thinking about education and training now taking place in Australia, especially in the context of a forthcoming federal election. For our political leaders, and more importantly for Australia as a whole, an integrated rather than piecemeal approach to policy will yield dividends - for young people, their parents, educators, communities, industry and governments.

While we are confident in the value of the proposals being tabled, we are equally conscious that they will benefit from fresh eyes and broader debate. We commend the paper to you and welcome your thoughts and comments.

Heather Ridout
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INTRODUCTION¹

More than a decade of sustained economic growth and prosperity has provided the country with an unprecedented opportunity to make a major assault on educational exclusion and disengagement, and to do so in ways that will not only deliver greater social equity but will set Australia up for continued growth and economic success into the future. And with an election later this year, 2007 is shaping up as a crunch time for action.

We can no longer afford significant levels of disengagement among Australian youth. In modern Australia greater social and economic equity is integral to economic efficiency and capacity. Traditional social policy concerns are now irrefutably economic imperatives.

There should be simple, clear but compelling objectives driving federal and state policy. These are, that subject to their ability, every young person:

- will attain Year 12, or, over time, a vocational equivalent at AQF Certificate III level²
- will be engaged in full-time work or learning, or a combination of these
- will be provided with the resources, and facilitated with relationships and integrated pathways needed to achieve these outcomes.

It is imperative that young Australians have these opportunities in order to lead productive and fulfilling lives. Without these basic educational attainments and levels of engagement young Australians will not be adequately equipped to cope with the demands being made of them either in the workplace or in the wider society.

The goals are not just worthy in themselves, they are vital if Australia is to make a significant advance on its principal long-term economic challenges: those of coping with a demographic squeeze resulting from baby boomers embracing retirement; the need to increase the rate of participation in the workforce; and to raise productivity to levels that match or exceed those of our competitors.

Young Australians are central to meeting these challenges.

There is a recurring myth that the numbers of young people entering the workforce will decline in future years. In fact young Australians are likely to provide the overwhelming majority of new entrants to the labour market in coming years.

The numbers of 15-19 year olds will increase from an estimated 1.4 million in 2006 to an estimated 1.58 million in 2051 (see Figure 1, over page).

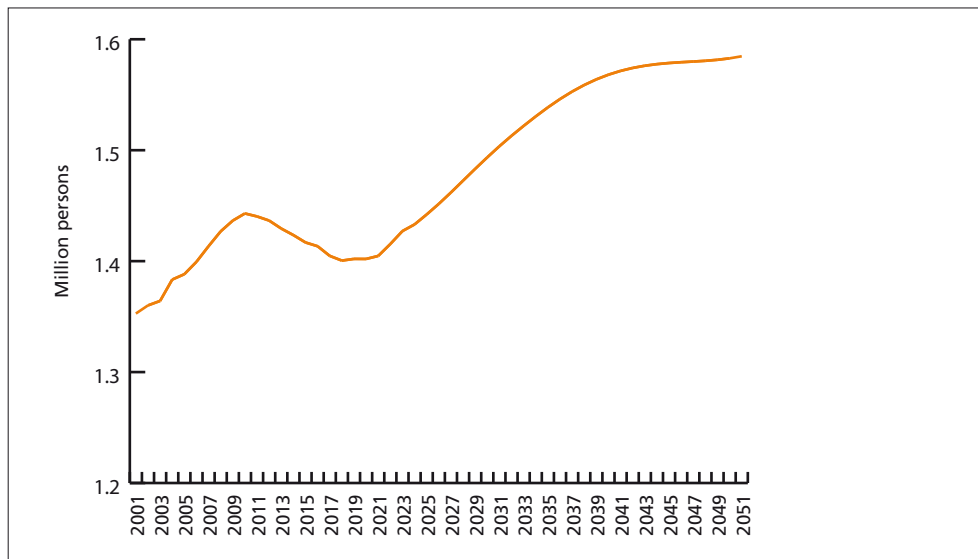
1 We are grateful to a number of researchers, practitioners and policy-makers for comments on earlier drafts of this paper. In particular, we appreciate the valuable co-operation of the ABS, and Mike Long and Gerald Burke at the Monash University-ACER Centre for the Economics of Education and Training. Readers will find additional data available in *How Young People are Faring 2007. At a Glance*, at www.dsf.org.au Please note the names of students profiled in later sections of the paper have been changed to preserve their privacy.

2 Certificate III qualifications encompass an array of occupations (and related skills). These include, for example: an animal attendant; beauty therapist, electrician; milliner; painter & decorator; motor mechanic; pastry cook; plumber; tailor; or tiler. The nature and duration of these courses vary and not all will necessarily be completed in the time it takes to complete high school.



As a proportion of the workforce age population, 19 year-olds are projected to fall from 12.2 percent in 2007 to 11.2 percent in 2018 and gradually increase to 11.6 percent in 2026 (see Figure 2 later in the paper).³

Figure 1: Projected number of persons aged 15-19 to 2051



Source: Productivity Commission, *Economic Implications of an Ageing Australia*, 2005, and unpublished tables

The demographic squeeze prompted by baby boomer retirements means that over time today's young Australians will play an increasingly crucial role in the economy as a major source of skilled labour: and they will also be called upon to sustain the revenue base of governments into the future. Australia cannot be complacent about this potential source of future skills.

The question will be asked: why do we need to do more to engage young people in the economy and society when economic growth is strong, unemployment is at historical lows, and Australia has its best-educated workforce ever.⁴ Most young people complete Year 12 or a Certificate III qualification – close to 81 percent of them according to the most recent data.⁵

The answer is that in these buoyant times, when the nation also faces major skills and labour challenges, we have the economic capacity and resources to ensure that even more young people are engaged, skilled and developed. Today's good economic times provide us with a unique opportunity to cement the institutional arrangements surrounding the school-to-work transition to sustain the country over the long-term, well beyond the influence of the current boom.

Australia still has a significant number of young people not adequately engaged or prepared for the future.

We face some powerful disparities related to skills attainment. Within the OECD Australia produces a relatively high number of tertiary education graduates, but we also have a significant proportion of young people not completing school or its vocational equivalent.

³ Productivity Commission projections cited in R Birrell and V Rapson, *Clearing the Myths Away: Higher education's place in meeting workforce demands*, DSF, 2006; M Long, *How Young People are Faring 2006*, DSF, 2006, Table A1

⁴ See G Marks, *The Transition to Full-time Work of Young People who do not go to University*, LSAY No.49, 2006

⁵ Based on the proportion of 20-25 year olds completing Year 12 or a Certificate III qualification: ABS, *Survey of Education & Work*, customised tables, May 2006



Close to one in five young adults in May 2006 had not completed Year 12 or a Certificate III vocational qualification.⁶ While Indigenous school completion is improving, about half the proportion of Indigenous students are completing Year 12 as non-Indigenous students.⁷ The policy challenge on skills attainment is to increase completions closer to levels experienced by the leaders in the OECD.

‘Youth engagement’ is a broad term bringing together active participation in learning or work. A strong economy has seen youth engagement improve considerably in recent years, to the extent that the proportion of young Australians not fully engaged in learning or work today mirrors levels akin to the 1980s.⁸ The policy challenge on engagement is to entrench these gains. Because of current economic conditions we have an unparalleled opportunity to do this.

Nevertheless, in May 2007, 526,000 young Australians aged 15 to 24 years were neither in full-time work nor full-time study.⁹

Not all these young people will be ‘at risk’. But 306,000 were not in full time study and were unemployed, or working part time but wanting more hours, or not in the labour force but wanting to work. Enabling these disenfranchised young people to attain a sustainable skills base or find pathways into work must be a public policy priority.

In shaping policy Australia’s leaders will need to take account of the generational changes taking place.

In many ways today’s young people have their feet firmly on the ground. The insecurities wrought by the forces of globalisation in their parents’ generation are largely not to be found when talking with young people today.¹⁰

It’s a generation growing up largely accepting that the future is all about mobility, adaptability and change. For the most part, they are preparing for it and they embrace it. Many are confident that they can manage the risks ahead. According to a recent Newspoll survey most believe they will achieve a standard of living as good as or better than their parents.¹¹

Personal experience, perhaps more than formal learning, is the principal source of authenticity and the thing that can be trusted most. Creativity in learning has become a powerful motif. But still, for a good number of young people there is a great fear of failure, of being identified as a loser, and they temper expectations accordingly.

Personal identity through work and social participation remains central. While the idea of a career and a ‘job for life’ might be dead that doesn’t mean young people don’t aim to take on significant roles in life. Aspiring to become a teacher, a policewoman, a plumber, a lawyer or whatever remains a marker for life’s journey.

The flipside to those fully engaged in learning or work is that young people not in that situation experience more financial and personal stress and lower levels of participation and integration with civil society. They are less satisfied with their lives.¹²

6 Ibid

7 *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2007*, Productivity Commission, 2007, Table 3A.3.

8 See *How Young People are Faring 2007. At a Glance*, available at www.dsf.org.au

9 18.2 percent of all young people aged 15-24 years; *Ibid*

10 Newspoll, *What Young People are Thinking*, DSF, 2007; I Saulwick & D Muller, *Fearless and Flexible: Views of Gen Y. A qualitative study of people aged 16 to 24*, DSF, 2006. See also K Hillman & G Marks, *Becoming an Adult: leaving home, relationships & home ownership among Australian youth*, LSAY No. 28, 2002

11 Newspoll, *ibid*

12 M Long, *The Flipside of Gen Y*, DSF, 2006



Youth engagement in learning and work is stratified by:

- geography – young people in the capital cities are more likely to be working or learning full-time
- household and social-economic status – young people in households with a weekly income below \$350 are far less likely to be in full-time learning or work
- educational attainment – early school leavers are more likely not to be in full-time work or learning.¹³

Policy-makers will need to take account of the views of young people, their language, preferences, technologies and media, and ways of organising life. And they will also need to understand the larger role that education can play in Australia.

Education is a powerful engine of modern economies. But that cannot be its only purpose.

There is a rich literature on the purposes of education but one view that appears to yield some common agreement are the four pillars developed by Jacques Delors for the 1996 UNESCO report, *The Treasure Within*. In that report Delors came to the conclusion that the focus of debate needed to move from the institutions of education to the learner ... to the treasure within.

His mantras of learning to live together, learning to know, learning to do, and learning to be, have become embedded in much education policy, if not all education practice, since then.¹⁴ He points to noble and principled purposes.

In developing education reforms in Australia, policy-makers must not reduce education to an endeavour so instrumental that it is just concerned with the basics, turned into a mere mirror of the market, or satisfied with just delivering work-ready and employable workers. In a changing and dynamic economic world it would be a mistake to educate and train for narrow occupations that may not be there in ten years time.

The task in education is to equip students more broadly, to become and to be active, free and meaningful participants in their communities, society and in the economy.

Many of the building blocks required to reach the three objectives we have outlined are already in place, but a qualitative change in existing schooling and training arrangements and resources is needed. We will need to do things differently, not just create more pathways and more programs.¹⁵

The focus in the medium-term needs to be centred on an integrated set of steps that identify and address the pressure points that a significant minority of students experience in the journey from primary schooling to entry-level employment and training.

The proposals in this paper are put forward to generate vigorous public discussion. While we are confident in the value of the proposals being tabled, we are equally conscious that they will benefit from fresh eyes and broader debate. We would expect others will have further, valuable ideas to put forward that have not been canvassed here.

Justifying the optimism and confidence that so many young Australians possess will depend in the long-term on the decisions and investments made today in education, workplace, training and other policies. If Australia fails the problem will be not so much the result of the attitudes of young people as the thinking and the limitations of our policy-makers and political leaders.

13 Ibid

14 J Delors, *Education: The Treasure Within*, UNESCO, 1996

15 R Sweet, *Education, training & employment in an international perspective*, Brotherhood of St Laurence, New Transitions: Challenges Facing Australian Youth seminar, 2006



WHY IT'S IMPORTANT TO ACT

With a strong economy and an unmatched fiscal position among Commonwealth and most State governments, we have a once in a lifetime opportunity to significantly lift youth engagement and skill attainment.

There is a rising demand for skills across the economy. Due to structural and occupational shifts the demand for an increasing proportion of people with post-school qualifications is growing. Strong employment growth is forecast in high-skill occupations over the next ten years, especially among associate professionals. The best estimate is that if the supply of people with VET qualifications remains at the same level as in 2005, a shortfall of 240,000 can be expected over the ten years to 2016. To meet the shortfall, net completions will need to increase by 1.9 percent per year for the next decade.¹⁶

While the shortfall is formidable in many respects we are well placed to take advantage of the emerging 'knowledge economy'. The nation, however, is struggling to lift school completion rates. Other OECD countries have managed to progressively and incrementally improve school completion rates, but as the former Director for Education at the OECD, Professor Barry McGaw notes these rates have barely shifted in Australia over the past 15 years. A dimension of the drift is reflected in the fact that among 25-34 year olds, Australia now ranks 20th among the OECD countries in terms of school completion.¹⁷

In its most recent report on youth transitions, the OECD concludes, "there is agreement that, in order to improve youth job prospects, it is essential to combat school failure. In particular, early and sustained intervention can help prevent a vicious circle of cumulative disadvantages."¹⁸ Across the OECD levels of school completion are an increasing focus of concern. In the United States for example, the country's political, economic and philanthropic leadership is attacking a 'silent epidemic of school dropouts' and is seeking to re-invigorate educators, school communities and students.¹⁹

Professor Richard Sweet, a former senior analyst at the OECD, observes that the disadvantage of not completing school is especially high in Australia: for example, 24 year olds who have not completed school or its equivalent are twice as likely to be unemployed as 24 year olds who have completed that level of education. Only in the Czech Republic is the ratio higher.²⁰

The 'human capital' stream of the National Reform Agenda agreed to by COAG – which includes targets on educational attainment and youth transitions similar to the ones suggested above - has made some progress but much more needs to be done. The Productivity Commission advises that the potential participation and productivity benefits of the COAG agenda could significantly offset negative impacts arising from the demographic squeeze facing Australia.²¹

As well as raising levels of completion in education, Australia must also improve the level of achievement of more of its students.

16 C Shah & G Burke, *Qualifications and the Future of the Labour Market in Australia*, Centre for the Economics of Education & Training, Monash University, 2006

17 Council for the Australian Federation, *The Future of Schooling in Australia*, Federalist Paper No.2, 2007

18 G Quintini, JP Martin, S Martin, *The Changing Nature of the School-to-Work Transition Process in OECD Countries*, Institute for the Study of Labor, IZA DP 2582, Germany, 2007

19 See <http://www.silentepidemic.org> And see also Canadian initiatives at *Pathways for Youth into the Labour Market*, Canadian Policy Research Network, April 2007

20 Sweet, *op. cit.*

21 Productivity Commission, *Potential Benefits of the National Reform Agenda*, 2007



For example, while Australia does well in PISA (tests of the reading, mathematical and scientific literacy of 15 year olds across the OECD countries), we perform relatively poorly in equity terms.²² Australia could do considerably better, and would benefit in terms of the skill capacities of future workers and citizens, if we managed to lift the performance of students from disadvantaged family or school backgrounds more closely to that of their peers from more advantaged backgrounds.

This should be possible. As Ros Black of Education Foundation Australia says, “a number of OECD countries manage to combine high educational achievement with small gaps between students and schools. Finland, for example manages to contain quality differences between schools to within five percent of the overall performance variation among students. Individual [Australian] schools are closing the gap, but the challenge remains to do it to scale.”²³

The importance of achievement in literacy and numeracy has been highlighted by several Australian studies and reinforced by a recent review of data from the International Adult Literacy Survey for 14 OECD countries. Overall, human capital indicators based on literacy scores have a positive and significant effect on the long run levels of GDP per capita and labour productivity - human capital accumulation matters for the long run wellbeing of developed nations. A particularly important finding is that raising the average literacy and numeracy skill level of the workforce, and reducing the proportion of workers at the lowest level of skill, could yield significantly higher levels of growth in GDP per capita.²⁴

Why focus on young people

Given Australia’s demographic trends young people will increasingly play a vital role in the economy as a major source of skilled labour. Figure 2 shows that as a proportion of the workforce population, teenagers will decline only slightly over the next twenty years. Their education and training will be crucial to future economic growth.

It seems that young Australians are overwhelmingly positive about their experiences in the final year of school, and of their subsequent experiences, whether in work, or study.²⁵

All the indications are that the present generation of young Australians feels ready and confident to engage in the future. Australia will be a better, more inclusive and richer place if this confidence leads to a more skilled, creative and engaged workforce and dynamic and cohesive society.

Compared to many OECD countries, Australia has relatively ‘youth-accessable’ labour markets. It is an international leader in terms of youth participation in the labour market.²⁶ There are age-based wage arrangements for young people, and there are few obstacles to youth combining work and study; indeed about a third of full-time secondary students and half of full-time tertiary students are also working part-time. Unemployment as a proportion of all young people has fallen considerably since the early 1990s.

However while the number of full-time jobs for older Australians has risen by 1.270 million since 1995, full-time jobs have been static for teenagers and have actually declined by 42,000 for young adults.²⁷

22 S Thomson, J Cresswell, L De Bortoli, *Facing the Future: PISA 2003 in Australia*, ACER-OECD, 2004

23 R Black, *Crossing the Bridge. Overcoming entrenched disadvantage through student-centred learning*, Education Foundation Australia, 2007; OECD, *Equity in Education Thematic Review: Finland Country Note*, Paris, 2005

24 S Lamb & P McKenzie, *Patterns of Success and Failure in the Transition from School to Work in Australia*, LSAY No. 18, 2001; G Marks, *op.cit.*, 2006; R Teese & J Polesel, *Undemocratic Schooling. Equity and quality in mass secondary education in Australia*, MUP, 2003; S Coulombe, J-F Tremblay & S Marchan, *International Adult Literacy Survey: Literacy scores, human capital and growth across 14 OECD countries*, Statistics Canada & Human Resources & Skills Development Canada, 2004

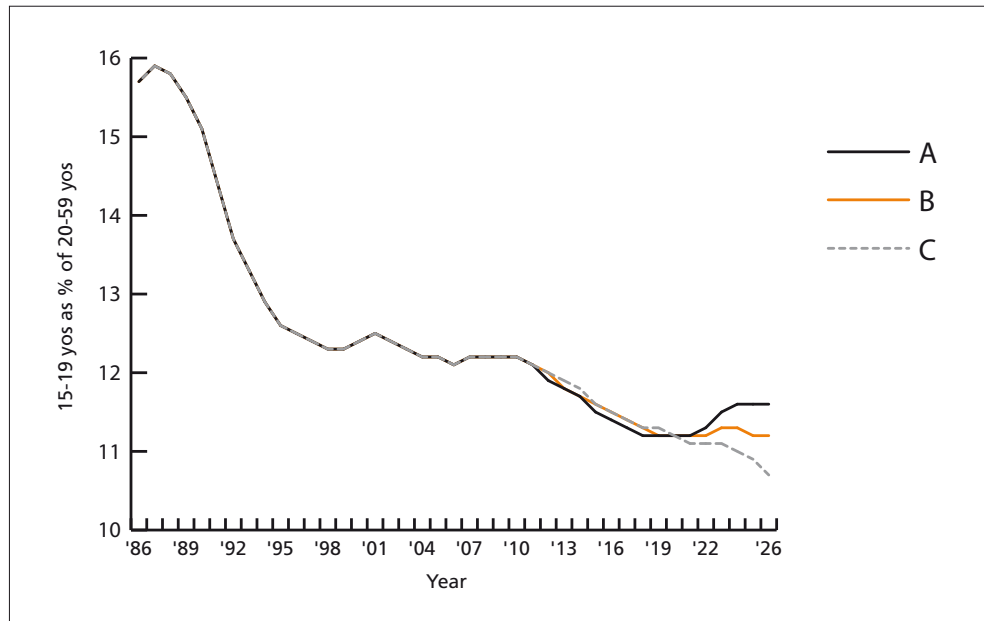
25 Newspoll, *What Young People are Thinking*, DSF, 2007; I Saulwick & D Muller, *op.cit.*, 2006

26 See OECD *Employment Outlook 2006*, OECD, 2006, Table C

27 M Long, *op.cit.*, 2007



Figure 2: The actual and projected number of 15 to 19 year olds as a percent of actual and projected 20 to 59 year-olds, Australia: June 1986 to 2026



Source: ABS, Population Projections, Australia, 2004-2101, The three population projections shown—A, B and C—are based on different assumptions about birth rates, life expectancy and migration.

Unemployment has been abated more by the rise of part-time work for young people, and their level of participation in school and post-school education, than by the creation of full-time jobs.

Despite strong economic growth in Australia over the past 15 years a significant number of young people remain disengaged – that is not in full-time learning or in full-time work.²⁸

In May 2007, 526,000 young Australians aged 15-24 years were not in full-time learning or work.²⁹ Of these approximately 306,000, were unemployed, working part-time but wanting more hours, or were not in the labour force but wanting to work.³⁰

While full-time work and study participation rates among young adults (aged 20-24) were at their highest level in two decades, 22 percent of young adults were not engaged in either full-time work or study. There are 107,000 young adults without Year 12 or a Certificate III qualification not in the labour force, unemployed, or working part-time and not studying.³¹

More than a quarter of all young Australians working part-time would prefer more hours of work. Half of the young adult part-time workers not studying full-time would prefer to work more hours. Forty-six percent of young adults employed part-time would prefer to work more hours.³²

28 M Long, *How Young People are Faring 2007. At a Glance*, DSF, 2007

29 *Ibid*

30 12 percent of young people aged 15-24; *Ibid*. In March 2007 there were 108,000 young people aged 24 or under receiving employment related benefits such as Newstart or Youth Allowance (Other), including 54,000 that had been on benefits for 12 months or longer, see *Labour Market and Related Payments*, DEWR, April 2007 at <http://www.workplace.gov.au/lmrp>

31 ABS, *Survey of Education & Work*, customised tables, May 2006

32 M Long, *op.cit.*, 2006 and *Labour Force Survey*, ABS, May quarter 2007, customised table



Numerous studies show that concerted policy and program reform would most likely boost levels of youth participation.³³

While it would appear that the main barriers to greater participation are probably more structural than attitudinal, the solutions do not lie entirely with governments, educators, industry or civil society.

Individual young people and their parents are entitled to and now enjoy richer, more diverse and attractive pathways through school and beyond than ever before. Young Australians have a personal responsibility to take advantage of those opportunities, and, along with the other stakeholders in the quest for higher levels of youth engagement, their decisions need to be measured against public expectations.

There is considerable capacity to significantly increase the participation of Australian young people in learning and work. Given the right opportunities research shows young people are ready to engage further.

The key to improved productivity is improved knowledge and skill levels

Much of Australian industry is aiming to become world class in terms of surviving and prospering in an increasingly global economy. Building the skill base is a key element of the strategy that firms have identified to improve their competitiveness and to achieve this status.³⁴

While the growth in employment will most likely continue to be in high skill jobs, there are too many young Australians ill-equipped with the technical, analytical and managerial skills that will be required.

Currently there are between 45,000 and 50,000 'early education exits' every year – young people not going into full-time work, full-time learning or a combination of work and study.³⁵ In 2006, nearly half of all school leavers (46 percent), including both early leavers and school completers, were not enrolled in any post-school study six months after leaving school.³⁶

Figure 3 (opposite), shows the level of disengagement from full-time learning or work in the short-term of school completers and early school-leavers. Without the skills gained through education and training, however, early school leavers face significant challenges in the workforce over the long-term. On average, early school leavers receive lower wages over their lifetime than their more skilled counterparts and are significantly more likely to become long term unemployed adults at later stages of their lives.³⁷

33 Mission Australia, *National Participation Agenda for Young People*, 2006; Brotherhood of St Laurence, *The Brotherhood's Social Barometer: Challenges Facing Australian Youth*, 2006; The Smith Family, *Youth Unemployment in Australia: a contextual, governmental and organisational perspective*, AMP Foundation, 2005.

34 Australian Industry Group, *World Class Skills for World Class Industries*, May 2006

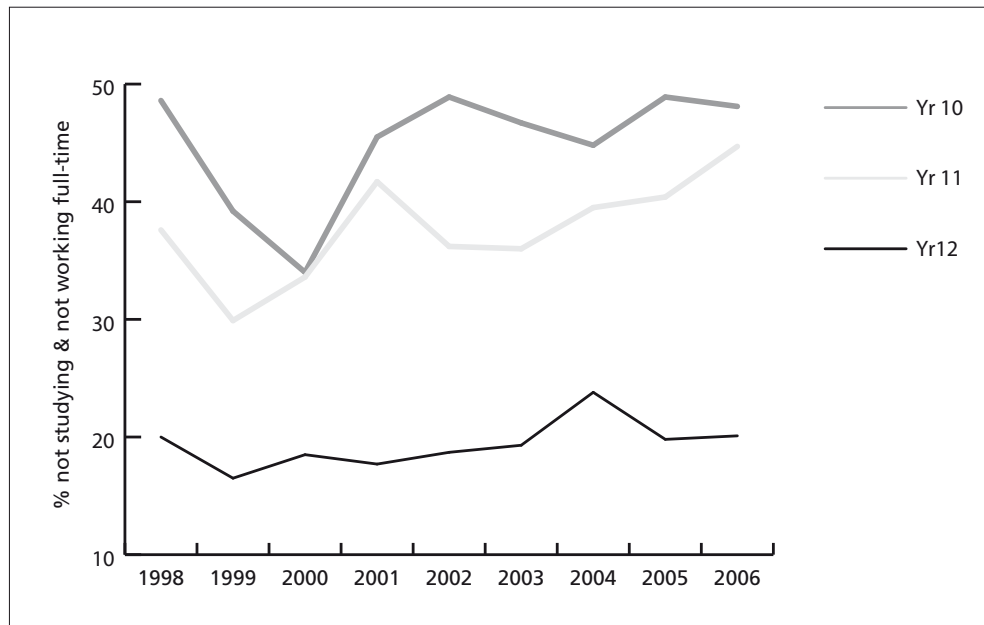
35 Six months after leaving school in 2005, 46,000 early school leavers were in this situation. 45 percent of Year 11 leavers were either unemployed, not in the labour force or working part-time but not studying. 48 percent of Year 10 or below leavers were in these situations. M Long, *How Young People are Faring 2007, At a Glance*, DSF, 2007

36 M Long, *ibid*

37 Access Economics, *The Economic Benefit of Increased Participation in Education and Training*, Business Council of Australia & DSF, 2005; the importance of school completion is reinforced by a recent ABS study, H Wei, 'Measuring Option Values and the Economic Benefits of Completing Secondary Education', Occasional Paper, ABS, 2006, Cat. No. 1352.0.55.082



Figure 3: The percent of school leavers not studying and not in full-time work in May the year after leaving school by their highest year of school completed, 15 to 24 year-olds, May 1998-2006



Source: ABS, *Survey of Education and Work*

A significant body of research is calling for increasing the educational attainment and skill levels of young people to boost their participation and productivity in the Australian workforce.³⁸

Skilling young Australians through university and vocational education offers the greatest potential source of additional skilled workers, and is the most efficient and productive policy approach.³⁹

In 2005, Access Economics analysed the economic impact of increasing the retention of young people in education and training. They estimated that boosting the proportion of young people completing school or an apprenticeship to 90 percent by 2010 would increase workforce numbers by 65,000, boost economic productivity, and expand the economy by more than \$9 billion (in today's money) by 2040.

Increasing school and training retention rates among 15-24 year-olds to 90 per cent would:

- have the same positive impact on the economy as increasing Australia's total migrant intake by 180,000 over the period to 2040;
- have a similar economic impact as increasing the workforce participation rates of older workers by 6.6 percentage points - from nearly 53 percent to 59.5 percent; and
- boost annual GDP by 1.1 per cent by 2040 - representing an extra \$500 a year per Australian in today's money.⁴⁰

Measures to increase school retention rates would also result in additional annual taxation receipts of \$2.3 billion (in today's money) by 2040, reducing future Budget deficits predicted by the Inter Generational Reports, and helping to defray the cost impact of the ageing population.

³⁸ Birrell and Rapson, *op.cit.*, 2006; Mark Cully, *Kirby Comes of Age: The birth, difficult adolescence and future prospects of traineeships*, DSF, 2006; Phillip Toner, *Getting it Right: What employers and apprentices have to say about apprenticeships*, AIG, GTA, DSF, 2005; Access Economics, *op. cit.*

³⁹ Birrell and Rapson, *op.cit.*, 2006.

⁴⁰ Access Economics, *op. cit.*, 2005



Why is it crunch time?

Australian policy-makers at state and Commonwealth level have been aware for some time of the need to strengthen youth engagement in learning and work. And over the past decade an array of initiatives, programs and legislation has been enacted to lift educational attainment and to encourage 'seamless' transitions from school to further learning or work.⁴¹

It is an exciting and critical time of change in senior schooling and post-school pathways.

Nearly all states and territories have raised the compulsory school attendance age, or are in the process of doing so. A feature of these changes is that the definition of educational participation has widened to include not just school attendance but learning through completion of an AQF qualification, or attendance at TAFE or ACE (adult and community education), often together with paid work.

Nearly every jurisdiction has reviewed its senior schooling certificate to include a broader range of curriculum options, and has introduced transition support services including professional guidance personnel and mentors.

Shared responsibility for participation is central to these changes: a requirement on individuals not to drop out of the learning, training or work loop and an obligation on governments to improve the attractiveness of schooling and the provision of robust alternatives alongside schooling. It is still early days to assess the effectiveness of many of these changes, and the measures will need to be subjected to independent analysis and evaluation.

At the federal level in 2004 John Howard committed his government to this objective: *We aim at nothing less than assisting all young Australians from age 13 to 19 to make a successful transition from school to an enduring career.*⁴²

As a result a number of existing programs and new initiatives were progressively brought together and packaged under the banner of Careers Advice Australia. CAA includes a focus on improved national and local labour market information to assist schools in their offerings and advice; funding for the co-ordination of structured workplace learning; community-based learning programs for young people of compulsory school age (POEMs) and a Youth Pathways Programme providing professional advice and support targeted at potential and actual early school leavers.

Taken together the state and Commonwealth initiatives represent a significant transformation in the social contract between society and young people. There is a greater diversity in schooling and learning opportunities, and improved support for those likely to experience a troubled transition from school. It will take some time for the impact of these measures to be reflected in the publicly available data.⁴³

The job is not done however. The challenge is to build on the efforts that governments have made: to bring greater cohesion and fluidity to the changes, to ensure both comprehensiveness and better customised delivery, and to fund and resource the new arrangements so that rhetoric matches reality.

To achieve these things an essential ingredient will be a strong and rigorous, open and public-minded, and more transparent research culture and practice. Independent and dispassionate evaluation

41 Many of these measures are summarised under 'Stepping Forward' at <http://www.mceetya.edu.au> and in P Kellock, *Local Investment. National Returns: The case for community support for early school leavers*, DSF, 2005

42 J Howard, Campaign Launch Policy Speech, Brisbane, 26 September 2004

43 See M Long, *op.cit.*, 2006



and assessment of the impact and processes of change - learning about what works and what does not, and the development of comparative (inter)national and state benchmarks - is vital.

The OECD has identified key features that contribute to a successful transition from education to work for young people.⁴⁴ These are:

- A healthy economy
- Well-organised pathways that connect initial education with work, further study or both
- Workplace experience combined with education
- Tightly knit safety nets for those at risk
- Good information and guidance
- Effective institutions and processes

Clearly Australia scores well in terms of the health and incentives in the national economy.

It is more of a mixed picture however when considering the detail of how well our education and training pathways are organised, and the quality of work-based learning opportunities, safety nets, information and guidance, and transition processes. These areas are addressed in the focal points for reform outlined in the next sections.

FOCAL POINTS FOR DRIVING REFORM

In making a claim for election, both political parties have already made a number of positive and worthy education, training and employment policy commitments. But so far the ideas are a patchwork. More integrated thinking about the problems being tackled and the solutions being sought, along with clarity and planning for implementation, are required.

The offers about educational achievement and post-school participation that the political parties are currently making to young people are not sufficiently clear or detailed.

We suggest that policy needs to sit within a clearly articulated framework and be woven around three fields of activity:

Engagement: initiatives seeking to actively engage young people in full-time learning or full-time work – or a part-time combination of both - in ways appropriate to their age and circumstances

Attainment: establishing clear levels of attainment and options for progression at relevant points in a young person's life

Development: initiatives for the express purpose of providing –according to their needs - a young person with the personal, career and material support to enable them to progress their learning, skills development and/or employment opportunities.

In developing this approach our purpose is not to restructure the provision of education and training. It is, however, to shift the focus from the institutions to young people, as learners and as workers.

We understand that completing school and making a transition from school involves an inevitably messy landscape of providers, sectors, jurisdictions, funding and pathways.

⁴⁴ *Thematic Review of the Transition from Initial Education to Working Life*. OECD, 1999



We are not suggesting a massive re-jigging of systems that currently work for large numbers of young people. However we do suggest there is a need for reforms that address non-completion in learning at school and in apprenticeships, and more than that, create genuine excitement and enthusiasm for learning and work. Ensuring that young Australians are equipped to negotiate the messy landscape around them needs to be a policy priority.

The key questions are about what learning and engagement actually takes place; how the landscape is understood and accessed by all students; how initiatives, pathways and programs are connected; how successfully young people progress from one phase to the next and have the opportunity to retrace their steps; and what benchmarks are set and met.

The following table demonstrates the relationship between the fields of activity we have outlined and the focal points for reform that we are proposing.

Phase	Engagement	Attainment	Development
Primary to secondary school transition	Establish basis for successful secondary school experience	Sound levels of literacy & numeracy	Customised learning plan Literacy & numeracy expertise Indigenous presence
Middle years of schooling	Student-centred learning Quality VET experiences	Progression to senior schooling	Improved teacher preparation Indigenous presence Mentoring Career & work awareness
Senior years of schooling	High quality VET School-TAFE partnerships	Year 12 or Cert III commencement	Mentoring Careers advice Indigenous presence
Learning alongside schooling	Workplace learning/traineeship Apprenticeship support	Cert III	Transition advice & support Mentoring Group training
Post-school pathways	Traineeship/apprenticeship incentives & assistance Labour market & training options Second chance options	Cert III completion Year 12 completion	Transition advice & support Workplace advice & support Group training

The most graphic feature of the table is the fundamental importance of the developmental field to the attainment and engagement goals. Linking, brokerage, guidance, advice and intermediary roles are no longer discretionary parts of the education and training landscape - they are crucial elements in turning large and impersonal systems into accessible networks. Done well, these roles represent a powerful way of enabling students to build the self-reliance and informed decision-making necessary to ensure that learning is better accessed and work is well negotiated.

In particular, intermediaries like Group Training organizations, where industry has a genuine investment in their success, need to be given a broader mandate and remit. They have the potential to be a critical juncture through which students can link between schools and training, TAFE, industry and employment.



We need to be smarter about existing programs such as traineeships and their capacity to be used as transitional labour markets to improve the employability of disengaged youth.

New youth transition programs and initiatives have grown like topsy in recent years. Exacerbated by poor co-ordination between state and Commonwealth jurisdictions, the result can be confusing and wasteful. It's a minefield for young people, their parents, educators, industry and policy-makers themselves. There is a need for a clearer division of responsibilities between state and Commonwealth governments.

The task of facilitating, connecting and maintaining engagement is often at odds with the way educational institutions are funded. For example, schools lose funding if a student leaves regardless of whether that is to go on to further learning or paid work or unemployment. Progress to TAFE, an apprenticeship or full-time work with training should be celebrated and rewarded rather than punished.

Public funding for non-government schools could encourage a stronger focus on disadvantaged and disengaged students. It's a sector that needs to be as actively involved as the government school sector.

Developing a student-centred resources model that encourages schools and other education providers to offer students and their parents genuine choice is a real challenge.

Too often in developing reforms and in making the case for change, not enough attention is devoted to measuring the results and evaluating what has worked and why. We are proposing that significant reforms in schooling, training and employment participation be introduced and accompanied by transparent indicators of progress.

Therefore by 2011 Australia should aim to have:

- 85 percent of young people leaving school completing Year 12 or achieving a Certificate III level qualification, increasing to 90 percent by 2015. 50 percent of Indigenous students leaving school completing Year 12 or achieving a Certificate III level qualification, increasing to 55 percent by 2015. This would substantially lift upper secondary school completion or equivalent rates for the first time since the late 1980s and provide the strong base needed for further skill development and innovation in the Australian economy. Currently about 81 percent of young people complete Year 12 or an AQF Certificate III qualification. Currently about 40 percent of Indigenous students complete Year 12. Whoever forms the next federal government should seek to establish a common definition of Year 12 completion as well as what constitutes a vocational equivalent, as these currently vary from State to State.⁴⁵
- More than 90 percent of teenagers (15-19 years olds) participating in full-time study, or full-time work, or a combination of work and study.
- More than 85 percent of young adults (20-24 years olds) participating in full-time study, or full-time work, or a combination of work and study.

A national monitoring and accountability framework will be needed to ensure that these goals are delivered.⁴⁶ An existing national agency with a revised remit or a new independent national agency

⁴⁵ Setting the school completion equivalent at the standard of an AQF Certificate III qualification is important. A recent paper on vocational education and training concludes: "For some students completing VET is an alternative to completing school, for others an alternative to university. While participation is high, outcomes are mixed. Completion rates are variable, and 12% of students have no recorded achievement at all. Relatively few young people graduate at certificate III or higher, and only a small proportion of people undertaking certificates I and II complete the qualification and move onto further training." T Karmel, *Vocational Education and Training and Young People: Last but not least*, NCVET Occasional Paper, 2007

⁴⁶ Existing MCEETYA reporting arrangements are not sufficient and timely enough.



with a mandate to report to Parliament on progress, a responsibility to undertake rigorous evaluation and research, and with scope to actively work with practitioners, industry and policy-makers to ensure that the policy goals are met, will be necessary.⁴⁷

THE ENGAGEMENT FIELD

- Successful transitions for all students from primary to secondary schooling
- Engaging, purposeful student learning during the ‘middle years’
- High quality vocational education in schools and in structured learning at workplaces

Successful transitions for all students from primary to secondary schooling

Opening the door to opportunity starts from the earliest days of school. And that door opens wider when students move from primary to secondary schooling. The learning and knowledge that students take from primary into secondary school becomes crucial to their engagement and capacity to learn down the track.⁴⁸

Australia can and must do a better and more comprehensive job of identifying the behavioural, emotional, mental and learning barriers and strengths of each student as they transfer to ‘the big school’.

The literacy and numeracy status of each student should be clearly understood by their new secondary teachers and used as a basis for the development of each student’s learning plan. Every student currently undergoes tests of literacy and numeracy in Year 7 but the results of these tests have traditionally been too slow in getting to teachers.

Underpinning and critical to this reform would be funding for testing, analysis and learning plan development, and for teachers and skilled personnel, using sound and evidence-based techniques, to work intensively alongside teachers and parents to address gaps and deficits that the testing identified.⁴⁹

At each stage of progress through school a student’s learning plan would be monitored and modified by teaching staff based on discussions with each student, their parents and the full range of a student’s teachers. The learning plan would be an evolving, living document and experience rather than another piece of bureaucratic red tape.

Some regions are developing this integrated approach already, but it should be fundamental to all schools. Most regions do not lack the desire. Instead improved communication between the sectors (eg. government and non-government), stronger incentives and skilled personnel are required.

We are not suggesting comprehensive diagnostic and skills testing in Years 6 and 7 for their own sake, or for use as a league table of schools and academic achievement. Rather this knowledge would be held by schools and used to ensure a successful transition between primary and secondary schooling; to advance the learning of students through an individualised, planned and well-articulated

47 *Evidence in Education: Linking Research and Policy*, OECD, 2007, provides useful profiles of how good practice and research in education can be a crucial guide to better policy.

48 Early intervention is cited by Lamb et al as an important policy response to early school leaving. They say: “Some current programs, such as basic literacy programs in early primary school, are not targeted to schools with high concentrations of disadvantaged groups.” see Lamb, et al., *Staying at School: Improving school retention in Australia*, Centre for Post-Compulsory Education & Lifelong Learning, University of Melbourne, 2004

49 A major study of the Reading Assistance Pilot Tutorial Voucher Initiative shows that only a third of eligible parents took advantage of the voucher offer (6,200 of approximately 19,000 eligible Grade 3 students). See Erebus International, *Report on the Evaluation of the Pilot Tutorial Voucher Initiative*, DEST, 2006. Provision of teacher aides may be more effective than vouchers.



approach; and to help schools adjust their resources to meet the needs of all students, especially those already disadvantaged by the time they reach secondary school.

Suggested actions:

- Provide incentives to improve primary-secondary school transitions
- Fund diagnostic testing of student learning barriers and strengths, and learning plans
- Employ skilled personnel to improve each student's literacy and numeracy
- Target up to 1,000 primary schools in the next term of government

Engaging, purposeful student learning during the 'middle years' of school

Most Australian students like school and are positive about their experiences when they reflect back. But there are crucial stages and potential 'break points' that all students go through.

Making the transition from primary to secondary schooling, for example, students soon encounter 'the middle', or for many, 'the lost' years of schooling. While many schools are re-inventing these years with purpose and endeavour, nevertheless a significant proportion of students begin to lose their way at school and with schooling during the Years 6, 7, 8 and 9.⁵⁰

The PISA survey of Australian 15 year olds at school shows that disengagement (measured by sense of belonging, student-teacher relations and attitudes to school) is especially pronounced among students from low socio-economic backgrounds. This in turn influences academic achievement and the likelihood of successful school completion.⁵¹

Students do want clear and high expectations and to be encouraged to achieve to their potential – but in return they expect support and assistance to fully develop their talents. There is a palpable desire from them for respect and for a positive role in schooling, not just to be acknowledged as consumers but to also be engaged in helping to shape the culture and direction of their schooling.

Our systems are relatively good at identifying curriculum standards but weak at constructing and supporting the personal and classroom relationships so crucial to productive learning. This is reinforced by the priority we place on curriculum assessment, which puts standardised content rather than pedagogy at the centre of education.

Where are the sources of innovation in education going to come from that will inspire, fascinate and stimulate all students? Australia's leading writer on schooling and its outcomes, Richard Teese, argues it is not going to come from high-end schools, that pitch themselves almost exclusively to university entrance as their benchmark.⁵²

Relatively passive consumption of knowledge is unlikely to develop enduring awareness and knowledge of how to learn among students that need to understand this most. If personal experience is the filter through which life is lived and learned by young people, are we doing enough to sustain high quality authentic learning in our education systems?

The large-scale Victorian Middle Years Research and Development Project found that classroom teaching and learning practices are the most critical factors in the achievement and engagement of middle years students.⁵³

50 See, for example, P Cole, *Reforming Year 9: Propositions for school policy and practice*, Centre for Strategic Education, Occasional Paper No 96, August 2006. His six suggestions for enhancing the schooling experience of Year 9 students are worthy of consideration.

51 S Thomson, J Cresswell, L De Bortoli, *Facing the Future: PISA 2003 in Australia*, ACER-OECD, 2004

52 R Teese, 'Condemned to Innovate', *Griffith Review*, No. 11, 2006

53 *Middle Years Research and Development Project*, Centre for Applied Educational Research, University of Melbourne, 2002



There is increasing recognition that new models of innovation and pedagogy are required. Student-centred learning during the middle years that seeks to engage all students, including the disaffected, and that aims for high standards is now developing in many schools. About a quarter of early school-leavers are going on to study at TAFE, but have we adequately linked this appetite for VET to the funding and pedagogy of middle schooling?

Some, like Brooks High School in Launceston, and Rosetta High School in Glenorchy, Tasmania, have revolutionised their entire approach to learning.⁵⁴ Others, like the Commonwealth-funded POEM projects, provide ‘time out’ for young people disconnecting from mainstream schooling and another chance at learning through flexible and accredited education and training options delivered in supported community settings.

According to the OECD a student-centred approach to teaching and learning is one that

- Is based on a challenging curriculum connected to students lives
- Caters for individual differences in interest, achievement and learning styles
- Develops students’ ability to take control over their own learning
- Uses authentic tasks that require complex thought and allow time for exploration
- Emphasises building meaning and understanding rather than completing tasks
- Involves co-operation, communication and negotiation
- Connects learning to the community.⁵⁵

Student-centred learning is expensive and demands high levels of professionalism and pedagogical understanding from educators. Resources and support for school and community based programs that seek to provide student-centred learning choices for at risk students must be provided.

Suggested actions:

- Provide for alternative and creative pedagogies and teaching that target the learning needs of up to five percent of the compulsory age secondary school population in any one year
- Strengthen teacher capacity to offer student-centred learning
- Increase the core teacher staffing of schools in disadvantaged communities
- Deepen the measures of student achievement and engagement
- Develop a research, sound evidence and good practice agenda and clearinghouse for student-centred learning

Charlie Clark, ‘Making It Big’ at Rosetta High School, Tasmania

Charlie toyed with the idea of becoming a Chef when he was in Year 7. He is now in Year 10 at Rosetta High School where his idea has become a goal and he is on the way to achieving it.

Charlie is involved in the ‘Make It Big’ program. This program includes core subjects and electives as in any other school, but instead of being programmed in a traditional line timetable, the student works with his or her advisor and subject tutors to design their own program. This in-school program takes up the equivalent of three days per week of the weekly program. The other two days are taken up with ‘internships’ out of school. Charlie’s classes include Food Studies and for one day a week he attends his

54 See Brooks High School at <http://www.brooks.tased.edu.au/> and Rosetta High School at <http://www.rosetta.tased.edu.au/>

55 Quoted in R Black, *op cit*.



internship at a Wine Estate. Being able to do consistent work experience in the Industry along with his Food Studies has allowed Charlie to keep his mind focused on where he wants to go.

Charlie says the best thing about 'Make It Big' is the diversity of courses offered, the freedom to choose what he wants to commit his time to and the flexibility to change his schedule and mix of subjects and short courses. For example, Charlie talks energetically about the opportunity he had last semester to undertake a 10 week film project with another School in the area. He was able to drop a unit of study and rearrange his schedule to take full advantage of this unique opportunity.

Rosetta High School "opens up the world". The worst thing is that "it is easy to fail if you slack off – you need to manage your own time". This is what Charlie says has been the biggest lesson for him – needing to gain the skills to self-manage and to be organised.

Charlie says Rosetta High School has equipped him with social skills, self-motivation and opportunities. He is fortunate to understand that in order to achieve at a high level you need to take responsibility and "do it yourself – and support is there if you need it". Charlie says Rosetta High School made him realise "what else is out there, and what you can do".

Janet Twining, 'Making It Big' at Rosetta High School, Tasmania

Janet grew up in the country and has always had an interest in agriculture and one day wants to climb to the very top in farming. Janet is in Year 9 at Rosetta High School and at the beginning of the year she sat down one-on-one with her advisor and discussed her interests, dreams and career goals. An individual learning plan was formulated, whereby her learning was tailored toward her career goal of farming. This approach puts each student at the centre of his or her learning and provides ownership and motivation.

Janet is currently arranging meetings with TAFE about undertaking a Certificate II in Agriculture. Her core subjects – Maths, Science and English have all been adapted to a farming context. She has completed work experience in the field including a trip to the East Coast with an Agronomist – visiting properties and giving advice on agricultural crops and grasses. Janet says that if she wasn't at Rosetta High School she wouldn't be concentrating on Maths and English – she now knows she needs the basics as they have been made relevant to farming.

Janet says 'Make It Big' is different because teachers listen to your ideas and interests and learning plans are individualised. With help from the Principal, Janet is hoping to go to Montana for a Student Exchange next year. She hopes to attend an Agricultural College for Years 11 and 12.

'Make It Big' has made Janet realise "I can do more than I thought I could." When asked to list three things Rosetta High School has equipped Janet with, she immediately replies: "self-confidence, a willingness to have a go and to try new things" and asks me if that is enough – "I could have kept going."



High quality vocational education in schools and in structured learning at workplaces

Earlier this year when it called on Australia to improve the rate of upper-secondary education attainment, the OECD cited the VET (vocational education and training) system as an important means of further boosting education participation.

In *Going for Growth*, the OECD said of Australia that, “the high share of the low-skilled in unemployment and inactivity, especially early school-leavers, suggests that the upper-secondary education system’s emphasis on preparation for university is too narrow, hampering innovative activities and productivity growth.”

It recommended promoting enrolment in VET and addressing the high level of non-completion of these courses, “by raising their quality and providing additional support for disadvantaged groups, such as those with minimal previous educational attainment or from low-income families.”⁵⁶

The progressive introduction of VET into Australian schools over the last 15 years has been something of a quiet revolution. In terms of participation it has been a recognised success with about half of all senior secondary students being involved in some form of VET activity. In terms of resourcing however it is still viewed as a discretionary activity with short-term funding and fee structures that can be a barrier to students and parents.

Vocational programs are a critical element in building a contemporary educational system that is capable of offering a broad curriculum and a diverse range of learning approaches. As the demand from young people (and their parents) suggests, for many, it offers relevant and meaningful educational options. This is due, in no small part, to the direct experience in the modern workplace and the understanding of the world of work derived from this.

Yet VET in our schools has not been an unqualified success. The promise that was seen in the pioneering programs based on partnerships between schools and their local businesses has not been fully realised. This is reflected in the ambiguous outcomes reported, for example, by NCVER.⁵⁷

There is a mixed quality to a number of programs on offer, there is a need to focus greater effort on lifting skills levels to the contemporary minimum standard (Certificate III), and to continue to build productive and sustainable relationships with industry. There is a need for regular, reliable and understandable labour market data being provided to industry and career advisers. An important first step would be for major agencies, DEST – DEWR – ABS, to rationalise and coordinate the provision of labour market information that can influence schools, career guidance and VET decisions.

In 2007 an estimated 65,000 Structured Workplace Learning (SWL) places will be funded by the Commonwealth through local partnerships with about another 50,000 students placed and coordinated by schools themselves.⁵⁸ The federal Opposition has promised to approximately double existing Commonwealth funding for SWL.⁵⁹ About 60,000 employers a year take part in SWL activities – and along with other local partnership opportunities in vocational education – their participation in SWL could be a powerful springboard to much deeper employer involvement in vocational education and training.

⁵⁶ OECD, *Economic Policy Reforms: Going for Growth*, Paris, 2007

⁵⁷ D Woods, *The Role of VET in helping young people’s transition into work: At a Glance*, NCVER, 2007; Anlezark Alison; Karmel, Tom; Ong, Koon; *Have school vocational education and training programs been successful?*, NCVER, Adelaide 2006; Karmel, 2007, op.cit.

⁵⁸ Table 3.4.2B DEST Budget Statement 2007-8, Outcome 4

⁵⁹ Labor’s Education Revolution: New Directions for Vocational Education & Training. Trades Training Centres in Secondary Schools, ALP, May 2007



A priority at this point should be to lift the quality and quantity of VET programs that offer school students a structured placement in work. There are two key issues that need to be addressed to deliver significantly improved outcomes in this area.

One is the involvement of local industry as partners at a strategic and operational level to ensure that VET programs are aligned with regional labour market needs, comprise relevant and skilful content and have both wide and deep support from local industry.

Next, and integral to the first issue, is the quality of program design and coordination: selecting and supporting the students, the engagement, preparation and support of participating employers and unions, and the supervision of student work. All parties – students, parents, schools and industry – need to be confident that these programs are of the highest quality.

A second priority needs to be more comprehensive pre-vocational programs, including but not limited to pre-apprenticeship programs. They do appear to have positive outcomes for participants who are disadvantaged in the labour market, and they may improve the chances of apprentices completing their contract of training.

A third priority is to actively link TAFE into the network of Australian Technical Colleges, the counterparts being established in most states, and into proposals to extend trades training to every secondary school. Efficient use of the public investment in training means TAFE must be a player in these emerging arrangements.

Positive examples of TAFE involvement in secondary vocational education are emerging. Holmesglen Vocational College in Victoria, for example, is a state-funded, adult-environment vocational school that has direct access to the facilities and programs of Holmesglen Institute, the state's largest TAFE Institute. It can offer students a direct pathway into a broad range of TAFE study programs and apprenticeships after they have completed their Vocational College education program. The personal development of students and their engagement in robust vocational learning that embeds core literacy, numeracy and employability skills are at the centre of its pedagogy.⁶⁰ The Sunshine Australian Technical College is also based around a strong partnership between industry, relevant secondary schools, Victoria University and Kangan-Batman TAFE. It too has focussed on an engaging pedagogy that creates opportunity and aspiration around technology and trades.

A fourth priority should be to build stronger connections between the different worlds that young people inhabit, especially the experience and skills gained through part-time work and community service, and formal study.

We are yet to see, based on what is in the public domain at present, whether the political parties have the vision to reshape schooling in such a way that vocationally-based learning builds these bridges to a richer world of learning and skills attainment. The potential of recent policy announcements could be quite profound. If well constructed they could provide students with significantly stronger curriculum choices, access to diverse pedagogies and firm links to industry, TAFE and trade apprenticeships.

Suggested actions:

- Lift SWL co-ordination to a standard of one co-ordinator to 60 student placements
- Expand the range and depth of pre-vocational programs
- Develop vocational education clusters of employers, TAFE, ATCs and schools to offer high quality vocational education in schools, TAFE and workplaces
- Develop stronger links between and recognition of the part-time work of students and their schooling

⁶⁰ See <http://www.holmesglen.vic.edu.au>



- Improve the provision of labour market information to better guide schools, career teachers and VET provision
- Develop quality benchmarks for the provision of VET in Schools
- Provide Commonwealth and state funding to fully meet the recurrent cost of VET in Schools
- Ensure Certificate III and diploma courses can articulate to university and higher education
- Provide incentives for retired tradesmen and women to become teachers and mentors of apprentices, and encourage teacher education faculties to train trade teachers
- Incorporate increased vocational experiences into the training and development of all teachers.

Lorna Arthur, re-engaging and achieving through VCAL, Holmesglen Vocational College, Victoria

Lorna is on the road to leading a fulfilling and productive life. She is currently studying for VCAL at Holmesglen Vocational College. In Semester 1 she has been involved in Hairdressing training very successfully and in Semester 2 she will find out about Community Services.

Lorna is dyslexic and her secondary schooling has been a continual struggle. Last year, in Year 10 at school, Lorna was doing VET part-time while also studying academic subjects. She felt teachers emphasised helping the top-performing students, while strugglers were left with inadequate support. Lorna remembers basically being told to leave. She says one day she came to the realisation that “I can’t do [school] – just get it.”

Being dyslexic has been the biggest challenge for Lorna to face - particularly in overcoming a lack of understanding and support while at school. Holmesglen has provided Lorna with a supportive, open and friendly environment with an emphasis on project work and ‘hands on’ training which has allowed her to blossom. The only bad thing is that “Maths is a bit easy at the moment, but it should get harder in Year 12.”

Chris Marlowe and the Australian Technical College, Sunshine⁶¹

Chris started at Australian Technical College Sunshine when it opened in 2007. Returning to a school environment was a big challenge for Chris, who had dropped out of Year 9 in 2005. Staff at the College interviewed Chris and his academic abilities and his attitude to work seemed to be good. He had a colourful history with previous schools and a tendency to ‘buck the system’.

The ATC model is a demanding one, with student activity divided between three different sites of learning: classroom, TAFE and the workplace. Each student studies a senior secondary certificate (VCE or VCAL) alongside an Australian School-based Apprenticeship (ASBA).

All students found the early period of their time at ATC Sunshine, a challenge; they had to leave their friends behind and start afresh. Chris found the classroom environment stifling and difficult; despite being able and articulate Chris was suspended twice in the first semester.

A feature of the ATC program is the on-the-job learning component. Students access trade studies at TAFE and learn skills in industry through their apprenticeship. Chris initially refused to attend TAFE but

⁶¹ Chris’ story is adapted from a profile by Andrew Williamson, principal of Sunshine ATC.



through the Structured Workplace Learning program he impressed an automotive paint shop owner such that he was offered an apprenticeship.

It was a turning point for Chris. He attended College more regularly and wore full uniform when he did so. Chris attended TAFE too, and came back raving about the skills he had learned. I doubt that Chris will ever lose his cheekiness nor his willingness to challenge the system. But the Australian Technical College education and training model allows him to progress his school studies and his trade skills concurrently, and the balance seems to work for Chris.

Chris is an intelligent young man who finds the classroom environment a difficult place to be, but acknowledges the importance of education in his life. The role of industry in broadening the provision of education and training should not be underestimated in this case or others like it.

THE ATTAINMENT FIELD

- Realistic and rigorous training and work options for students to complete their education
- Improved support and incentives for apprentices to complete their training
- Second chance options for young adults to complete Year 12 or its equivalent
- Renewed purpose and scope for traineeships

Realistic and rigorous training and work options for students to complete their education

To remain economically competitive Australia must lift its completion rate of upper secondary education.

But we also know that completing this education through school is not for everyone, and that equivalent worthwhile learning can take place in TAFE and adult and community education (ACE) settings, through apprenticeships and on-the-job training, and in entry-level employment that develops robust and enduring skills.

The long-time stranglehold of university entrance requirements over post-compulsory schooling is changing. Reforms in recent years to senior certificates in states such as South Australia and Queensland reflect this.

The revival of technical education through the Australian Technical Colleges and a number of state programs recognise the need for diverse learning pathways for senior students. In NSW large numbers of senior students already complete their HSC through attending TAFE. Other options equivalent to and operating alongside a traditional school-based matriculation, such as the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL), are also proving to be serious, cost-effective alternatives.⁶²

In a strong economy and labour market such as Australia currently enjoys, the availability of work may attract a number of young people to leave school early. Over time however many of these

⁶² See http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/vcal/resource_kit/vcal_stats.html In 2006, nine percent of VCAL students went on to a VET certificate at Certificate IV or higher; 31 percent of students went on to an apprenticeship, and 7 percent went into a traineeship; 13 percent were working full-time; 12 percent went on to entry-level VET; one percent went on to university; 15 percent were working part-time and 12 percent were unemployed. VCAL is an accredited secondary certificate that is a hands-on option for senior students and adults, and is offered through school or community settings or a combination of these. It provides practical work-related experience, as well as literacy and numeracy skills and the opportunity to build personal skills that are important for life and work.



leavers will need a second chance to acquire the skills that come with completing Year 12 or an AQF Certificate III qualification. A guaranteed place in TAFE or ACE is necessary to do this.

For a minority of students, especially those in weaker regional economies, the open labour market route to engagement may be a pathway to failure. Labour market programs, especially those with a youth focus, are fraught with difficulty and mixed results.⁶³

A counter-intuitive example however are the transitional labour markets being developed by organizations like the Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL) that provide the disengaged with a 'direct line of sight' to sustainable employment.

Taking advantage of subsidy arrangements through traineeships, and customising training to the needs of participants, the BSL provides the chance for disengaged young people to develop confidence, useful skills and experience. In return the BSL's public and private partners in the open labour market are prepared to match the investment and commitment made by program participants.⁶⁴

The offer of a place in an active program providing real work with training and skills development should be an option.

Suggested actions:

- Develop and fund the opportunity for students to complete their secondary education in cross-sectoral and 'hands-on' settings, such as TAFE, ACE and workplaces
- Provide a guaranteed place for early school leavers to return to study to complete Year 12 or a Certificate III qualification
- Bring together existing resources, including traineeships, to offer a transitional labour market platform with real work and training to eligible early school leavers.

Tim Wilson, Making a transition through a traineeship, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Victoria

It can be hard to pinpoint a turning point in your life when you're actually in the moment.

Tim has spent the last few months building fences, doing landscaping and being part of the Energy Taskforce. It's the first time he has ever had continuous full-time work.

Wind the clock back and the Melbourne City Mission young offenders program was having trouble placing Tim in employment. After completing Year 10 through a special program at his school he left and spent some time doing 'bits of work here and there' with his father. He got into a bit of trouble and ended up in the young offenders program.

However, he proved himself during a five week trial at the Brotherhood of St Laurence's Maidstone-Braybrook Community Enterprise Project and Tim earned himself a position on their Certificate II Horticulture traineeship program. The program provides local people with jobs and training in their own community - a bonus to Tim as he had lost his licence. He receives a higher level of support than he would in a regular traineeship. His case-worker is on-site every two weeks and advocates on his behalf if need be: but his boss describes Tim as "a fantastic worker."

63 See JP Martin, 'What works among active labour market policies: evidence from OECD countries' experiences', *OECD Economic Studies*, 30, (1), 2000

64 L Bedson, *The Community Enterprise Development Initiative: Learnings from work with twelve disadvantaged neighbourhoods in 2005-6*, BSL, 2007



As he nears completion of his traineeship his case-worker will help him to develop his CV and practice his interview skills. Tim's hope is to continue working in the landscaping or construction industry and his case-worker will help him to link with potential employers to obtain an apprenticeship or employment. Part of the motivation comes from having seen the birth of his son nine months ago.

It will be interesting to know, in 3 or 4 years when Tim looks back, what he sees as the turning point of this stage of his life.

Incentives for apprentices to complete their training

Much policy attention has been focused on attracting an increasing number of young people and older workers into trade apprenticeship ranks, and to moving from time served-based to competency-based training. Less attention however has been directed to the quality of the apprenticeship experience or reducing the high numbers of apprentices not completing their training.

A number of recent initiatives have sought to make apprenticeships comparatively more attractive.⁶⁵ A further step might be to provide a payment directly to apprentices at the completion of their training.

Expanding pre-vocational programs could also be a cost-effective means of lowering non-completion rates as participants from these programs have a higher completion rate than other apprentices. They are useful tests of the aptitude of potential apprenticeship applicants. Knowledge of working conditions and skills acquired during pre-apprenticeship training provides a 'real world' understanding of what to expect.

The cost of training and demands for short-term productivity outcomes has sometimes impacted on the support and supervision of apprentices. Once entering an apprenticeship was a rite of passage not just into the trades but into adult life, and pastoral and personal care were integral components of the apprenticeship experience. Mentoring and other forms of support must remain central to the apprenticeship experience.

Employers and supervisors need time, relationship skills and resources to encourage apprentices to remain committed to their training. One way of doing this is to improve the financial basis of group training organisations (GTO) and other demand-side intermediaries. Group training arrangements can be user-friendly gateways into trade training and they enable apprentices to experience a variety of workplaces. The best of them strive to provide a customised and highly supportive apprenticeship environment. They have the potential to create dynamic and systemic links for young people between school, training, employment and industry.

Suggested actions:

- Expand pre-vocational and pre-apprenticeship courses, and especially target disadvantaged regions and disengaged students
- Provide an incentive reward for trade apprenticeship completion
- Provide a package of mentoring and personal support for apprentices
- Fund Group Training organisations to provide high quality training experiences for apprentices.

⁶⁵ These include providing a federal government Top-Up payment for first and second year apprentices, wage incentives for older workers to do trades training, the AiG-AMWU wage agreement to recognise competency-based training and improve youth apprentice wages, and providing apprentices with access to Austudy; as well as funding for tool-kits and to help offset off-the-job training fees.



Diana Crow - Certificate III Automotive Heavy Machinery with a GTO, WA

A heavy vehicle mechanic might seem an unlikely job for someone who wanted to be a fighter pilot but to Diana Crow it's her passion and she loves it. Identification of a rare blood condition whilst in her final year of school ruled out her career of choice as a fighter pilot. Five years of focused preparation came to a halt. Quick thinking by Diana along with support from her Year Co-ordinator enabled Diana to switch streams half way through Year 12 and thrive. "It's so important to have a Year Co-ordinator who has knowledge of what's out there – there's too much emphasis on entering university".

Diana is now 12 months ahead of her peers at TAFE and has achieved great results in all her subjects. She'll complete her Apprenticeship this August. However, the road to excellence in her study and training has not been smooth. The first half of her Apprenticeship was a "mess" – Diana had no support and was being treated badly by her former employer. Her Apprenticeship was suspended. Directions Group Training got Diana back on track. She attributes much of her success to her GTO Field Officer who helped her relocate from her home town of Perth to Melbourne, kept her organised and aware of her entitlements as an Apprentice and is on hand whenever need be for guidance and information.

Being a female in a male dominated field is just one of the challenges Diana has faced, along with moving away from home to take up her Apprenticeship. Her drive to be an excellent technician, the support she has received from Group Training and a determination to prove her doubters wrong are what motivate Diana to work twice as hard as everyone else and win their respect.

Raelene Trimble at Facey's Nursery, Cranbourne, Victoria ... understanding good practice in employing young people

Understanding what motivates Raelene's apprentices has been essential to the success of her family's business. At Facey's Nursery in Cranbourne, Victoria, it's not an easy thing to do – managing a staff of twenty with a mix of ages, experience and skills. They have succeeded by having systems in place that ensure open communication and honest and transparent work practices.

Five years ago, in spite of repeated advertisements in the local paper, the nursery couldn't find employees. Raelene worked directly with careers counsellors at the local High Schools and offered paid work experience trials for those interested in undertaking a Horticulture Apprenticeship. This has paid off for the company with two of the apprentices who took up the offer, now in management positions at the nursery.

Support is provided for new apprentices in other ways as well. Training and tools are paid for by Facey's Nursery and they "bend over backwards" when the apprentices need information for their training assignments. As Raelene explains, they "try to be motivators". In an informal mentoring strategy, new staff are paired off with someone of their own age. Communication lines are also kept open by a monthly newsletter, job sheets, and a roster system so everyone is aware of what each other is doing.

All new staff are given a comprehensive set of guidelines that covers everything from their wage package, break times, right down to the nitty gritty of who provides the coffee and biscuits in the tea room. The appropriate Award sets out the minimum employment standards and the responsibilities, performance, motivation and length of service of individual employees leads to above Award entitle-



ments. With many new employees starting straight out of school, these guidelines ensure that they are aware of what is expected and “don’t have to worry about doing something wrong”.

Raelene is acutely aware of the differences between her younger and older staff. While those who have been with her for twenty years are “very loyal and work-minded”, the younger ones are “only at work because it’s a necessity”. They “gather information and move onto something else”. While this presents obvious challenges to running a business, Raelene pinpoints the need for multi-skilling her staff, and accepting that even if you are an employer of choice, you will still have good people leave. In fact, she focuses on the positives, “when someone does leave there is often the opportunity for someone else to step up and provide an injection of enthusiasm into the position”.

Second chance options for young adults to complete Year 12 or its equivalent

The understandable policy focus in recent years on school-leaver transitions and upskilling existing and older workers has meant that the skill and participation levels of young adults (20-24 years) have tended to be overlooked.

They are an age demographic that falls between the rising and maturing generations. Their participation in full-time learning or full-time work or a combination of these has gradually improved over recent years. Nevertheless close to one in five young adults are not fully engaged in learning or work, which is relatively high by OECD standards.⁶⁶

There is clearly scope to improve the skill and participation levels of young adults. The latest available *Education and Work* survey shows 107,000 young adults without Year 12 or a Certificate III qualification who are either not in the labour force, unemployed, or working part-time but not studying.⁶⁷

Tooling up these young people with skills and participation opportunities should be a policy priority.

Suggested actions:

- Bring together existing resources, including traineeships, to offer a targeted labour market platform with real work and training to young adults without Year 12 or a Certificate III qualification not in full-time learning or work.
- Offer vouchers to eligible young adults to enable them to complete Year 12.

Renewed purpose and scope for traineeships

The headline story in training over the past decade has been a phenomenal growth in the take-up of traineeships, which are typically one or two-year contracts of training in areas such as retailing, hospitality, administration and transport. Over the past 20 years more than 1.7 million Australians have been part of the traineeship experience, with over 650,000 completing one in that time.⁶⁸

Traineeships are especially popular with employers in service industries (about one in five employees in retailing and in hospitality are on contracts of training, for example) because they can tailor entry-level training and skills to their particular needs.⁶⁹ Their own investment in training is offset

66 OECD & Canadian Policy Research Networks, *From Education to Work: A difficult transition for young adults with low levels of education*, 2005

67 *Survey of Education and Work 2006*, ABS, customised tables

68 M Cully, *op cit*.

69 T Karmel, ‘Future skill requirements and implications for TAFE institutes’, NCVET, 2003, Table 12



to some extent by considerable public subsidies that are available. For people without university or formal TAFE qualifications, traineeships represent an important way to develop recognised skills.

During the lifetime of the program, its scope, scale and focus have undergone major changes.⁷⁰ First-time entrants to the workforce are no longer the prime participants; indeed, about a third of people commencing a traineeship are understood to be existing workers being transferred from an employment to a training contract. A majority of people entering a traineeship have already attained Year 12 qualifications, while the original design emphasised traineeships as a route for early school leavers.

The program is a big part of Australia's training effort, and constitutes a large direct public investment by taxpayers.

However there is a significant imbalance between the sectors where jobs are growing in the economy overall and where the bulk of traineeships are. Over time the program has increasingly taken on the appearance of an active labour market program.

Trade apprenticeships remain one of Australia's premier skill development pathways. Quality and excellence of skill development should remain their primary focus. It is time, however, to review the purpose and scope of traineeships.

On the one hand they need to be more dynamic and better positioned to meet the technical, para-professional and design skills now demanded in health, education, construction, environmental sustainability and manufacturing.

On the other hand there is scope to use the program to better target training support to the disadvantaged, particularly those being brought under a welfare-to-work umbrella, older workers (especially those in externally traded sectors), disengaged school leavers, and others.

A reformed and better segmented traineeship program represents a golden opportunity to address a number of the design, skills, and knowledge frontiers facing Australia.

Suggested actions:

- Establish a review of the purpose, scope, funding and future potential and priorities of traineeships. Consider segmenting traineeships into two streams: one to meet future technical, para-professional and design demands, and another that positions traineeships as transitional labour market opportunities for disengaged teenagers, young adults, and others marginally connected to the labour force.

⁷⁰ M Cully, op.cit.



THE DEVELOPMENT FIELD

- Personal support or mentoring for every potential early school leaver to make a successful transition to further learning or work
- Improve teacher support and preparation for ‘hard to teach’ students
- An Indigenous presence in schools and support for Indigenous students and communities

Personal support or mentoring for every potential early school leaver to make a successful transition to further learning or work

Transition support and mentoring for vulnerable students does work. The relationships and trust that builds between students and their advisers are powerful, and in many instances, life-changing.⁷¹

The multiplicity of state and Commonwealth programs however still does not ensure that every student at risk of leaving school early receives the support and advice that they need to make informed decisions. Too many still fall through the cracks - with adverse implications not only for those young people but also for levels of workforce participation, workforce skills and the productive capacity of the economy.

More cohesive and comprehensive programming and arrangements in this area need to be made between the Commonwealth and the States.

One option might be to agree on a clearer division of responsibilities, funding and service delivery between the jurisdictions.

Another option might be to recognise that this could involve much effort for few achievements, and that it might be more realistic to establish something akin to a franchise model with common branding and identification but a multiplicity of outlets, platforms and contact points.

A third approach would recognise the centrality of demand-side intermediaries like GTOs. A distinctive feature of GTOs is that they are direct employers of apprentices and trainees, so that they are much more than information brokers, matching agents or advice centres. Public and private sector employers host GT employees on a fee for service basis that means industry has a direct stake in ensuring that good quality skilling occurs.

The scheme is particularly attractive for small and medium sized businesses because GTOs deal with employment overheads, other costly responsibilities, and provide host employers with a flexibility often not possible with in-house training arrangements. For employees the arrangement brings security, quality training, variety, pastoral care, and support into real employment at the conclusion of the training contract.

Consideration should be given to providing GTOs with a broader mandate and remit. They could be a critical juncture through which disengaged young people are linked between schools and training, transitional labour markets, industry and employment.

However it is not just a question of providing access to professional resources, it is also about reinforcing the informal networks in the lives of ‘at risk’ young people - their parents, their peers and mentors, workmates and employers.

⁷¹ P Kellock, *Familiarity Produces Trust*, DSF & Brotherhood of St Laurence, 2002; P Kellock, *Local Investment. National Returns: The case for community support for early school leavers*, DSF, 2005; Dept of Premier & Cabinet Victoria, *Better Outcomes for Disengaged Young People: Initial Scoping, Analysis & Policy*, 2005



Suggested actions:

- Ensure that every early school leaver is provided with professional support and guidance for up to one year as part of their transition from school experience, at a ratio of one advisor to every 35 early leavers
- Recognise the centrality of demand-side intermediaries in transitions from school and consider providing Group Training with a broader mandate and remit
- Extend school-based mentoring through mentor training programs and grants for co-ordination and evaluation
- Extend and deepen parental and youth peer involvement in career and transition advice
- Provide a central place for industry in the development and implementation of career and transition advice
- Develop benchmarks and recognition for good practice employers of young people.

Ellen Whitehall – Certificate III Commercial Cookery with a GTO, WA –

Ellen's career choices show that the 'road less travelled' can lead to immense achievement and satisfaction. During Year 11 Ellen was lost. She approached her teachers to explore alternative education pathways but was consistently met with closed doors. "They had no links with TAFE and were not willing to try. It was only that Mum did a bit of investigating for me that I ended up doing work experience in TAFE for two weeks, attending classes and meeting the lecturers. Then I understood how the system worked and realised that it was for me."

Even though Ellen felt "shunned", labelled a "drop-out" and found herself constantly being asked the question "what's wrong?" she took the challenges of being the youngest student and adjusting to an adult learning environment in her stride, knowing that she was doing what was right for her.

Her Group Training company has worked in partnership with TAFE and her host employer to enable Ellen to win gold and silver chef competition medals, industry awards and a scholarship to work in a top restaurant. The company has enabled her to transfer and work at the front of house in a major hotel and bridge the gap between the two areas of the business. She now wants to study event co-ordination and sales and marketing management. After feeling lost Ellen feels at home in her chosen field, having formed many strong friendships and connections through Group Training.

Improve teacher support and preparation for 'hard to teach' students

With a far greater proportion of students staying onto senior schooling than 25 years ago, schools and teachers are encountering students that in previous generations would have been in the workplace or elsewhere. The proportion of students that are 'hard-to-teach' using traditional pedagogies has also risen over that time. Engaging all students in worthwhile study remains the great educational challenge.

A policy focus has been on the capacity of educators to respond, the repertoire of skills that teachers possess and the health of the teaching culture. Particular emphasis has been placed on teacher education and training.

A common view is that while not in crisis, better quality teacher education has the potential to improve the effectiveness of the entire school system. The recent Inquiry by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training recommended a range of initiatives



including better induction practices for beginning teachers, and research and partnership funding amongst others.⁷² The 2007-8 Commonwealth Budget includes a number of positive measures to support the further development of classroom skills by student teachers.

There could be a more serious preparation of pre-service teachers to work more successfully with 'hard to teach' students.

Some universities such as Deakin, the University of Western Sydney and the University of the Sunshine Coast are providing exposure for student teachers to hone their skills and capacity to work with alternative pedagogies and in alternative settings.⁷³ Designing and running their own projects in these settings, emerging teachers are able to gain an insight into strategies for successfully engaging students.

There is also a need for the TAFE and ACE (adult and community education) workforce to be better geared to the needs, aspirations and cultures of young people. This will become especially important as state-based learning guarantees for young people are increasingly offered through TAFE and ACE settings.

Suggested actions:

- Provide a package of assistance to each of Australia's teacher preparation courses to better link, support and enable their students to learn from and with schools and settings focused on 'hard-to-teach' students
- Develop TAFE and ACE workforce development strategies and practices that assist educators to engage 'hard-to-teach' students.

Sydney graduates of Next Generation

It's about being thrown in the deep end. For one of their placements, student teachers were charged with designing and delivering a major project to students in programs who are not getting on well in regular school,. A tough job? Certainly. But this is some of their feedback:

I am glad that I got to experience this part of teaching. Often the teachers in school do not get to see these students as anything other than 'bad kids'. I probably would have been like that too had I not seen students that have been suspended so many times and who have very little respect for teachers complete our project.

When I go into a school, I'm going to ensure that every kid knows their potential, no matter what others tell them. I'm going to inspire them!

My area is Maths and Science – I'm a former Geologist from India – but they wanted me to do a computerised magazine so I said, 'OK, I'll do it'. We had the students learning along with the teacher!

I no longer have any fear about getting a tough school.

It's like an apprenticeship for teaching.

72 Top of the Class: *Report on the Inquiry into teacher education*, House of Representatives Committee on Education & Vocational Training, 2007.

73 At Deakin, see the Graduate Diploma of Education (Applied Learning) at <http://www.deakin.edu.au/education/masters/courses/applied-learning.php>; and www.nextgeneration.com.au for developments at UWS and USC. Next Generation is a partnership between these universities and DSF.



An Indigenous presence in schools and support for Indigenous students and communities

There are about 2200 Indigenous Australians employed in schools that have high enrolments of indigenous students.⁷⁴

Indigenous Education Workers (IEWs) provide student, community, and teacher support and do a range of tasks from providing classroom assistance to teachers in literacy and numeracy, informing school staff and principals on the challenges and opportunities relating to the education of their Indigenous students, checking on and encouraging student attendance, engaging the school's Indigenous community, and providing mentoring and pastoral support for students who may be experiencing difficulties with school or home life.⁷⁵

One of Australia's leading Indigenous educators, Chris Sarra argues policy-makers should be, "... open minded enough to embrace Indigenous education workers (IEWs) as co-teachers in our classrooms with a wealth of knowledge about the children and the community context. Such knowledge is of potentially more value than the knowledge we bring in with our flash tertiary degrees. Sadly this is one mistake that many new teachers make, particularly when both schools of knowledge, when blended together, make for an extremely powerful teaching and learning combination."⁷⁶

Properly skilled and effectively supported, IEWs are an important feature of the successful education of Indigenous Australian students.

However there is considerable room for improvement when it comes to their professional development, and employment and funding arrangements.

Suggested actions:

- Provide a package of training, literacy and numeracy support, IT skilling, mentoring and leadership development for Indigenous Education Workers in schools and TAFE

74 Australian Government, *National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education 2003, 2006*

75 IEWs are known by different titles in all states and territories, from Aboriginal Education Assistants in NSW to Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers in WA. Though the titles and employment conditions may vary, the idea and purpose remain the same; that is, the employment of Indigenous Australians in schools that have high enrolments of Indigenous students for the purposes of providing student, community, and teacher support in the delivery of appropriate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education for ALL students.

76 C Sarra, 'Young and Black and Deadly: Strategies for Improving Outcomes for Indigenous Students', Australian College of Educators, 2003



Crawford Public School in western Sydney ... Engaging Indigenous communities in education

Crawford Public School in western Sydney was established in the mid-1970s and today educates about 450 students, 140 of whom are Indigenous.

'Auntie Daph Bell' is the local Indigenous Education Worker providing a profound link between Indigenous students and parents, teachers and the larger Crawford school community. Crawford does more than offer Indigenous students a dedicated room and homework centre. Daph, with the school's principal and teachers, has infused the school with Indigenous stories and culture, Indigenous history, and a holistic engagement of Indigenous parents in the learning taking place at the school.

In collaboration with Daph, teachers developed a Mathematics in Indigenous Contexts project using a mural theme, the local Indigenous reserve and group-based activities that focused on building specific mathematical skills such as measuring, numeracy, basic operations and geometry. An in-class tutoring program in literacy and numeracy involves parents as well as Indigenous students, developing role models for other members of the community: 'the parents got over their fear, because all of a sudden they were learning things that they hadn't picked up on high school and they thought, "this is easier than I thought."'

The relationship of mutual trust and respect between Steve Stuart, the school's principal, and Daph underpins Indigenous engagement in the school. She is clearly seen to be a critical part of the overall plan for sustainability of the many projects and activities being undertaken. The principal says: 'I would think that all schools with a significant number of kids should have an IEW. It's just so important. . . . We need to bottle her and put her into other schools!'

77 Adapted from P Howard et al., *Community Capacity Research Project - Final Report*, Office of the Board of Studies, NSW, 2006



SUMMARY OF SUGGESTED ACTIONS

Ten main reform areas have been outlined, each with specific suggested actions:

Successful transitions for all students from primary to secondary schooling

- Provide incentives to improve primary-secondary school transitions
- Fund diagnostic testing of student learning barriers and strengths, and learning plans
- Employ skilled personnel to improve each student's literacy and numeracy
- Target up to 1,000 primary schools in the next term of government

Purposeful student learning during the 'middle years'

- Provide for alternative and creative pedagogies and teaching that target the learning needs of up to five percent of the compulsory age secondary school population in any one year
- Strengthen teacher capacity to offer student-centred learning
- Increase the core teacher staffing of schools in disadvantaged communities
- Deepen the measures of student achievement and engagement
- Develop a research, sound evidence and good practice agenda and clearinghouse for student-centred learning

High quality vocational education in schools and in structured learning at workplaces

- Lift SWL co-ordination to a standard of one co-ordinator to 60 student placements
- Expand the range and depth of pre-vocational programs
- Develop vocational education clusters of employers, TAFE, ATCs and schools to offer high quality vocational education in schools, TAFE and workplaces
- Develop stronger links between and recognition of the part-time work of students and their schooling
- Improve the provision of labour market information to better guide schools, career teachers and VET provision
- Develop quality benchmarks for the provision of VET in Schools
- Provide Commonwealth and state funding to fully meet the recurrent cost of VET in Schools
- Ensure Certificate III and diploma courses can articulate to university and higher education
- Provide incentives for retired tradesmen and women to become teachers and mentors of apprentices, and encourage teacher education faculties to train trade teachers
- Incorporate increased vocational experiences into the training and development of all teachers.

Realistic and rigorous training and work options for students to complete their education

- Develop and fund the opportunity for students to complete their secondary education in cross-sectoral and 'hands-on' settings, such as TAFE, ACE and workplaces
- Provide a guaranteed place for early school leaver to return to study to complete Year 12 or a Certificate III qualification
- Bring together existing resources, including traineeships, to offer a targeted labour market platform with real work and training to eligible early school leavers.

Intermediaries and incentives for apprentices to complete their training

- Expand pre-vocational and pre-apprenticeship courses, and especially target disadvantaged regions and disengaged students
- Provide an incentive reward for trade apprenticeship completion
- Provide a package of mentoring and personal support for apprentices
- Fund Group Training organisations to provide high quality training experiences for apprentices.



Second chance options for young adults to complete Year 12 or its equivalent

- Bring together existing resources, including traineeships, to offer a targeted labour market platform with real work and training to young adults without Year 12 or a Certificate III qualification not in full-time learning or work.
- Offer vouchers to eligible young adults to enable them to complete Year 12.

Renewed purpose and scope for traineeships

- Establish a review of the purpose, scope, funding and future potential and priorities of traineeships. Consider segmenting traineeships into two streams: one to meet future technical, para-professional and design demands, and another that positions traineeships as transitional labour market opportunities for disengaged teenagers, young adults, and others marginally connected to the labour force.

Personal support or mentoring for every potential early school leaver to make a successful transition to further learning or work

- Ensure that every early school leaver is provided with professional support and guidance for up to one year as part of their transition from school experience, at a ratio of one advisor to every 35 early leavers
- Recognise the centrality of demand-side intermediaries in transitions from school and consider providing Group Training with a broader mandate and remit
- Extend school-based mentoring through mentor training programs and grants for co-ordination and evaluation
- Extend and deepen parental and youth peer involvement in career and transition advice
- Provide a central place for industry in the development and implementation of career and transition advice
- Develop benchmarks and recognition for good practice employers of young people.

Improved teacher support and preparation for 'hard to teach' students

- Provide a package of assistance to each of Australia's teacher preparation courses to better link, support and enable their students to learn from and with schools and settings focused on 'hard-to-teach' students
- Develop TAFE and ACE workforce development strategies and practices that assist educators to engage 'hard-to-teach' students.

An Indigenous presence in schools and support for Indigenous students and communities

- Provide a package of training, literacy and numeracy support, IT skilling, mentoring and leadership development for Indigenous Education Workers in schools and TAFE.



SOME IMPLICATIONS

When people think of policy implications most thoughts turn to costs. The advantage of what we are proposing is that the ideas largely build on or re-frame what already exists. In education and training incremental change rather than 'big bang' ideas tend to be more effective.

As a result there will be some significant cost offsets in these proposals. Nevertheless the gains to be made will involve additional public expenditure, of approximately \$600-800 million dollars in a full financial year. While most costs fall to the Commonwealth, some would need to be shared with the states. It will take up to three years to reach this level of spending. Hence the importance of gradual rather than dramatic indicators of progress.

The proposals do involve some significant change in the way many of the stakeholders go about their business.

An important change would be in the culture of schools. For educators there would be closer scrutiny of the ways students are inducted into secondary schools and the creativity, pedagogy and results of what follows.

Increased expectations would be made of students: to learn not so much by being attentive consumers of knowledge as by actively helping to shape and expand the frontiers of their knowledge. There would be better school, industry and community assistance in this endeavour. There would be stronger learning incentives and better second chance opportunities to complete Year 12 or a vocational education and they would be expected to take advantage of these.

Government and non-government schools would be expected to open themselves to larger communities, and related providers like TAFE, ACE and work-based training. Intermediaries would play a central role in connecting young people to learning and work and enabling them to move easily between sectors, providers and other stakeholders.

For industry – employers and workers – the proposals involve an increased commitment to quality on-the-job training and apprenticeship completions; to real partnerships with community sector organizations seeking to re-engage young people; and to building school and intermediary partnerships into the core business of enterprises.

For our political parties, and more importantly for Australia as a whole, an integrated approach to tackling youth engagement in learning and work, skills attainment and personal development will yield dividends for young people, their parents, communities, educators and industry.





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