Understanding Youth Pathways

Research Conference 2001

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Introduction

ACER is very pleased to host our sixth national Research Conference. The research conferences have provided a significant national forum for reviewing current research-based knowledge in key areas of educational policy and practice.

Research Conference 2001 brings together key researchers, policy makers and practitioners from a broad range of social policy areas from around Australia and overseas to better understand the interactions between the intentions of pathways planners and the decisions of young people and their families, and how these can be strengthened and better informed.

The conference will provide a ‘state-of-the-art’ review of:

- what is known about youth pathways in Australia – what pathways are available and chosen by different groups of young people, what factors shape access and success, and what are young people’s views on their opportunities and constraints?
- the major directions in which Australian policy and practice on pathways are heading;
- how Australian developments compare with major trends overseas;
- evidence on the impact of new forms of pathways, and the factors that seem to be important for their success;
- the main at-risk groups towards which policy attention needs to be directed; and
- the priorities for future research.

ACER is particularly pleased that participants in this conference have a diversity of backgrounds in addition to education and training. One of the key lessons from research on improving young people’s pathways is that the issues are too complex and wide-ranging to be tackled by educators working in isolation. We hope that one of the main outcomes of the conference will be the identification of effective models for integrating services for young people, and for engaging young people themselves in that process.

Discussion of pathways issues is timely given the release in May 2001 of Footprints to the Future, the report of the Prime Minister’s Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce. Related initiatives also are underway in a number of states: for example, the 2000 Kirby Report on post-compulsory education and training in Victoria.

ACER research, with its focus on improving learning for all young people, has made important contributions to these policy deliberations. For over 20 years we have conducted the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) program and its predecessors. These studies have been conducted in partnership with the Commonwealth government, and with the assistance of all state, territory and non-government school authorities. LSAY data provide a rich and unique perspective on young people’s pathways from school to work and adult life, and will feature in several of the conference sessions. Improved learning outcomes by young people, and a stronger sense of engagement with learning over their lifetimes, are the platform upon which pathways policies need to be built. ACER’s Professional Resources Division provides a variety of tools and services to help educators and other professionals in these tasks.
We are especially pleased that Research Conference 2001 includes a number of high quality plenary speakers and concurrent session presenters from around Australia and overseas. These speakers have invested considerable time and effort in developing informative and challenging presentations, and their efforts are greatly appreciated.

On behalf of ACER I also would like to record my appreciation of the work of the Conference Planning Committee and of all those involved in bringing this significant gathering together.

We are sure that the papers and discussions from this Conference will make a major contribution to the international literature and debate on understanding and improving young people’s pathways.

(Prof) Geoff N Masters
Executive Director, ACER
Background to the conference

The following document was prepared for the Conference Planning Committee by Phil McKenzie, ACER in January 2001. It provided the rationale for “Understanding Youth Pathways” being identified as the theme of the 2001 ACER annual Research Conference.

The concept of “pathways” has been a powerful organising idea in Australian education and training over the past 10 years. The imagery of the pathway, with its sense of order and structure, and linked education and training experiences that lead to employment, has had a significant impact on Australian policy at both state and federal level.

Australia has not been alone in engaging in “pathways engineering”. As the recent OECD comparative review of education-to-work transitions in 14 countries reported, most countries have been attempting to make the pathways by which young people move from school to work more attractive, open and flexible, and to provide more opportunities to combine vocational learning with general education (OECD, Making Transitions Work, 2000). A common motivation in these policy initiatives has been the desire to better prepare young people for an increasingly uncertain economic and social future.

In late 1999 the Prime Minister established the Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce. The Taskforce attempted to develop a set of policy directions that will provide a more coherent notion of pathways for all young people, with particular attention to those for whom secondary schooling is least attractive, and who may lack access to other social support services. Interestingly, the Taskforce’s terms of reference are concerned with young people’s transition to independence, broadly defined, and not just to work. This orientation presumably reflects a view that, at any one time, transitions are underway in a variety of aspects of young people’s lives, and that the rate and direction of transition on any one of these aspects can affect the likelihood of successful transitions on the others. Although the Taskforce’s report has not yet been released, its cross-sectoral and cross-portfolio membership suggests that it will also be adopting a much broader perspective on how to equip and sustain young people and their families as they navigate increasingly complex and lengthy pathways.

At state level, the Kirby Report (2000) in Victoria argued for strengthening the information and counselling services available to young people and families to support them in the pathways they follow or in many cases forge. The report also argued for a more active role for individual schools, regions and education authorities in monitoring the pathways that young people are following, and in co-ordinating early intervention programs for those judged to be at risk.

Analysing pathways

Despite all of the activity around the pathways area in recent years, it is not clear that there is a commonly shared understanding of what the concept actually means and how it can be applied in education, training and other social policy domains. Although many individual studies abound, there has been little drawing together of the empirical evidence as to what types of young people follow different sorts of pathways, the destinations that they lead to, and the factors that determine access and success.
The pathways concept has proven difficult to apply and identify empirically. Most attempts have used one of two approaches:

- By what policy makers intend. This approach focuses on the institutional and formal opportunities that various countries have in place or are implementing. This tends to be the forward-looking perspective on pathways. The limitation of this approach is that the pathways may be more symbolic than real.

- By what young people do. This approach focuses on the journeys that young people make, or the itineraries they follow, which may not always coincide with the formal structures on offer. However, this tends to be the retrospective perspective on pathways: you only know that a pathway exists once some young people have gone down it.

The need is for an approach that recognises that a “system” of pathways results from an interaction between the pathways designs and reforms of policy makers on one hand, and the decisions by young people and their families on the other.

**Purposes and themes**

The 2001 Research Conference provides an opportunity to bring together key researchers, policy makers and practitioners from a broad range of social policy areas from around Australia to better understand the interactions between the intentions of pathways designers and the decisions of young people, and how these can be strengthened and better informed.

There has not yet been a national conference in Australia that has focused on youth pathways, despite the prominence given to the area in policy and practice. The conference will attempt to provide a “state-of-the-art” review of:

- what is known about youth pathways in Australia – what pathways are available and are chosen by different groups of young people, what are the factors that shape access and success, and what are young people’s views on their opportunities and constraints;
- the major directions in which Australian policy and practice on pathways are heading;
- how Australian developments compare with major trends overseas;
- evidence on the impact of new forms of pathways, and the factors that seem to be important for their success;
- the main at-risk groups towards whom policy attention needs to be directed; and
- the priorities for future research.

ACER is well-placed to co-ordinate the conference through the experience and insights gained through its own research, particularly the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) program which it manages jointly with DETYA, its links to the OECD’s transition review, and its contacts with a wide range of networks in education and other social policy areas.
1. Summaries of conference papers

This section of the conference proceedings includes summaries of plenary and concurrent papers. It should be noted that these are summaries, and not necessarily the full version of the paper as presented at the conference. The papers are presented in the order as shown on the conference program. (See pages 76–77.) Following the Conference the papers will be available on the ACER website: www.acer.edu.au
What are pathways? Concepts and evidence from cross-national research

David Raffe
University of Edinburgh

Professor David Raffe has worked at the University of Edinburgh's Centre for Educational Sociology since 1975, and he was its Director from 1987–2001 (jointly with Andrew McPherson to 1994). His research has covered various aspects of secondary and post-secondary education and transitions into the labour market. Recent and current projects include analyses of education-work transitions in Europe, comparative studies of post-16 policy, evaluations of vocational education and training, a comparison of the UK's four education and training systems and a study of the introduction of a unified system of post-compulsory education in Scotland. He was founding chair of the European Research Network on Transitions in Youth from 1992–97, and he has worked for the European Commission and on several European projects. He contributed the conceptual framework for the OECD’s ‘Pathways’ study, part of its VOTEC activity, in the early 1990s; his contributions to the OECD’s recent Review of the Transition from Initial Education to Working Life include authorship of the UK Background Report and participating as rapporteur in the review of Japan.

Introduction: what are pathways?

Pathways are first and foremost a metaphor. A metaphor conveys meaning, and the metaphor of pathways conveys particular features of young people’s educational routes to work. Thus, pathways are longer than a single step; they are diverse but they may interconnect; and they lead towards destination(s) but allow changes of direction. They need to be signposted. They may develop in an unplanned way, or they may be deliberately constructed or modified; the pathways metaphor links research with policy perspectives.

However, pathways are only a metaphor; they are neither a theory nor a rigorous analytical tool, and we must not let the metaphor run away with the analysis. Metaphors may convey unintended meanings or divert attention from important issues. The pathways metaphor is criticised for being linear, economistic and individualistic (e.g. Dwyer and Wyn, 1998). That is, it is criticised for ignoring the overlap of work and study and the varying directions and sequences of young people’s transitions; it is criticised for focusing on transitions to the labour market and neglecting family, household, health or lifestyle transitions; and it is criticised for ignoring social structure and the effects of gender, class and ethnic inequalities. These may be fair criticisms of the pathways metaphor; whether or not they are fair criticisms of ‘pathways research’ is harder to judge, partly because we cannot easily say what this research is. Little research carries an explicit ‘pathways’ label, and the pathways metaphor is imprecise. It can mean different things.

I will discuss three ways in which the pathways concept has been used to express aspects of young people’s transitions through education and work and to raise questions for research and policy. These three themes provide a frame within which I will summarise some of the themes of cross-national research, focusing on OECD countries.

Types of pathways

First, the metaphor of pathways is used to describe and contrast the main educational options after compulsory education. A recent example of this is the OECD’s Thematic Review of The Transition from Initial Education to Working Life, which distinguished ‘three principal types of pathways through upper-secondary education and beyond it to work or tertiary study’: general education pathways, school-based vocational pathways, and apprenticeship-type vocational pathways (OECD, 2000).

The questions for research and policy raised by this notion of pathways include: what are the strengths and weaknesses of each pathway, and what should their relative size be in a well-functioning transition system? These questions are more urgent in view of the prevailing trend of ‘academic drift’. In most countries the proportion of young people entering general pathways has increased, and the proportions entering vocational and especially apprenticeship-type pathways have tended to decline. In many countries vocational education is being squeezed upwards into the tertiary sector – where, incidentally, it often enjoys higher status.

Many countries are trying to halt academic drift, or even reverse it, and to revive their vocational pathways, especially apprenticeship. But should they bother? On the criterion of labour-market success, no pathway is consistently superior to the others. The general education pathway more often leads to tertiary education, but among secondary education leavers no pathway consistently leads to better employment chances, occupations or earnings. The relative returns to each pathway vary across labour-market outcomes, across programmes within each pathway, by gender, across countries and according to the method and data used to calculate them.

If we use other criteria for comparing pathways we find that the arguments are again balanced – and again
vary according to the national context:

- learning: can vocational education better integrate theoretical and applied learning, or should vocational skills be acquired after entry to regular employment, on a solid foundation of general education?
- motivation: are young people better motivated if we respect their current preferences, even if these lead to academic drift, or would more vocational education motivate the disaffected?
- social justice and inclusion: is the role of vocational education in ‘diverting’ less advantaged young people from the best opportunities more or less important than its role as a ‘safety-net’ against unemployment or low-skilled work? Does the motivational value of apprenticeship outweigh the excluding effects of its cyclical supply and skewed distribution by occupation and gender?
- pragmatism: is there really much we can do about it? Or is academic drift irreversible once it reaches a point where vocational education is trapped in a vicious circle of low status and low expectations?

The policy literature is full of warnings against transplanting apparently successful pathways such as the dual system to new contexts. The size, content and organisation of each pathway vary widely across countries. The main conclusion from the cross-national research is that contrasting arrangements can be equally viable, and that the best solution for any country depends on national circumstances and the position it is starting from. Maintaining a diversity of pathways is more important than maintaining a given size or character of any particular pathway.

Interconnectedness of pathways

The second use of the pathways concept focuses on the relationship between pathways and their interconnectedness. Once again, countries vary but the general trend is for different pathways or tracks to be brought closer together, or merged within a unified system: what colleagues and I have called the ‘unification’ of post-compulsory education and training systems (Raffe et al., 1998). Examples of ‘unifying’ trends and policies include: the integration of general and vocational curricula, curricular elements common to different pathways such as key qualifications, convergence in assessment and certification arrangements, qualifications frameworks, integrated schools, and common systems of governance, regulation and quality assurance.

Unification is a global trend but it takes different national forms. In many countries it includes the development of more coherent, flexible and interconnected systems of pathways. This is often pursued through ‘pathways engineering’, the remodelling of pathways systems to ensure adequate opportunities and to encourage desired levels or patterns of participation. For example, pathways engineers may construct ‘bridges’ from vocational programmes to higher education to encourage vocational participation; they may broaden pathways or defer decision points to attract people who want to keep their options open; they may lengthen pathways to unblock ‘dead-ends’; or they may introduce such measures as modularisation, credit transfer and qualifications frameworks to make the network of pathways more seamless (OECD, 1998).

Pathways engineering changes the opportunities, incentives, costs and constraints associated with participation in different educational programmes in order to influence patterns of participation and progression. It thus appeals to the rational element of young people’s decision-making. Now, the role of rational action compared with cultural (and other) factors in explaining behaviour is a contested issue, and researchers have shown that individual young people do not act in a procedurally rational way. Nevertheless, the assumption of rationality (or at least, of instrumentalism) can help to explain the aggregate outcomes of their decisions. And pathways engineering can point to successes, such as higher participation in vocational programmes which provide new pathways to higher education.

Nevertheless, pathways engineering is not a total solution, and pathways engineers face several general problems. First, they can only control parts of the system. Some sectors of education, such as the universities, may be beyond their direct control; and they cannot easily influence employers’ recruitment from different pathways, which may be an important source of opportunities and incentives. Second, in a time of rapid change the destinations of different pathways become less certain, and the power of any incentives is weakened. Third, to the extent that education is a positional good, concerned with selecting young people to positions in the labour market, then pathways engineers face the zero-sum problem: in the last analysis the stock of incentives is finite. This can be an argument for appealing to the non-rational as well as the rational bases of behaviour: for example, invoking positive symbols such as ‘Baccalauréat’, re-labelling training schemes as ‘apprenticeships’, or using vocational education to develop personal and occupational identities.

However – and this is the fourth problem – in a flexible pathway system it may be harder for vocational education to develop occupational identities or to maintain a distinctive vocational ethos, because its connections with occupational destinations are weaker and it is less insulated from the dominant academic ethos.
Pathways and navigations

The third use of the pathways concept is to illuminate young people's transitions through contrast with other metaphors. For example, the metaphor of **trajectories** expresses the influence of social structure on the speed and direction of individual movement – an influence which may be stronger and more durable than officially-designed pathways. The metaphor which best complements the pathways concept is that of **navigations**, which expresses young people's active role in shaping their lives within the opportunities and constraints that face them (Evans and Furlong, 1997). If the concept of pathways reflects a policy-making perspective, the concept of navigations reflects the perspective of the individuals who use pathways.

Treating pathways and navigations as complementary concepts can bring several benefits for research and policy. First, if we examine young people's own perspectives and transition behaviours we may look more critically at the 'maps' of educational pathways on which policy decisions are based. These official maps may bear little relation to the way that pathways are actually used, and policies based on them may be flawed. Second, the emphasis on young people's perspectives also reminds us that young people have to make different types of transitions. Family, household, leisure and health transitions all interact with educational and labour-market transitions, increasingly so as pathways become longer; researchers and policy-makers need a holistic perspective. Third, the concept of navigations links the pathways concept with changing guidance needs. Pathways need signposts, and young people must learn how to navigate them; longer and more complex pathways require new models of continuous, lifelong guidance, with a more holistic focus and new relationships between formal and informal guidance sources.

Above all, the metaphor of navigations draws attention to a current concern of both researchers and policy-makers: the active role of young people in shaping their own transitions. Has this active role declined, as pathways lengthen and young people's dependence is prolonged, or has it increased as young people exploit the flexibility of more interconnected pathways systems? Most researchers agree that youth transitions have become more 'individualised'; unfortunately, they do not agree about what this term means. Some commentators interpret individualisation as the triumph of 'agency' over 'structure': as meaning that young people have more control over their itineraries and that the influence of social structure, including inequalities of social class and gender, has diminished. However, the evidence tends to support an alternative interpretation, of 'structured individualisation': young people have more differentiated itineraries but they do not necessarily have more control over them. Many underlying inequalities and structural influences are as strong as ever, but they are obscured by an individualist culture and a policy climate which promotes individual responsibility for transitions.

Conclusion

What general conclusions can be drawn from the cross-national research on pathways? On the one hand, it shows that different countries' pathways systems face common trends, pressures and challenges. Academic drift, pressures for 'unification', social inequalities and social exclusion, individualisation, and so on are all, at some level of analysis, global trends. Cross-national research helps us to understand these trends and it provides a rich language with which to analyse possible policy responses. On the other hand, the paradoxical conclusion from cross-national research is that problems that are shared by different countries may require specific solutions which depend on the national context.

References


Early school leavers: who are they, why do they leave, and what are the consequences?

Gary Marks and Julie McMillan
Australian Council for Educational Research

10 September, 2001

Dr Gary Marks is a Principal Research Fellow at the Australian Council for Educational Research. He has been project manager of the LSAY project since 1996.

His LSAY publications include reports on Early School Leaving, Achievement in Literacy and Numeracy, Well-being, Youth Employment and Earnings, Participation in Year 12 and Higher Education, and Tertiary Entrance performance. He has worked on projects commissioned by the National Education Performance Monitoring Taskforce and is involved in the analysis of the PISA data.

Dr Julie McMillan is a Research Fellow at the Australian Council for Educational Research, where she works on the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth project. Her current research focuses on influences on the educational attainment and early labour market outcomes of young people. Dr McMillan previously worked at the Australian National University, where she developed a range of new measures of socioeconomic status and social class for use in Australian research. She has co-authored reports on the measurement of socioeconomic disadvantage among school and higher education students for the Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs and the National Education Performance Monitoring Taskforce.

Introduction

Three decades ago, the majority of teenagers in Australia left school before the completion of Year 12, and most moved relatively quickly into stable full time employment. Since the 1980s, however, a substantial increase in school retention rates has increased the age at which many young people enter the labour market. Furthermore, changes in the youth labour market mean that the pathway from school to work was not so clearly defined by the late 1990s. There are concerns that a proportion of young people, especially those who do not complete secondary school, are now at risk of experiencing a transition characterised by long periods of unemployment, interspersed with short periods of employment in low skilled, part time or casual jobs. Such experiences are likely to continue to have negative repercussions for the future labour market activities of this group of young people.

This paper addresses three broad issues:

• In the late 1990s, who left school before the completion of Year 12? Are the sociodemographic factors which exerted an influence in the past still influencing the educational pathways of young people?
• What are the reasons given by young people for leaving school early?
• What are the consequences of school non-completion in the immediate post-school years?

Data

Our analysis is based upon data from the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) project, which follows the experiences of young people as they move from school into post secondary education, training and work. A number of cohorts of young people have been surveyed as part of the LSAY program. In order to examine the influences on, and consequences of, leaving school in the late 1990s, data for this paper focuses on the cohort of young people who were in Year 9 in 1995, and examines their experiences up to 2000. The initial sample included 13,613 students from all states and school sectors, with approximately equal numbers of males and females. The students were surveyed in their school in 1995, where they completed a questionnaire about themselves and their families, and undertook reading comprehension and numeracy tests. Further data have been collected from this cohort on an annual basis. By 2000, 7,889 persons remained in the sample. All results have been weighted to correct for both the original sample design and the effects of attrition (Marks and Long, 2000). These data from the 1995 Year 9 cohort provide the most up-to-date and detailed information on recent school leavers in Australia. The results of an analysis of three older cohorts of Australian youth (Lamb, Dwyer and Wyn, 2000) are also used for comparative purposes in order to assess whether the profile of school non-completers has changed in recent decades.

Who are the ‘early school leavers’?

Approximately 9 per cent of the 1995 Year 9 cohort left school by the end of Year 10, and a further 13 per cent left before August of Year 12. Seventy-nine per cent of the cohort remained in secondary school until at least August of Year 12. For the purposes of this paper, we classify this latter group as ‘completers’.

Past research suggests that factors such as gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, region, school sector and achievement in middle schooling are related to the non-completion of school. A profile of young people who did not complete school in the 1980s and 1990s is presented in Table 1 and described below.
Gender: Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, boys were more likely than girls to leave before the completion of secondary school. Among the students who commenced Year 9 in 1995, 26 per cent of males compared with 16 per cent of females did not go on to complete secondary school, a gap of 10 percentage points. This gender gap has been relatively constant throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Multivariate analysis suggests that gender differences in school non-completion cannot be explained by gender differences in literacy and numeracy, or by other sociodemographic factors.

Socioeconomic background: Numerous studies have concluded that young people from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds are less likely to complete school than those from English-speaking backgrounds. However, school sector differences remain significant after controlling for other factors such as socioeconomic background, and literacy and numeracy.

Urban-rural differences: Rural students continue to be overrepresented amongst early school leavers, and the gap between rural and urban students in school non-completion did not decline between the early 1980s and the late 1990s. Of the students who attended Year 9 in rural and remote areas in 1995, 29 per cent left school before completing Year 12, compared with 26 per cent of students from regional areas, and 17 per cent of students from metropolitan areas. Furthermore, regional differences remain significant after controlling for a range of socioeconomic background and schooling factors.

School sector: School non-completion is substantially more common among students who attend government schools, than among those who attend Catholic or other independent schools. Of the Year 9 students who attended government schools in 1995, 26 per cent left school before the completion of Year 12, compared with 12 per cent of Catholic school students, and 11 per cent of independent school students. However, school sector differences have declined since the early 1980s. For example, the gap in non-completion between male and female students narrowed over the period.

Table 1: School non-completion by sociodemographic and academic characteristics, early 1980s to late 1990s (per cent).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Males</th>
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<th>Females</th>
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<td>1980/1</td>
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<td>1995</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Yr 10 cohort</td>
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<td>Yr 9 cohort</td>
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<td>Total cohort</td>
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<td>62</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>51</td>
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<td>Prof/managerial</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>Clerical/sales</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Skilled manual</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unskilled manual</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>21</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parents country of birth</td>
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<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
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<td>Non Eng. speaking country</td>
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<td>Independent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Literacy and numeracy</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Very high</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>Very low</td>
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Source: 1980/1, 1988/9 and 1992/3 Year 10 cohorts (Lamb, Dwyer and Wyn, 2000:18); 1995 Year 9 cohort (McMillan and Marks, forthcoming)
students attending government and independent schools declined from 46 percentage points in the early 1980s, to 19 percentage points in the late 1990s. Similarly for girls the gap has declined from 40 percentage points to 11 percentage points. While these school sector differences can be partially explained by differences in the socioeconomic and academic mix of students attending different school types, school sector nevertheless continued to exert a significant independent effect on school non-completion in the late 1990s.

Achievement in literacy and numeracy: Of the factors considered in this paper, achievement in literacy and numeracy has the strongest influence on school non-completion. Just under 40 per cent of students who were in Year 9 in 1995 and whose literacy/numeracy performance was very low (more than one standard deviation below the mean) did not complete school. In contrast, only 8 per cent of students whose performance was very high (more than one standard deviation above the mean) left school early. Multivariate analysis indicates that the effects of achievement on school non-completion cannot be explained by background factors such as gender, SES, ethnicity, region or school sector. Multivariate analysis also demonstrates that the effect of literacy and numeracy achievement is much stronger for leaving by the end of Year 10, than for leaving after the commencement of Year 11 but before the completion of Year 12.

Summary: During the last two decades, there has been a marked decrease in the proportion of young people in Australia who leave school before the completion of Year 12. Apparent retention rates rose dramatically during the 1980s and early 1990s, from 35 per cent in 1980 to 77 per cent in 1992. Since 1992 the holding power of schools has slightly declined, so that by 2000 the apparent retention rate was 72 per cent (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1984–2001). Throughout this period, low literacy and numeracy achievement in middle schooling has remained a strong influence on subsequent school non-completion. On a positive note, the influence of socioeconomic background and school sector on school non-completion declined. But despite these improvements, by the late 1990s, coming from a low SES family, attending a government school, being male, having Australian-born parents, and growing up in a non-metropolitan area still remained significant predictors of school non-completion.

Reasons for school non-completion: the views of young people

Another way of identifying factors that influence school non-completion is to ask young people themselves. These subjective explanations have the potential to provide a fuller understanding of the process of school leaving. Lamb, Wyn and Dwyer’s (2000) study of school non-completions from the early 1980s to the mid 1990s found that work-related factors such as “to do an apprenticeship” or ‘to get a job’ were the most common reasons given by non-completers (see also Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001:100).

Similar results are evident in the late 1990s (see Table 2). For nearly 80 per cent of the non-completers from the 1995 Year 9 cohort, wanting to get a job or apprenticeship was an important consideration in their decision to leave school. Furthermore, nearly half of the non-completers said that this was the main reason why they left school. The next most important reason was also work-related. About 76 per cent indicated that “to earn my own money” was an important consideration, although only 5 per cent indicated that this was their main reason for leaving school.

School-related factors were less prominent among the reasons given for non-completion. Less than a third of non-completers indicated that not liking school, not doing well at school, or the subject/course choice offered by the school was their main reason for leaving school. Very few students left school because of advice from teachers. Similarly, very few said they left school for financial reasons.

Table 2: Reasons for leaving school given by non-completers in the late 1990s (per cent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Important reason</th>
<th>Main reason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work-related reasons</td>
<td>I wanted to get a job/apprenticeship</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To earn my own money</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I wanted to do job training that wasn’t available at school</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School-related reasons</td>
<td>I didn’t like school</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I was not doing very well at school</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The school didn’t offer the subjects/courses I wanted to do</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers thought I should</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other reasons</td>
<td>Financially, it was hard to stay at school</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other reasons</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sample: LSA 1995 Year 9 cohort (n=1390)

1 For example, in a bivariate analysis of the Y95 data, the odds of leaving by the end of Year 10 for government school students were 2.7 times those for independent school students. After controlling for literacy and numeracy, socioeconomic background, and a range of other demographic factors, this odds ratio declined to 1.6. Similarly, the unadjusted odds ratio for later school leaving was 2.9, but this declined to 1.5 after controlling for other factors (McMillan and Marks, forthcoming).
Consequences of school non-completion

The results presented in Table 2 suggest that the majority of non-completers leave school in order to find employment. In the second half of this paper, we ask whether non-completers are disadvantaged in the labour market, by comparing the activities of those who left school before completing Year 12, with the activities of those who completed Year 12. Our analysis is restricted to the cohort of young people who were in Year 9 in 1995. By 2000, the modal age of the study participants was 19 years. Those who did not complete Year 12 had been out of school for up to five years, and the majority of the completers had been out of school for two years. Thus, these data represent the most up-to-date information on the early post school destinations of school leavers.

Post secondary education and training: Leaving school does not necessarily signify the end of formal education and training for non-completers. While very few returned to school or enrolled in university courses, 12 per cent had completed an apprenticeship or traineeship, and 31 per cent had completed other study by the end of 2000.

Nevertheless, in any given year, non-completers were much less likely than completers to engage in post secondary education and training. For example, in 2000, two-thirds of school completers, compared with only 35 percent of non-completers, were engaged in some form of post-secondary education and training (Table 3). Furthermore, the type of education and training undertaken by completers and non-completers differs. Non-completers were most commonly found in apprenticeships, followed by traineeships and other TAFE/non-degree study. Only 1 per cent were studying towards a bachelors or higher degree in 2001. In contrast, completers were concentrated in courses leading to bachelors and higher degrees (41 per cent in 2000).

The differential amount and type of education and training undertaken by completers and non-completers are likely to influence how the two groups fare in the labour market. In the remainder of the paper, we compare the early labour market experiences of non-completers with the experiences of young people who completed Year 12 but did not subsequently enter higher education in the immediate post-school years. Given the age of the study cohort, it is too early to examine the labour market outcomes of those who entered higher education, most of whom were still studying in late 2000.

Snapshot of activities: A snapshot of the education, training and labour market activities in 2000 of non-completers, and completers who did not enter higher education in the immediate post-school years, is presented in Table 4. There are five main points to note from this table:

- The majority (67 per cent) of non-completers were in full-time work. However, there were marked gender differences in the extent of full-time employment among this group. Just over three-quarters of male non-completers were working full-time, compared with only 55 per cent of female non-completers.

- Of the non-completers in full-time employment, just under half of the males were combining work with education and training in late 2000, either through new apprenticeships or other study. However, less than one third of female non-completers in full time work were combining work and study. Similar patterns are evident among the completers who did not enter higher education. This is somewhat concerning, as combining full-time work with study provides a means of increasing the skills base of young people who enter full-time work immediately or soon after leaving school.

Table 3: Participation in education and training in late 2000 (column per cent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Persons</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-completers</td>
<td>Completers</td>
<td>Non-completers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not in education or training</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In education or training</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rtn to school/sch. subj. at</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAFE</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprenticeship</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traineeship</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other TAFE/non-degree study</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelors or higher degree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Total N)</td>
<td>(1675)</td>
<td>(6176)</td>
<td>(1000)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sample: LSAY 1995 Year 9 cohort

2 It must be noted that both the non-completers and completers who do not gain a tertiary qualification are unlikely to enjoy the same labour market advantages as young people who undertake higher education (Lamb 2001:28–33).
• Non-completers were less likely than completers to be engaged in full-time study in late 2000, even after excluding completers in higher education from the analysis.

• Male non-completers were more likely than completers to report that they were not working but looking for work. About 12 per cent of male non-completers, compared with 6 per cent of male completers without higher education and 6–8 per cent of females, were unemployed in late 2000.

• Female non-completers were more likely than completers to be outside the labour force (and not studying). About 15 per cent of female non-completers who had been in Year 9 in 1995, compared with 4 per cent of female completers and 2–3 per cent of males, were not in the labour force in late 2000.

Table 4: Education, training and labour market activities in late 2000, by school completion status and gender (column per cent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Persons</th>
<th></th>
<th>Males</th>
<th></th>
<th>Females</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-completers</td>
<td>Completers not in higher ed.</td>
<td>Non-completers</td>
<td>Completers not in higher ed.</td>
<td>Non-completers</td>
<td>Completers not in higher ed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studying full-time</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working full-time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrolled in ed. and training</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not studying</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working part-time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time education and training</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not studying</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not working</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time education and training</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking for work</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not in the labour force</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Total N)</td>
<td>(1675)</td>
<td>(3222)</td>
<td>(1000)</td>
<td>(1595)</td>
<td>(675)</td>
<td>(1627)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Includes apprenticeships, traineeships and part-time study
Sample: LSAY 1995 Year 9 cohort

Types of jobs obtained: The types of jobs first obtained after entering the labour market can influence earnings and later labour market outcomes. Marks and Fleming (1999:24) argued that the clustering of early school leavers in jobs that typically have limited opportunities for advancement (males in unskilled manual work, and females in sales and personal service work) is potentially problematic. This is especially the case for those in part time or casual work that is not coupled with study, as this type of work is highly concentrated in relatively low skill occupations in relatively low paying industries where there is limited access to training and promotion opportunities (Wooden, 1998).

The types of jobs held in late 2000 by non-completers and completers not in higher education are presented in Table 5. Focusing first on persons in full-time work, non-completers were less likely than completers to obtain white collar jobs (37 per cent of non-completers, compared with 62 percent of completers not in higher education, were employed full-time in managerial, professional, clerical, sales or personal service work). In contrast, non-completers were more likely than completers to obtain trades and semi/unskilled manual work.

The occupational profile of those in part-time work in 2000 differs from that of full-time workers. The majority of both school non-completers and school completers in part-time work held clerical/sales/personal service jobs. Relatively few were found in the highest occupational category or in skilled trades positions, supporting the concern that part-time work is concentrated in relatively low-skill occupations that provide limited access to training and promotion opportunities. Non-completers in part-time work do not appear to be more or less disadvantaged in this regard than completers in part-time work.
Job mobility: A recurrent concern in the literature relating to early school leavers, is that they are at greater risk of moving in and out of jobs; that is, they have difficulty obtaining relatively stable jobs. In the study cohort, there is evidence of a high degree of job mobility (or instability) among non-completers (see Table 6). However, the amount of job mobility decreased/stabilised the longer these young people were in the labour market. For example, among the non-completers who left after the commencement of Year 11, about half experienced a job change between 1997 and 1998, but by the 1999 to 2000 period, this had fallen to 37 per cent.

Table 6: Percentage of employed young people who were in a different job to that held 12 months previously.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1997</th>
<th>1998</th>
<th>1999</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-completers who left school by the end of Year 10</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-completers who left school during Year 11 or Year 12</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completers who did not enter higher education</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Panel 1: Full-time jobs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Non-completers</th>
<th>Completers not in higher ed.</th>
<th>Non-completers</th>
<th>Completers not in higher ed.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Managerial/prof/para-prof</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical/sales/personal serv.</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trades</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi/unskilled manual</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Total N)</td>
<td>(1104)</td>
<td>(1904)</td>
<td>(751)</td>
<td>(1012)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Panel 2: Part-time jobs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Non-completers</th>
<th>Completers not in higher ed.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Managerial/prof/para-prof</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical/sales/personal serv.</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trades</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi/unskilled manual</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Total N)</td>
<td>(197)</td>
<td>(784)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Job mobility should not necessarily be viewed as a completely negative experience for the non-completers. For many, the immediate post-school period represents a settling in period, where they move between jobs in an attempt to find the types of work or careers they most like. For example, the most common reasons given by non-completers for changing jobs between 1999 and 2000 were either to get a better job (31 per cent) or because they were not satisfied with the job (37 per cent). Considerably smaller proportions of the non-completers who changed jobs indicated that it was because they had been laid off (8 per cent) or that it was a temporary job (9 per cent).

Young people’s views about their jobs and careers: Finally, we look at non-completers views about the type of work they had obtained. By 2000, the vast majority of employed non-completers in the sample were fairly satisfied or very satisfied with various aspects of their jobs, and there were no differences between the work satisfaction levels of non-completers and completers who had not undertaken higher education (see Table 7). However, this should not be used as grounds for complacency, as in each year since leaving school, only about 55–58 per cent of employed non-completers indicated that their job was the type of job they would like as a career.

Table 7: Percentage of employed young persons who were fairly satisfied or very satisfied with various aspects of their work in late 2000.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Non-completers</th>
<th>Completers not in higher ed.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The kind of work you do</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The tasks you are assigned</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your immediate boss or supervisor</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The people you work with</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The pay you get</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition you get for tasks well done</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities for training</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your opportunities for promotion</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sample: LSAY 1995 Year 9 cohort (n=3886)

Summary: The second half of this paper has examined the consequences of school non-completion in the immediate post-school years. The most common reason given by non-completers for leaving school was to gain employment, and the majority (67 per cent)
were indeed in full-time employment in late 2000. Furthermore, the majority of employed non-completers displayed high levels of work satisfaction, and over half were in the type of job they would like as a career. Job mobility, while high, was mostly in order to obtain better jobs.

However, the picture is not completely positive. Even by the age of 19, some differences in the post school activities of non-completers and completers had emerged. Non-completers were less likely to engage in post-secondary education and training, especially in degree-level courses. They were also likely to experience less successful transitions from school to work: male non-completers were more likely to be unemployed, and female non-completers were more likely to be outside the labour force (and not studying), than were completers who had not undertaken higher education. Furthermore, those non-completers experiencing problematic transitions were disproportionately drawn from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and displayed lower literacy and numeracy levels. Of those who entered full-time work, non-completers were clustered in blue collar occupations, while completers were clustered in relatively higher status white collar work. Differences between the labour market activities of completers and non-completers are likely to become even more pronounced once the school completers in the study cohort who were undertaking higher education in the late 1990s/2000 complete their studies and enter the full-time labour market.

Conclusion

Our findings suggest a number of areas requiring ongoing policy attention. First, as the completion of secondary schooling has implications for subsequent education, training and labour market outcomes, there is an ongoing need to ensure that school non-completion rates are minimised. The second is an equity issue. Despite improvements in the school completion rates for some equity groups, by the late 1990s non-completers were still disproportionately drawn from low socioeconomic backgrounds, government schools, males, the offspring of Australian-born parents, and non-metropolitan areas. Targeted policy initiatives designed to improve the school participation rates of these groups remain necessary. The third issue relates to literacy and numeracy levels. Young people who have attained high literacy and numeracy levels by Year 9 are more likely to complete secondary school, and even if they do not complete school, they are more likely to experience positive labour market outcomes in the early post-school years. Thus, improving the literacy and numeracy skills of young people requires ongoing attention. Finally, while the majority of non-completers obtain full-time employment after leaving school, some do experience difficulties in making the transition to stable full-time work in the initial post-school years. These initial difficulties may have ongoing implications for future labour market outcomes, and as such, there is a need to identify and provide intensive assistance for the subgroup of non-completers who experience difficulties in making the transition from school to work.

References

The inequities in learning opportunities and outcomes are well known between metropolitan and non-metropolitan1 regions in Australia. The inequities within non-metropolitan Australia are much less well conceptualised, known or theorised. This paper is designed to encourage thinking about what are postulated to be great and inequitable divides in learning opportunities and outcomes for people, particularly young people, in many, but not all, rural and remote towns. These divides have important implications for youth pathways beyond the cities in Australia in 2001.

Introduction

The necessary brevity of this paper does not allow for a full explication of the points enumerated below. All points have been made and referred to by the author in previous or in progress research (Golding, 2001; Golding and Rogers, in progress 2001). They were selected for inclusion based on their ability to provoke and facilitate speculative thinking about youth learning pathways more broadly rather than school-based pathways per se.

The emphasis in the paper on accessibility to a range of learning pathways within non-metropolitan Australia is deliberate. Without access to basic services, including services required for people of all ages to learn, families with children will not move to or stay in rural and remote areas of Australia. The paper is also underpinned by a critique of learning pathways as ‘highways to somewhere’. While the penalties for not learning are severe and increasing for all young people, the viable pathways are most limited for those who get ‘off track’ (early school leavers, people with low formal literacy, people without access to or encouragement from a family or community learning culture).

Pathways tend, ironically, to be postulated by governments in contexts where outcomes are most uncertain and uncertainty is most extreme and problematic. Formal pathways in rural and remote areas are more limited than in any other context in Australia. Facilitation of pathways will therefore be less amenable to learning models which are metro-centric (city-centred), mono-sectoral and which assume a progression of learning by age. There is more of a need in non-metropolitan contexts to consider lifelong learning rather than schooling, and learning communities rather than learning organisations. But first there is a need to recognise the internal inequities. As Horne (2001) recently suggested, “making country dwellers all seem the same may gain votes, but it can prevent realistic policy making and it can do harm by making country dwellers seem more different than they are from other Australians” (cited in The Age, 1 September, 2001, Extra 7).

Accessibility to learning is inequitable within non-metropolitan Australia

The existing inequities in education in Australia are not explained by simplistic division between ‘Sydney or the bush’. Many of the worst inequities in terms of access to learning are found between particular areas and groups in non-metropolitan Australia. If accessibility is defined as living within 80 km from a service (Haberkorn and Bamford, 2000), remote Indigenous communities remain the most disadvantaged. For example more than one third of Indigenous people (35.8 per cent) in the Northern Territory live more than 80 km from a school compared to only one in 20 non-Indigenous people.

Nationally, the number of Indigenous people without accessibility to basic services exceeds the number of non-Indigenous people without accessibility to basic services: by a factor of 42 in the case of schools, 37 for post offices, 32 for pharmacies and general practitioners and 26 for banks and 13 for TAFEs.

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1 Non-metropolitan is used in this paper to refer to communities and with less than 50 000 people.
Almost counter intuitively, the more basic the level of service, the more inaccessible the service is likely to be in remote Indigenous communities.

The inequities are also partly explained by political boundaries. Haberkorn and Bamford’s data (2000) suggest that young people living in small communities in inaccessible towns are much more likely not to have access: to schools in the Northern Territory, to TAFE in Queensland and to universities in New South Wales. There are 64 communities in Queensland with more than 200 people who are more than 80 km from a TAFE, ten of which have populations of more than 2000. There are 86 communities in New South Wales and Queensland with more than 200 people who are more than 80 km from a university.

The pathways and inequities go well beyond the normal and the formal

In small and remote communities where formal learning organisations offering accredited learning become less viable, the options for young people to learn through community owned and managed organisations become more important. The role of community owned and managed forms of adult and community education (ACE; see Golding, Davies and Volkoff, 2001), and of surrogate adult learning organisations (e.g. CFA, SES), in supporting learning by people of all ages in rural and remote areas is poorly recognised. Again, accessibility to ACE is inequitable, though the largest inequities are across state and territory boundaries. ACE only exists and is comprehensively supported in its government-supported, community-owned and managed form, in New South Wales and particularly Victoria. By comparison, the ACE option is very limited in most other states.

The options for young people who fall foul of the justice system are also extremely inequitable. Yet again, the inequity is across state and territory boundaries. Around one half of the corrections education and training in Australia in prisons and juvenile justice systems is delivered by or through TAFE. In most other cases, the accessibility to quality, accredited corrections education is very limited. In Queensland, Western Australia and Northern Territory in particular, such options are most limited.

The desire for learning is strongest in the smallest and remotest places

Contrary to some stereotypes, the strongest desire and need for learning is in the smallest and remotest places. People operating small businesses and family enterprises in such remote contexts have to do it all. The days when many farms and shops employed several people, including young people who were specialists for particular tasks, has long gone. The remote owner is often the operator, the worker and also an external contractor. The feasibility of buying in skills is limited. If young people are to remain and be employed in the area or town of their birth they need a wide range of highly developed skills: not just in producing but also in accounting, managing, coordinating and marketing.

As in many other Australian communities, the world of work in rural and remote communities has changed radically. The idea of one waged job for one employer for life has gone. Many people work off farm or out of their communities at a range of insecure and part time jobs, some of which are their own enterprises or contracting businesses. The skills to work in this way are not obtainable through traditional education and training pathways or from training packages. For all of these reasons, the option of leaving town for an education, training or job are often preferable to eking out a difficult or marginal existence in a declining family business.

Small and remote towns are not all happy families

While all small rural and remote communities are different, they share a strong sense of loyalty to place. With this sense of loyalty comes a suspicion and mistrust of ‘outsiders’. Many rural and remote communities have experienced a recent influx of new people: to set up small businesses, to take up cheap housing, as economic refugees from cities, as fragments of families returning home. The tensions created in the interactions between the old and the new, the conservative and the radical, the locals and ‘blow-ins’, those who have and those who are on welfare, are real and widespread.

Problems are particularly acute wherever local learning organisations or service providers are controlled by conservative, local people and where people are overtly or covertly excluded, through racism or sexism or ageism, for example. There are particular tensions within local learning organisations around the distinction between ‘welfare-type’ provision of services and learning offered as fee for service. Models of learning provision, welfare and labour market support underpinned by competition policy and a bounty of the disadvantaged serve only to fuel the existing tensions.

Online learning as a stand alone learning tool to 2001 is dead in the water

There is a wide range of initiatives to promote and establish online learning as the solution to all issues associated with learning flexibility and a lack of face to face access in rural and remote areas. There is no evidence upto 2001 to suggest that online learning can
or should be a stand alone learning tool. The advantages of the internet for communication are clear. The ability to deliver programs and the necessary support for learners online has not been demonstrated economically, practically or pedagogically. Most existing online programs and other forms of flexible delivery are provider rather than client driven.

In rural and remote areas most learning is valued for its ability to connect people to others, to their communities and to a wider body of knowledge and experience. Online learning to date has generally not been able to achieve such connections. The prerequisites to learn online are generally not there except in rare instances where motivation, lack of alternatives, technological skill and existing networks coalesce.

**Young people are limited in their local learning options**

Apart from the primary schools in most small rural and isolated communities and the secondary colleges in the larger towns, people in small rural and isolated communities do not generally have access to the same range of learning organisations and services as those dedicated to youth or adults in larger, metropolitan communities. As a consequence, learning pathways for young people have to be locally grown and supported, beyond the formal, through collaboration, involving mentoring, through community owned and managed providers. The opportunity for young people to get educational and vocational qualifications is locally limited. Many rural and remote communities have aging communities. At best, small towns have organisations which support learning dedicated to and run by older people.

Many small towns are only able to support young post-compulsory learners through collaboration with local schools. Young people alienated or disengaged from the school experience are therefore doubly disadvantaged. The opportunity for young people to find a learning organisation they trust and to be locally connected to learning depends largely on local circumstance. The best opportunities are available where people think and act collaboratively: beyond sectors, across ages, inclusive of both men and women, through existing networks, with employers, across and beyond governments, through local learning leaders and community owned and managed organisations.

**Men in particular are disengaged from learning in most non-metropolitan communities**

With the exception of some mainly male community learning organisations (e.g. CFA, SES), there is a tendency for most other adult learning organisations in small towns to be managed, controlled, staffed and patronised primarily by women. Australian non-metropolitan men are comprehensively excluded as learners of all ages for a range of reasons, as McGivney (1999b) comprehensively demonstrated in Britain. Partly as a consequence, young men have few adult learning models or mentors. Whichever sector or field of study one looks at beyond the traditional manual trades, women are out-participating and outperforming men of all ages in non-metropolitan areas in all areas of formal and informal learning.

Women appear better at making a link at an early age between the need to keep learning and employability. Men are relatively slow learners in this area. Men are generally less able in country communities to adapt to the changing economy, to a world of part time and insecure work. They are also less able to adapt to not working, to reconnect after experiencing adversity or to create and use community networks. Disengagement and exclusion of men is a time bomb in many non-metropolitan communities, not only for young people.

**It is possible to identify areas friendly as well as hostile to youth**

The natural, cultural and social environments most under threat in non-metropolitan Australia tend to be those which are most remote and out of sight of people in cities: including those areas which are not amenable to the creation of recreational environments and theme parks for metropolitan tourists. People generally, and young people in particular, tend not to choose to move to or remain within areas with high remoteness (ARIA, 1999) or limited accessibility, other than where the natural environment includes forests, water, waves or snow.

There are strong links between sustainable natural environments and sustainable young communities. The most endangered natural environments are sympatric with the most marginal non-Indigenous communities in remote range lands and riverine areas, which lack the above attractions and which are aging. Previously and currently forested areas closest to cities and the well watered, temperate coast are the most attractive and preferred non-metropolitan lifestyle choices. The same areas are preferred for new enterprises, retirement and investment.

People making active choices to move to non-metropolitan areas appear to be seeking out three apparently contradictory attributes:

- relatively isolated, pristine and attractive frontier-type, natural environments (preferably with water or coast) coupled with the associated occupational and recreational freedoms;
• neighbourhoods which are small, people friendly, safe, inexpensive and caring; and
• communities and towns with the potential to grow, accessible by commuting distance to larger centres, with a full suite of public and community (including learning) services.

Where all three attributes are found in combination, ‘lifestyle’ areas develop. For most young people, the learning pathways and employment opportunities are relatively good compared to the flatter, dryer and non-coastal communities.

Accessibility is a dynamic attribute: people have choices

Given the choice, most non-Indigenous Australians factor accessibility highly into the decision tree if they live outside capital cities. These choices are clear in relation to recent trends in population growth. People are tending to choose non-metropolitan areas accessible to major existing centres, to recreational opportunities and to beaches. Hugo (2001, p60) noted that patterns of population change in non-metropolitan Australia vary according to the degree of accessibility or remoteness. In effect, there are declining and aging populations with increasing distance from large cities, except at the very remote (Indigenous community) range.

Isolation from a whole suite of services is most marked in Indigenous communities. The next most isolated and inaccessible communities are in rangelands and riverine environments, though the effects are less well recognised because of the small size and remoteness from city-based media and politicians. These communities are also most likely not to have public transport to commute within the zones or to access services outside the zones. Young people are most disadvantaged where service accessibility is most limited. For example non-accessibility to TelstraMobile phone range in 2000 correlated strongly with non-metropolitan disadvantage.

Some demographic attributes correlate with urbanisation. Positive correlations between urbanisation (Natural Labour Market size) include:
• unemployment (that is unemployment increases with urbanisation);
• employment in the finance and property and business sector;
• employment in professional and advanced or intermediate clerical occupations;
• attendance at a university or TAFE;
• completed higher level qualifications (associate diploma, bachelor degree, higher degree); and
• stocks of post-compulsory skills.

Some demographic attributes consistently increase with remoteness. Positive correlations between remoteness identified by Guenther include:
• employment in mining (that is employment in mining increases with remoteness);
• employment of labourers; and
• non-attendance at an educational institution.

There are some correlations with population growth

Whether a non-metropolitan area is growing or declining in population has a big impact socially and economically. It has a similarly large effect on the perceived need for learning locally and the likelihood of learning being available to young people. Hugo (2001, pp59–60) noted that areas of population growth are strongly concentrated in:
• the areas surrounding metropolitan areas;
• some resort and retirement areas;
• some regional centres; and
• along the Hume Highway linking Sydney to Melbourne.

There are some correlations with learning opportunities and employment

The learning opportunities in non-metropolitan growth regions are relatively good. By contrast, communities with a declining population tend to have an aging, remnant or relic populations. Hugo (2001, p60) identifies a declining population in:
• ‘all dry farming areas of the wheat sheep belt’;
• many pastoral areas in central Australia; and
• declining industrial cities.

Superimposed on this are doughnut-shaped patterns of population decline between 150 and 300 km from the capital cities (J Guenther, unpublished data, CRLRA 1999). There is an almost universal loss of youth 15–19 years old but up to age 34 from non-metropolitan areas for educational and employment reasons. At age 35 to 39 the drift is reversed, as some individuals and families move back to their families or home towns.
Income tends to increase with urbanisation and decrease with remoteness (J Guenther, unpublished data, CRLRA 1999) other than in the mining communities. Urbanisation is associated with professional qualifications and occupations, particularly within 300 km of capital cities. There is a parallel increase in clerical occupations with urbanisation.

**Adult learning accessibility varies across non-metropolitan Australia**

Formal post-compulsory education, particularly university education, is generally attained in cities. Attendance at tertiary institutions correlates with urbanisation (J Guenther, unpublished data, CRLRA 1999). The only positive correlation with distance from a capital city is non-attendance at a tertiary institution. Attendance at TAFE Institutes tends to be linked to urban population size, particularly in communities from 150 km to 700 km around the capital cities. Tertiary qualifications also tend to increase with urbanisation. The stocks of post-compulsory skills reaches its peak in learning communities with 100 000 or more people (20.4%) and is lowest for communities below 20 000 (between 15% and 16%).

It is not just formal learning. There is a widespread recognition in non-metropolitan Australia that lifelong learning and the knowledge it produces is valuable in all its forms, at all levels and for all purposes. The vocational is unable to be simply distinguished from learning ‘for interest’ in terms of content, competencies, intent, experience or outcome.

**Summary**

There is a delicious, double irony in the words of the Australian poet A. D. Hope ‘from deserts the prophets come’ as it relates to Australia. The old Australian ethos is of a wide brown land ripe for picking profits. A more recent idea of Australia is that it is one of the most highly urbanised countries in the world with a sparsely populated hinterland which has been largely picked over, globalised, rationalised and partly abandoned. Superimposed on these ideas is Australia’s persistent and adaptive Indigenous culture as well as an increasingly diverse multicultural present.

Whichever view or combination of views is taken as accurate, people and the economic pickings in remote areas continue to change and adapt to the new economy. Some of the new economy is about new forms of irrigation, agriculture, horticulture, aquaculture, forestry and mining with new opportunities for young people. In every case it is about value-adding: to the quality of the product, to the packaging, to the distribution and marketing. However some new environmental and economic problems emerge in the process: particularly with over-commitment of inland rivers and salinization. Globalised markets have winners and losers. The future of many Australian country towns is very much on the line (Rogers and Collins, 2001). Some towns have lost and others have gained. Some have been fortunate enough to be on a major tourist route or arterial highway. Others have an existing tourist attraction or icon. Many others have creatively marketed or manufactured one. It is those 11 000 small towns and populated localities in Australia which are small, remote and have no feature or opportunity attractive to or recognised by outsiders which are in most trouble as learning communities and most difficult for young people.

Cities still require that the resources and profits (and prophets) come from the remote though populated plains, forests, deserts and rangelands, though in a different mix. People in cities most value and guard those parts of non-metropolitan Australia where their peri-urban home, beach house and re-creational playground is increasingly likely to be located. The beaches, the ski slopes, the camping and fishing spots are protected. What people know best is likely to be most valued.

The largely leased rangelands have been over-exploited. The inland rivers on their margins have been drained of their redistributed waters and also their young people. Both areas are in most trouble: ecologically and economically. They are second only to remote Indigenous communities in terms of their poor exposure to lifelong leaning and their greatest susceptibility to unanticipated unsustainability.

The increased need for informal learning in the community is widely recognised (McGivney, 1999a). The need for learning which empowers rural communities, including their young people, to renew and remain is acute (Kenyon and Black, 2001). The fact that most rural learning at the level of community is being done and facilitated by women is mirrored in international research (McGivney, 1999b). The issue of what happens to the young people who leave and the excluded rural men are unexplored issues ripe for research.

Some of the contemporary thinking about the ‘dead heart’ of ‘quarry Australia’ goes back to the lie of terra nullius. The land beyond the forests and heavily populated margins is not and was not empty of people or young people. Learning and sustainability in such areas is inextricably linked to the history and future of Australia. The inequities are obvious. Adult and youth learning pathways in communities which comprise the majority of Australia’s land area are in crisis in 2001. If metropolitan Australians want to see it, it starts where the mobile phone reception ends. It is beyond the range of most learners in Australia where the needs to learn to change are most profound.
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Australian society has changed considerably over the last few generations. In many aspects we seem to be ‘better off’. A recent ranking for Australia as second best country in the world in which to live, after Norway, substantiates this. However, there are those who would argue that the fabric of our society might be becoming threadbare and fragile.

The impact of change

The media bombards our senses with seemingly never-ending instances of global, national and local tragedy, conflict and catastrophe. Societies are more complex, unstable and competitive than ever before and economic and social innovations seem to be the pivotal driving forces. As individuals, we are under pressure to perform in a world that changes so swiftly we struggle to keep up. Our world grows increasingly unpredictable and for many of us the future seems uncertain. We live with inconsistent and negative messages about boundaries and values. Our communities are fragmented, with an emphasis on privacy and civic disengagement rather than shared vision and commitment. Families face unprecedented challenges and operate in isolation, silence, mistrust and age segregation. We appear to be immersed in what Garbarino terms ‘socially toxic societies’.

Macy suggests there is a “numbing of the psyche... (where) energy expended in suppressing despair is diverted from more creative uses, depleting resilience and imagination needed for fresh visions and strategies”. Those who seem particularly vulnerable are young people. They are frequently characterised as having a “propensity towards recklessness” or deviance and referred to as: ‘victims of poverty’, ‘problems of society’, ‘alienated from community’, (or) ‘disengaged from democracy’. These are the types of images that permeate the popular media, social science, and professional practice. This view assumes that young people are deficient or vulnerable members of society.

Hugh Mackay argues that because our current young people have grown up in a period of accelerating change, they have learned to expect change. “Being the children of change, change is not much of an issue: it is the air they breathe; it is simply the way the world is”. He calls our young people the ‘options generation’, postponing commitments, waiting to see what tomorrow brings, ‘hanging loose’. They have lived with high unemployment; they know that the jobs they want might not exist when they are ready for them; they don’t expect an employer to take them on ‘forever’: they have abandoned a “straight-line approach to work”.

You may be aware that the term ‘adolescence’ is relatively recent. It was first used by Hall in a 1905 psychology text and the term ‘teenagers’ was first coined in the USA in the 1940s to identify adherents of the then pop music culture. Yet, interestingly, perceiving youth as a problem isn’t a new phenomenon. Historically this goes back a long way, but media and social researchers treated it as if were conceptualised in the 1950s.

“Youth is such a slippery concept”. When does it start and finish? Most would agree that it is defined by the period that marks the physical, psychological and

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social transition into adulthood but then we all know of someone who has not quite completed that leap! The United Nations define young people as those up to the age of 18, while many policies consider youth to be from age 13 to age 2514.

The concept of ‘youth’

But what does ‘at risk’ really mean? Historically, the term was used for physical illness15 like ‘at risk’ for Tuberculosis or infant mortality. Now it is predominantly consigned to behaviours and is bandied around so often that I sometimes wonder what the people who use it think it means. Those in health related areas use it to identify people in danger of contracting disease or undertaking health compromising behaviours. Social workers use it to distinguish those who are in socio-cultural situations that may be hazardous to their well-being, integrity, or development. Educationists use it to monitor school retention or to indicate those with gaps in their knowledge and skills which may impact on their futures. Law and justice personnel use it to demarcate people who have the propensity to become involved in criminal activity or those who seem more likely to suffer the effects of violence, abuse or crime. It is interesting however, to observe that these delineations among service sectors are becoming increasingly blurred. For example drug trafficking and use can be not only criminal ‘problems’ but also ‘problems’16 within the social ecology of young people’s lives.

There is a body of work that challenges the term ‘at risk’. As an example, most of us here would probably consider early school leavers to be ‘at risk’. That would be our perception, our conceptualisation. However, earlier this year, the Queensland Department of Families published a paper by Johanna Wyn based on the Youth Research Centre’s project on young people’s pathways through school, post-compulsory education and training and work. Wyn’s research reveals that young people whom we might perceive as having restricted chances “still define their lives in terms of choice”17. They are choosing to leave school or their careers, negotiating alternatives and struggling to control their lives. In this instance they do not always see school completion and career acquisition as their ‘pathways’ to success. Success for the post-1970 generation is not restricted just to credentialisation or career promotion; it includes a shift in emphasis to dimensions of leisure and relationships18, a valuing of flexibility and horizontal mobility. Therefore, these early school leavers do not perceive themselves as being ‘at risk’.

Adults engage in the risky behaviours of drinking and driving; adults abuse illegal substances, commit crimes, become suicidal. Yet we don’t talk about ‘adults at risk’. It seems that, as ‘successful (middle class) adults’, we define ‘success’, ‘non-success’ and ‘risk’ rather narrowly, then we identify which young people will be classified as ‘at risk’. Next we devise and administer programs we think will fix them up, rectify the deficit, and set them on the pathway to ‘success’ as we characterise it. Where are the voices and the views of young people themselves in this? This is a theme I will return to later. In the meantime, I will use the conventional construction of the term ‘at risk’.

Recent research evidence also indicates ‘at risk’ youth are in an “intense process of individuation associated with social fragmentation and atomisation”19. That is, young people, and more specifically ‘at risk’ youth, cannot be conveniently homogenised20. This has serious implications for projects, for example, which focus on reducing health-compromising behaviours.

I notice in the conference program that there are quite a number of others who will focus on the specific fields of health, social well-being, education and law. My comments encompass a large number of these dimensions of ‘at risk’.

I would like to explore two prominent paradigms utilised for ‘at risk’ young people and then propose to you a compromise that I believe is potentially more successful and enduring.

The deficit-reduction approach

This is fuelled by social researchers who name and count the negatives and is reinforced by media in the form of a “mayhem index”21. When young people’s transitions have hiccups the response is to design and implement programs which reduce or eliminate individual risks and problems. The analogy is curing a disease utilising treatment by medication or ‘band-aid’ strategies. Such ‘therapy’ “confers status upon those who practise it! It also protects us from feeling impotent in the face of overwhelming social forces and it enables us to derive an often illusory sense of efficacy”22.

The inherent difficulty with this approach is that it is based on a simple cause-effect linear model that ignores the complex and interactive bases of human behaviour. Contextual as well as individual factors are important in shaping behaviour and the deficit-reductionist approach fails to consider this complex interplay of factors.

There has been a growing interest in another paradigm, which is founded on a positive strengths-based approach. The African axiom ‘It takes a whole village to raise a child’, although simplistic, epitomises this approach.

Deficit reductionism conceptualises young people as being no more than a sum of the parts. On the other hand, the holistic framework of developmental asset building acknowledges and promotes ‘people skills, people resources, trusting relationships, and the strength of collaborative networks and partnerships, both formal and informal, existing within the community’23. It celebrates connectedness and is built on the intersection of two rationales – accumulation of developmental skills and the promotion of a community’s well-being. It moves from a ‘victim’ to an ‘agent of change’ narrative. This is preventative ‘medicine’.

Asset taxonomy and its outcomes

In the end, however, there needs to be a balance, or convergence, of these approaches to target risk and assemble protective factors. Foundational asset-building accompanied by risk reduction programs will ensure that issues such as poverty, abuse, unemployment, school retention, crime, drugs, homelessness, self-harm and other health-compromising behaviours are addressed and confronted whilst still promoting a climate of capacity and community building. This two-pronged strategy deals with unconstructive or harmful incidences whilst creating protectionist mechanisms for young people against potentially risky behaviours in the future.

Yet, even under the most optimal conditions there is still a small proportion of young people who will not be ‘inoculated’, but instead remain ‘at risk’. Similarly, there are those who against all odds and with multiple barriers seem to be able to pass into adulthood unscathed.

This is why I believe greater recognition of the effects of early intervention is important. Investing in our ‘youth at risk’ is important too, but we are becoming increasingly aware of the effect of the timing of investments we make in people and the advantages of investing early in the life cycle.

There is a growing body of research, which provide several reasons for emphasising early investments:

“In addition to the evidence that early experience matters a great deal, especially for brain development, the evidence from early intervention programmes shows that well-designed programmes improve developmental outcomes. Early interventions come at the time when families are more open to interventions and lay the groundwork for later development and success”24.

Evidence is mounting that greater investments in early childhood would not only benefit children but also save the government money by reducing welfare payments, increasing tax revenues, and decreasing criminal justice system costs.

Some relevant Queensland projects

These examples will demonstrate some of the exciting projects being undertaken with young people in Queensland. Some have been initiated from a health perspective, some come from the field of education, and others are from the welfare sector. I have no doubt that many members of the audience could describe exciting projects that are happening in their corner of this country too. Unfortunately, there is also probably no dearth of unsuccessful examples too, stories of wasted effort and resources.

So how do we get a picture of what is happening nationwide? Where are we going as a nation in terms of how we treat children and young people? Where are the gaps and the overlaps? What are we really achieving overall? As a nation, we just do not know.

But, more importantly, where is the vision for Australia’s children and young people? What are our hopes and dreams and goals for them, and how do we know what progress we are making towards these?

The full developmental needs of young people are met through departments of health, education, social services, justice, housing and employment, each of which has its own particular focus and sets its own goals. It is a fragmented approach.

I believe that, as a nation, we can no longer rely solely on pieces of the picture to frame our actions. Our children and young people need and deserve more.

I believe that, as a nation, we need a coordinated, long term action plan to ensure that Australian children and young people have the best possible opportunities for growth and development.

That is why I am calling for a National Agenda for Australia’s Children and Young People.

Regional and local government initiatives to support youth pathways: lessons from innovative communities

John Spierings
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Dr John Spierings is a researcher with the Dusseldorp Skills Forum (DSF), a not-for-profit public interest organisation. For the past decade Dusseldorp has provided research and advocacy in the development of Australian education and skills formation policy, a role reinforced by the research collaboration and publication of Australia’s Youth: Reality and Risk, and Australia’s Young Adults: The Deepening Divide which explored the learning and work situation of Australian young people in the late 1990s. Dr Spierings previously worked as a lecturer or researcher at Melbourne, Monash and Adelaide universities, and joined DSF in 1998. His PhD. is a study of Australian business management between 1918 and 1940.

Background

Two years ago the Dusseldorp Skills Forum and the then Australian Student Traineeship Foundation (now the Enterprise and Career Education Foundation) entered a partnership to develop innovative community responses to the need for more dynamic, locally based pathways for young people. This ‘national youth commitment’ project sits alongside a multitude of initiatives including Full Service Schools (now defunded); Local Learning and Employment Networks in Victoria; the Enterprise and Vocational Education strategy in South Australia; local VET alliances and partnerships, and others all attempting to provide a more inclusive set of mainstream learning options for young people. The community partnership approach is at the centre of the recent Footprints to the Future report (Eldridge, 2001) and is likely to be an area of significant activity at the state and Commonwealth level in the next few years. This paper presents an analysis of the approaches being adopted in the national youth commitment communities, the difficulties and positives encountered and reports on progress to date. This summary focuses on one initiative but the longer paper will provide a richer range of examples and case studies.

The rationale for the project was simple. Australia is one of the few OECD countries where school retention declined during the 1990s. Currently there about 190,000 teenagers who are neither in full-time work or full-time education. This is occurring at a time when education and training is becoming a lifelong, on-going process and when, in terms of employment, value is being placed on the development of personal and intellectual skills – the so-called ‘soft skills’ like clear thinking, problem solving and relationship-building.

The foundation skills required to enhance the capacity of individuals to learn and to participate successfully in work over a lifetime are best acquired through formal education and/or through structured workplace learning to Year 12. Young people leaving school before completing Year 12 face long-term disadvantages, either in terms of unemployment, lower incomes, or face other risks to their well-being. The overall cost to individuals, governments and the rest of society due to the disadvantages of higher unemployment, lower incomes and other costs arising from early school leaving in Australia is estimated at $2.6 billion every year.

In the ‘new economy’ labour market and social environment of this decade the transition to adulthood and economic independence is becoming increasingly complex. New forms of integrated social assistance are required to enable young people, especially early school leavers, to navigate their way through labour markets and education and training systems. This effort needs to focus on encouraging early school leavers to stay on at school, and to support them in the world outside school if they choose to leave.

The need for strong local initiatives and accountabilities

Thus the attainment of generic skills through a variety of experiences, and in structured, meaningful ways is becoming increasingly important. An analysis of youth transition services produced by the Boston Consulting Group (2001) for the Business Council of Australia (BCA) highlighted some major problems in service conceptualisation, planning and delivery within our education, employment and training systems. The capacity of central agencies under current arrangements to determine successful youth transitions is questionable. In particular the BCA pointed to:

- Unclear accountabilities of education providers such as schools and TAFE, and employment service agencies in the Job Network, reflecting broader confusion and turf warfare between the Commonwealth and states in the whole area of youth transitions.
- Inadequate measures of outcomes, so that local communities are unaware of or have great
difficulty in ascertaining the participation levels and activities of their young people.

- Lack of knowledgeable buyers of employment, education and community services to assist young people. Program fragmentation, short-term funding, competitive pressures and lack of clear local accountabilities mean that collective knowledge is often not drawn upon, successes and failures are not documented and no-one locally has the power or authority to re-direct or re-prioritise resources.

This insight was reinforced by findings of the Eldridge Taskforce on Youth Pathways Action Plan which identified the following weaknesses in our education, employment, training and community care systems:

- We don't recognise the joined up nature of young people’s problems and experiences
- The links and co-ordination between institutions, services, and programmes are fragmented or non-existent
- Services don’t provide adequate information and signposting to guide young people and their families through the choices they will have to make
- Problems are unrecognised until they have reached crisis point
- Services are responsive to the future needs of young people, and are not accountable for broader outcomes
- We do not have enough accurate information about how young people progress along pathways, particularly when they leave school
- Increasing mis-match between the world in which young people live and the support offered by systems supposed to help them.

Compared to many of the more successful northern European and Scandanavian countries with a rich network of local involvement, support and service provision in youth transitions, Australian educational pathways have until the past decade or so been centrally determined and strikingly slow to adapt to the changing nature of work and shape of the labour market. However nearly all post-compulsory education systems in the federation are now undergoing major change, devolving funding and there are strong working relationships to overcome these deficiencies.

The Whittlesea Youth Commitment objectives are to:

- Provide all young people with the opportunity and support to complete Year 12 or its equivalent
- Be flexible about the nature of this equivalence, which will be defined by the needs and aspirations of young people themselves
- Develop new learning, training, further education and employment options for young people to achieve these goals
- Provide new workplace, work opportunities, skill development, and community support structures for young people to achieve these goals
- Establish a school and community based mediating structure that will assist young people to meet their knowledge, learning, the labour market needs during the transition to adulthood
- Develop and customise the curriculum provision of schools, TAFE and other training providers to better support the aspirations of young people.

One of the chief targets has been to develop more precision about early school leavers, their destinations and their pathways. Now this cannot be an exact science, despite our best efforts. Anybody who knows young people understands how fluid their decision-making is, and how quickly ambitions and ideals can change. It is a telling comment about our culture that until recently we have not systematically invested in finding out how young people are faring at a local and personal level (ACER’s LSAY and the annual ABS Education to Work survey aside).

A mediating structure or brokerage role, involving the employment of four EFT staff working with the eight local Whittlesea schools, TAFE, training organisations, Centrelink and the Job Network, developed in the second half of 2000. The goal set in conjunction with the schools and other key agencies was ‘to provide support to all potential early school leavers in the Whittlesea Youth Commitment area to ensure that every student leaving school before completing Year 12 has secured a place in employment, training or
education or is actively engaged in job search activities.’

Have this goal been achieved? In some ways it is too early to tell – we need more time to evaluate longer-term results. However I think the initial signs are very promising.

Table 1. Destinations of Whittlesea early school leavers for all terms 1999 and 2000, as at 28 February. Note: Excludes one school in 1999.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>% 2000 cases</th>
<th>% 2000 survey</th>
<th>% 2000 survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking employment</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FT employed</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other employed</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy/Numeral</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intersate</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other schooling</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>205</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total exits</td>
<td>762</td>
<td>636</td>
<td>630</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total early leavers</td>
<td>558</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>411</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 describes the activities of exiting students, and especially early school leavers at the end of Term Four (i.e. the end of February 1999 and 2000) from the participating schools in Whittlesea. Caution is required in interpreting this table but some highlights from the data include:

- Decline in early school leavers of about one-third (and likely to be higher as the baseline does not include the local Catholic college in 1999)
- Large decline in unknown destinations
- Greater accuracy about early school leaver pathways, especially greater definition about employment and training participation, even when compared to the official departmental CASES software used by schools. The survey column data results from personal interviews, phone calls and letters to each individual young person
- Apparent improvement in training participation
- Need to focus on further reducing the ‘seeking employment’ and ‘unknown’ categories, which remain high in proportional terms, but which appear to be manageable in terms of absolute numbers (i.e. about 50 in number; the task here is not one of enormous magnitude, and which could be tackled with greater employer and Job Network involvement)

The team of four full-time brokers/case managers worked in this way: during Term Three 2000 the schools surveyed all students in Years 9, 10, and 11 to ascertain the number of potential early school leavers through a self-selection process. 307 students responded by indicating that they were likely to leave school either before the end of the school year or not return in 2001. To better gauge their intentions and to assist with options the broker team interviewed each of these students. Most opted to remain at school. Files were opened for 230 students including 86 students referred from each school’s transition team (e.g. careers teacher, Assistant Principal, student welfare co-ordinator). As a result of these interventions 36 per cent of intending leavers remained in school after this contact and 39 per cent of those who left went to a positive training or employment destination.

From this preliminary data some of the key issues arise:

- The brokerage relationship appears to have had a strong impact on school retention and training participation
- The brokers have identified that the levels of literacy and numeracy in the middle years of schooling are key concerns for some vulnerable and potentially disengaged students
- A need to improve employment outcomes for those on that pathway, especially through greater employer and Job Network involvement
- A key task has involved substantial job search training for young people – there is a need to look to a stronger contribution from the Job Network, Centrelink and training organisations to the work of the brokers and directly to potential early school leavers.

What are some of the key things that need to be addressed in the collaboration through which this brokerage team emerged? These might include:

- Cementing the role of transition brokerage with a broader range of teachers, with external agencies and with parents and School Councils
- Creating a stronger feedback loop to principals, teachers, parents and post-school agencies about the issues young people are raising – issues of loneliness, trust, poverty, competencies, bullying, and so on
- Provision of longer-term support and assistance beyond the ‘first’ registered destination, to see how those that have stayed in school are travelling and to follow up those in training and other activities, given the extended nature of the transition process.
- Alternative settings within the schooling framework (e.g. the outer northern region of Melbourne lacks educational settings that cater for students seeking non-conventional school experiences)
- Local clearing house arrangements with employment and training agencies for opportunities to be more easily notified and shared
- Harnessing the goodwill and capacity of local employers
- Review the failure to develop improved school based part-time apprenticeship arrangements
• Stronger careers education focus in the middle and senior years is needed, and more creative use of workplace learning, especially to address literacy and numeracy issues
• Address and document key policy issues of registration, eligibility, and breaching that are arising within Centrelink and the Job Network
• Supplement the brokerage role with community based mentoring, so that school communities as a whole respond to the issues being raised.

Conclusions

More generic features of these sorts of partnership arrangements include:
• Identifying the clear regional boundaries within which it will operate.
• Integration of existing local services for young people adding greater value to what already exists, especially in the employment, education and training sectors.
• Active involvement of young people in the design, delivery and evaluation of the Regional Youth Commitment.
• A willingness to share the resourcing of the Community Partnership and to advocate for additional government (Commonwealth and state) funding to enable the key goals of the Youth Commitment to be achieved.

The first tasks for the community partnership would be:
• Development of an environmental scan or map of young people’s circumstances and youth-related services in the region, documenting their participation in employment, education and training.
• Development of clearly identified benchmarks and indicators with periodic evaluation against these both for the community partnership and individual key stakeholders.

As the community partnership develops the following activities could be adopted:
• Tracking and monitoring arrangements in place for all school-leavers.
• Personal action plans for all secondary students.
• Skilled transition brokers and community mentors co-ordinated by the community partnership with responsibility for case managing the transition for those young people leaving school before completing Year 12.
• Careers advice and guidance that draws on community links and meets the needs of all students especially those leaving school before completing year 12.
• Exploring new youth-friendly labour market opportunities through the community partnership.

References


The Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce, chaired by Captain David Eldridge was established in September 1999 as a response to the Youth Homeless Taskforce Report. The 14 members of the Taskforce, including two young people, represented the community sector, academia, business, the Commonwealth and state governments. The Taskforce was charged with the responsibility of investigating issues relating to young people’s transitions through and beyond school to independence. In undertaking its task the Taskforce was asked to consult with young people, parents, communities, and governments and utilise this information to prepare a report advising the government on ways to enhance transition support for young people. The Taskforce was specifically asked to advise on the scope and direction of a Youth Pathways Action Plan. The Plan is to propose ways to improve support for young people and their families during young people’s transition to independence and in particular ways to strengthen pathways for those who do not go straight from school to further education and training or full-time employment and those not fully engaged with their community. The Taskforce submitted its report, Footprints to the Future, to the Government on 15 January 2001. During its 18 months of deliberations the Taskforce undertook a number of consultations with stakeholders and conducted research on a range of issues relating to young people and their transitions.

The Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce developed 24 recommendations and 6 over-arching principles that outline a framework for the development of a Youth Transition System. This framework is devised from the vision of the Taskforce that young people and their families, schools, communities, business and governments work together in partnership to enable young people to attain their goals and aspirations and to participate in the social and economic life of the community.

Footprints to the Future argues that the recognition of education and training is the foundation for effective transitions; the availability of timely and relevant career and transition support; the need for focused local partnerships; the need to change the ways in which we support and respond to young people and the ability to respond to diversity. A strong theme, which permeated throughout the consultations, was the need for a more co-ordinated and collaborative approach to the delivery of youth services.

The Taskforce also outlined the need for a national commitment to all young people. This commitment would call for all those involved in supporting young people to work in partnership with each other and with young people to equip them for the challenges they face now and in the future. The Taskforce argues that such a commitment would underpin and sustain young people in their quest to achieve their goals and develop successful pathways for their transition through and beyond school to active participation in their communities.

A number of the elements of a youth transition system are already in place. Elements such as the National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century demonstrate a Commonwealth/state/territory government commitment to providing all young people with the opportunity to attain the education and training skills and knowledge they will require to participate effectively in the labor market. The National Goals also set important benchmarks for the attainment of literacy and numeracy levels and for the further development of support and assistance programmes designed at enhancing the opportunities for young people at risk of disconnecting from mainstream institutions.

The Commonwealth government has already responded to the Report through the establishment of the Enterprise and Career Education Foundation. The Foundation was set up by the Government in March 2001, and aims to promote the expansion of school to work links to enable young Australians to acquire vocational, enterprise and career education, knowledge and experience before they leave school.

The Commonwealth has funded the Enterprise and Career Education Foundation to support a range of functions that encourage and support effective
partnerships between schools and industry, and in particular between schools and small business and support the development of school/work links for students. The Foundation also aims to sustain the work being undertaken in schools by supporting work placement coordination; recruiting industry partners; facilitating business involvement; and providing networking and linking opportunities for career educators and work placement coordinators. In addition to this the Enterprise and Career Education Foundation will coordinate data collection and analysis of student outcomes in enterprise and career education programmes, and provide feedback to stakeholders on programme effectiveness in improving transitions from school to work or further education and training. These activities will provide valuable support to young people and inform the future direction youth transition programmes and services.

The recommendations made in *Footprints to the Future* complement the Stronger Families and Communities initiative in ensuring young people have the support they need for effective participation in community life. The report embraces the integrated approach taken in the Stronger Families and Communities strategy and supports and enhances early intervention initiatives such as Reconnect.

As part of its initial response to *Footprints to the Future* the Commonwealth has announced the introduction of the Career and Transition pilots. These pilots are designed to test new methodologies for the delivery of career and transition support. A component of these pilot projects will be the further development of the Taskforce’s concept of ‘Learning Pathways Plans’ that aim to provide young people with the information required to navigate their way through their transitions and attain their goals. These pilots will also provide us with a much needed chance to examine, in practical ways, the methods by which career and transition support is delivered in schools and find elements of transferable best practice which, in the long term will ensure that all young people receive professional, accurate and relevant career advice and which will enable them to meet their aspirations.

A youth transition system would see all young people having access to professional and appropriate career and transition information and support. Such a system requires youth workers and teachers working together with young people and their families to develop appropriate transition plans that identify opportunities and seek to provide practical solutions. It would provide integrated support through local networks and will rely on all practitioners who work with young people being equipped with a clear understanding of their role, and the role of other providers in promoting holistic support.

In order to be beneficial a youth transition system needs to assist young people and their families to gain the skills required to negotiate their way through long and often complex pathways, and to sustain them as they make the transition to independence. It also needs to encompass ways to provide additional support and information to young people who have become disconnected from mainstream institutions and or the community so that they can reconnect quickly in order to be given the opportunity to reach their full potential. The Government is currently exploring ways to reconnect young people who have become disconnected from education through the development of the Partnership Outreach Education Model pilots. These projects will see communities working together in ‘learning support networks’ to provide education and support services to young people in settings where they feel comfortable. The aim of this intensive and specialised support will be to reconnect young people back into mainstream education or training and the community. These pilots will provide a unique chance to build links within the community and across sectors and governments to ensure that this group of young people is provided with the same opportunities as their peers.

The Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce stressed that the strongest need was not necessarily for the development of new services or programmes but rather for the current system to be adjusted to ensure that a more cohesive and collaborative approach is taken. The Taskforce identified the need for governments, communities, young people and families to work together and form partnerships that result in changes to the way in which our systems currently work. A significant problem is that institutions that young people often do not recognise themselves as part of a coherent transitions system. Instead of focusing on young people’s broad needs these institutions often focus on providing their specific service without necessarily taking into account wider linkages and the additional support needs of the young person. This results in young people being adversely affected by gaps, overlaps and inconsistencies between different services and departments. As David Eldridge said the problems are all joined up in young people but the government and community responses to these problems are not.

The Taskforce found many examples of best practice and innovative service delivery during its consultations. In a number of communities the Taskforce discovered services that were working together in partnership with each other and with young people and their families to achieve remarkable outcomes. They met with committed workers and service providers who were not only identifying the challenges facing them in relation to young people and their transitions but were also implementing creative
solutions and programmes. These examples showed the Taskforce what can be done when there is a shared commitment to, and joint responsibility for, the successful transition to independence for each person. They also provided information and concepts for the development of a framework for a cohesive youth transition system and highlighted the existence of a broad commitment to new ways of working that involve partnerships and collaboration in the delivery of transition services to young people.

*Footprints to the Future* acknowledges the current system weaknesses and outlines ways for moving beyond them to ensure that all young people have access to mainstream institutions, additional support and safety nets in order to ensure that they are no longer adversely affected by a system that is designed to assist them. In the Taskforce’s vision schools, business, community groups, governments and families will be required to think and act collaboratively, keep each other informed about programmes, be accountable to one another, and work co-operatively with young people around the planning and delivery of transition arrangements.

The recommendations in *Footprints to the Future* are underpinned by a conviction that broader and more productive community partnerships will improve the identification of problems, promote better delivery of services, and empower young people, their families and communities to navigate their way more successfully to appropriate transition outcomes. The Commonwealth government supports this conviction and has announced a range of initiatives to trial ways of ‘joining up’ service delivery. These will build on the 5 collaborative trials in various community settings around Australia. The initial findings of these trials will be supported by the announcement of funding for 18 pilot projects to model new ways of providing innovative and collaborative youth services.

By working together, from a strong existing base, we aim to assist young people to obtain their goals and aspirations and support them in their transitions to independence. The Commonwealth is currently preparing a whole of government response to the Report. This response will be informed by the discussions the Commonwealth itself is having across its own portfolios, the discussions it is having with its state colleagues and the partnerships and evidence gained through the pilots it has set in train.

As the Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce says “Australia is not alone in facing many of the problems we have raised in our report. Nor should we lose sight of the fact that there are many strengths in our existing education, training and community support systems. However, we do need to take immediate action to ensure that our institutions and systems are able to respond to the challenges of the future, and that we build on the strengths that already exist”.

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ACER Research Conference 2001
Understanding Youth Pathways: What does the research tell us?

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Doing what it takes: options and opportunities for supporting Australian youth

Jane Figgis
AAAJ Consulting Group

Jane Figgis is a Director of AAAJ Consulting Group which was formed in 1998 to serve educational and social service institutions and agencies. A significant portion of their work has been in the VET area including leading national projects on learning cultures and on the underpinning knowledge in Training Packages. Prior to the consulting work, Jane was a broadcaster with ABC Radio National where she produced and presented the award-winning Education Report.

The research reported here is the work of a large team – the joint effort of my colleagues from AAAJ Consulting Group, Anna Alderson, Anne Butorac and Ann Zubrick; of Jack Keating from RMIT; Mike Frost from the Tasmanian Qualifications Authority; Alf Standen from Training and Assessment Services; and Stephen Lamb from University of Melbourne. Further, Jeff Malley from the Victorian Department of Education, Employment and Training is playing an important role as honorary advisor to the project.

It is also work in progress: the DETYA funded project on which it is based began a few months ago and is not due to be completed until early next year.

Building on what is known about supporting youth in transition

The premise on which DETYA commissioned this project was their view that one should be able to build on what is known in principle about supporting youth in transition to further help people in practice. What is known about contemporary youth in transition is, of course, extensive. There has been a succession of penetrating and astute government-commissioned reports on the supports youth need and get (or do not get), both in Australia and elsewhere. There have been systematic evaluations of education, training and employment programs designed to help young people. There are on-going longitudinal and other fundamental studies of Australian youth.

This knowledge base has been constructed to a considerable degree by investigating what people do when they are supporting young people in their transition(s) from compulsory schooling to satisfying work. The key and consistent observation about this ‘doing’ is that it depends fundamentally on developing productive relationships – and that many, many such relationships need to be developed.

The core relationship is the one created with the young person whose transition(s) are being supported – whether that is, for example, between teacher and student, between employer and trainee, mentor with ‘mentee’, employment officer or youth worker with client, etc. One of the most disturbing findings in many of the reports, in fact, is how often these relationships fail to be successfully established. From the adults’ view it is often a matter of not having the time to attend sufficiently to each individual, but from the young person’s point of view it appears that the person ‘isn’t listening to me...doesn’t care about me’.

Cooperative relationships amongst the suite of agencies, departments, employers and governments which provide education, training, employment and other services to youth are also critical. As the Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce memorably pointed out: young peoples’ needs come “joined up”. Services and support, on the other hand, come from separate and separately accountable jurisdictions – ones which can also be in competition with one another for scarce resources and recognition. Indeed, it has become clear that most of the actors involved (including employers) in programs and strategies for youth in transition will most likely be cooperating and competing with one another.

Balancing cooperation and competition is a task that is being widely recognised, well beyond the question of supporting youth in transition. There are ‘compacts’ (variously named) being drawn up between governments and the not-for-profit sector in a number of countries (for example, in England, Canada and New Zealand) and regions (for example, Oregon in the US). These are intended to create mutual respect, understanding and cooperation between different sectors. There is work being done on social capital, governance and network theory which is also relevant to fostering and/or understanding cooperative action among competing agents. The number of university and TAFE units teaching community development appears to be rising sharply.
Knowing when and where to build connections

It seemed to us, therefore, that one critical direction our research should take was to examine much more thoroughly how people in the youth-in-transition area actually manage to do this complex task of countering fragmentation – of coordinating the variety of support required by various young people. How do they know when and where to build connections? How do they make them robust and effective? Cooperation in this sense is not simply a matter of good working relationships amongst adults (although that’s necessary) but of true coordination and linkage amongst the supports young people get.

One well documented example of this kind of investigation is of the cooperative arrangements in the outer Melbourne suburb of Whittlesea, the Whittlesea Youth Commitment, and the guiding lessons the Dusseldorp Skills Forum has drawn from it. Our approach has been to identify a series of ‘locales’ centred around different focal points or hubs (we are struggling to find the most appropriate terminology) and explore them through a case study methodology. Amongst the examples we are considering, some of which have already been explored in some depth, others are more speculative at this stage, are:

- the relationships in YEETAC, a formally constituted Youth Advisory Council composed of some 30 agencies operating in the Perth suburb of Mirrabooka, which is a community of disadvantage where young people’s transitions to satisfactory work are often difficult;
- the relationships being forged in a regional LLEN (Local learning and Employment Network) in Victoria;
- the maintenance of cooperative arrangements centred on a school (or cluster of schools) with its local community to meet students’ vocational and personal needs;
- the support network brought into synergy by a TAFE institute to improve the retention of, particularly, young male students;
- cooperative arrangements which have been initiated by a local Council or library in support of youth in transition;
- the informal linkages and support for youth centred on the owner of a skateboard shop in Tasmania.

Since it is impossible to be comprehensive in the selection of these ‘cases’, their purpose is not to generate a ‘theory’ about minimising fragmentation. We are looking to extract two specific kinds of information from them:

1. how coordination improves the quality of transition options and opportunities;
2. how the experience of these efforts can help others engaged with youth in transition programs and strategies. What is wanted here are the telling details, the memorable quote, the personal emotion, the intriguing solution, the surprising incident, the seemingly insoluble problem. This approach to writing case studies is informed by the research underpinning ‘expert’ computer programs which rely on case-based reasoning. Cases are important, they have discovered, because people rarely think from first principles. Mostly people think by remembering incidents, experiences, examples – that is, cases. When a similar situation arises, the knowledge and decisions embedded in the original incident provides a starting point for thinking about the new situation or problem.

With the case studies, we are striving to get beyond truisms (e.g., relationships must be based on trust) and dot points (e.g., establish clear goals and guidelines for the cooperative action) – as correct as that advice is. Our goal is to collect a store of real people’s insightful, useful and memorable experiences to help others coordinate support and maximise their quality and relevance. This is not an easy task. When we interview people for this project about their working effectively, or ineffectively for that matter, with other educators or providers of services to youth, the talk constantly veers towards generalities. The articulate person, for example, who chairs two youth advisory councils located in neighbouring suburbs could only say that one group had “a knack” for tendering jointly for available funds (and winning them) while the other, as good at networking, just didn’t have “that knack”.

Countering the fragmentation of provision for youth in transition is not only a matter of coordinating the transition strategies needed in a particular locale. Fragmentation exists in time as well as in space. The reports on youth in transition consistently point to the problems created by the constant ringing of changes in programs and the short term nature of much of the funding. There is an unbalanced emphasis on initiatives – beginning things – in comparison with sustaining them. Some work is being done now on the ‘life cycle’ of these sorts of programs and strategies, showing in the first place that they do have an expected life cycle and that different thinking and management is required to maintain them at different points in that cycle. Programs for youth in transition have their own transitions to navigate.

* A separate aspect of this DETYA project is to put together a data base of some 50 well documented examples of ‘options and opportunities’ for supporting youth in transition(s) in order to provide a comprehensive conceptual map of the dimensions of programs and strategies in use to meet the various transition needs of young people, aged 15-25. This data base is focused on the way the needs of the young people themselves are met and not, as in the case studies, examining the ways fragmentation is countered. It is a complex undertaking as there are traps in categorising dimensions – for example, levels of support required by which youth – and dangers in missing effective but informal ways of acquiring transition-enabling skills.
The interviews and documents analysis

A few points emerging from the interviews and document analysis:

- One of the questions we have been asking people engaged in supporting young people in their transitions is: ‘what are your sources of energy and resilience?’ They look at us with some surprise, then delight. It is not a usual question, and their gratitude at being asked is a reminder of the discrepancy which can exist between what outsiders want to know about their work and the concerns that trouble them about doing the job;

- Coordinating the supports young people might need is not only a horizontal negotiation amongst people at the ‘coal face’ (including people in industry and the community with whom youth services and schools/TAFEs/universities make direct contact). People within agencies and departments have hierarchical relationships upwards to manage. These relationships can be as problematic in terms of coordinating and providing the requisite support for youth as the more commonly noted blockages across borders.

- We are hearing, as have other studies, a persistent criticism that schooling is still based on a strict, if these days slightly more subtle, model of control over young people. Further, it is said that many teachers have a very incomplete understanding of contemporary youth, their non-school lives, and their aspirations – indeed, that teachers may be blinkered to appreciate only attributes that are safely middle class. It is difficult for studies like ours to confront this issue because the people we talk to do not identify themselves as misunderstanding youth.

‘Doing what it takes’ extends beyond practitioners delivering programs and services, options and opportunities. Developing and implementing policy is also a ‘doing’, and it is expected that our findings will have implications for policy which will need to be drawn out.

Implications from the study so far

A few implications have emerged already. One, which others are also pointing to, is that young people’s transition(s) should not be conceptualised as a journey with the goal (outcome measure) of arriving at a safe destination. Neither the labour market nor our personal and social worlds seem to offer many safe havens. It appears to be the case that no one arrives any more, in the sense that they get there and stay put. The importance of lifelong learning is founded on exactly that recognition: you will need to keep moving on, therefore you will need to keep on learning. Our evidence aligns with others in that it is more useful to think of young people’s transitions as the task of collecting up the skill, knowledge and self-reliance needed to keep going in a variety of contexts. As one young person put it, successful transitions are about ‘being competitive’. To shift the emphasis from destination markers to evidence of young people’s acquisition of robust and meaningful skills has significant ramifications for both policy design and accountability measures.

Other studies have already put on the table policy ideas to improve the sustainability and stability of effective programs and strategies. Our team has discussed, only partly in jest, that there should be available early intervention ‘therapy’ for networks, committees and whatever other arrangement have been put in place to get people to work together. It is a rare group where dissention or difficult inter-personal relations do not arise. Yet this is rarely addressed until too late with the result that programs/supports that are working well for young people either fall apart or spend years in a barely-holding pattern.

The meaning of the term ‘pilot’ in pilot projects needs attention. It tends to be used indiscriminately with the consequence that it is frequently used inappropriately. In industry, for example, a pilot plant has a specific meaning. It is a mechanism for increasing the scale at which a process is carried out. A chemical process that works successfully in a test-tube is then tested in a vat where heat may be generated in a problematic way. Then the process is trialed in a pilot plant where other problems of scale may emerge. Then finally on to full production. Many of the models for supporting youth in transition which are labelled ‘pilots’ are in reality demonstrations: showing how a particular idea has been put into effect at a few sites. Future growth of the program or strategy to less innovative sites or to a wider target population is not part of the project. There are significant policy implications in this observation.

There is one final component to the DETYA project. Communication is a significant aspect of ‘doing what it takes’ to support youth in transition. It is clear that people rely very heavily on personal networks to stay informed about what is going on and, especially, what funding is available for initiatives and for participation in demonstration projects. One of our tasks is to judge how reliable these networks are – how much serendipity is involved and whether there are people who consistently miss out because they are not properly networked. We need also to inquire about the way fresh information, particularly more fundamental ‘big picture’ ideas and knowledge about the needs and supports required for youth in transition, is injected into these networks.

ACER Research Conference 2001
Understanding Youth Pathways: What does the research tell us?

31
Overview

By the mid 2000, Australia had completed its ninth year of continuous growth, the longest period of economic expansion since the 1960s. Unemployment has fallen and real income levels risen. In these highly favourable labour market conditions, how are young people faring? The focus of this paper is on 15 to 24 year-olds and examines Australian and international official data to throw some light on their transition from full-time education to full-time work. Specific attention is given to identifying those young people most ‘at risk’. The paper also compares how young people in Australia fare with other OECD countries in terms of labour market, education and literacy and numeracy outcomes.

Internationally, Australia performs well in terms of its proportion of tertiary graduates in the adult population (ranking sixth out of 28 countries). However, in terms of upper secondary school completion, Australia ranks behind most other OECD countries (ranking 17th out of 28 countries). It is this gap between the education “haves” and “have nots” that is undermining Australia’s ability to compete in a global knowledge economy and is helping to further increase income inequality. Failure by a range of stakeholders in society to help the most vulnerable will exacerbate income inequality and undermine social cohesion.

A significant group of young people in Australia do not have the means to survive in this knowledge economy in terms of literacy and numeracy and other basic skills. As many as 17 per cent of 19 year olds have not attained a minimum level of education necessary to compete in today’s demanding labour market. Many of these have poor literacy and numeracy skills.

Moving from education to work for many young people is not a single step of leaving the educational system and entering the world of work. The complexity of what is happening, therefore, cannot be captured in a single statistic such as the youth unemployment rate. Indeed over-reliance on this measure has hampered a deeper understanding of the nature of the difficulties experienced by young people.

A better way is to use the concept of risk to identify those young people who are more vulnerable than others in encountering prolonged difficulties in finding and sustaining stable employment. The ‘at risk’ group is defined as those young people who are: not studying and in part-time work, or who are actively looking for work (the unemployed), or those not in work and not considered as actively seeking work (not in the labour force).

Active engagement in education, employment and training is a key ingredient in reducing the risk of young people not making a successful transition from education to full-time work. The Australian Council for Educational Research’s (ACER) longitudinal youth survey has found that those whose principal activity in the first post-school year was either part-time work, being unemployed, or outside the labour force were much less likely over their first seven post-school years in total to make a successful transition to full-time employment. These findings are confirmed by other longitudinal data on young people.

Teenagers at risk

Most teenagers beyond compulsory schooling are still full-time students, even if they are working part-time. However, in May 2001, just under a third (31 per cent) of 15 to 19 year olds were not in full-time work. Of those not in full time education, just over a half are in part-time work and the remainder, representing 15.0 per cent of all 15 to 19 year olds, (14.9 per cent for males and 15.3 per cent for females) are ‘at risk’, in part-time work, unemployed or not actively looking for work. Teenagers in this group are particularly prone to experience major difficulties in their transition to full-time work.
The longer-term trend in the size of the 15 to 19 year old ‘at risk’ group is clearly downward from a high point of 17.1 per cent in May 1992. However, this trend appears to have bottomed out as the May 2001 ‘at risk’ proportion is slightly above the proportion of ‘at risk’ young people in May 1999 and May 2000.

The proportion of post school teenagers ‘at risk’ varies greatly by where they live. Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia in May 2001 have the highest proportions of teenagers ‘at risk’ (all around 19 per cent) while Victoria has the lowest proportion (10 per cent). The largest state NSW has 14 per cent of its post compulsory school teenage population not in full-time education or full-time work.

What happens to young people when they leave secondary school?

Information is available on the destinations of 1999 school leavers in May. The likelihood of going onto further education varies greatly according to the year of secondary schooling the school leaver has completed. Just over two thirds of 1999 Year 12 leavers (69 per cent) went onto higher education, TAFE (including New Apprenticeships) or other forms of further education. However, only 39 and 43 per cent of Year 11 and Year 10 leavers followed a similar path.

Many of these early school leavers not in further education have failed to find full-time work. This applies to just over a third (34 per cent) of Year 10 and 11 leavers. Overall, nearly a quarter (24 per cent) of 1999 secondary school leavers five months later are in part-time work, unemployed or not-in-the-labour force.

A third of early secondary school leavers in 2000 do not appear to have made a successful transition to further study or full-time work. The high proportion of early school leavers with poor labour market prospects compared with Year 12 completers has persisted over the three years reported. However, the better economic conditions appear to have reduced the actual number of 1999 school leavers who five months after leaving school could be defined as being at risk compared to the two previous years, from 116,700 to 67,400.

Young adults aged 20 to 24 years old

Nearly four-fifths of the 20 to 24 age group have left full-time education. However, only 57 per cent are in full-time work. Over a quarter of the age group (26 per cent) are not in full-time education or in full-time work. Compared with teenagers, young people aged 20 to 24 years are more likely to be unemployed, in part-time work and not-in-the-labour force. The high proportion of especially young women in part-time work reflects a fall in the availability of full-time jobs held by this age group. Between May 1995 and May 2001, the number of full-time jobs held by non-students aged 20 to 24 years fell by 94,300, a 13.3 per cent decrease.

Because of the high proportion of young adults who are ‘not-in-the-labour force’ for positive reasons (caring for children, household duties and so on), a more accurate measure of risk needs to be derived by looking more closely at those not in education who are looking for work or otherwise want to work. A narrower definition suggests that 25 per cent of young women may be ‘at risk’ and 18 per cent of young men. Compared with May 1999 and 2000, the proportion of ‘at risk’ young adult men and women in May 2001 has not improved over time.

International data for 1999 on the proportion of young people 20 to 24 years not in education and not in full-time work show that Australia’s high proportion, 27.5 per cent, ranks it 13th out of 18 countries. The major reason for this ranking is the high proportion of young adults in Australia in part-time work. Australia ranks third behind France and Sweden in terms of the proportion of young adults in part-time work.

Young people’s Access to New Apprenticeships

Structured entry level training arrangements have expanded rapidly in the last few years to reach 295,620 apprentice and trainees in training at the end of 2000, an increase of 109 per cent since 1995. However, the number of young people aged 15 to 24 in apprentices and traineeships has only increased by 43 per cent over the same period. This is despite the fact that New Apprenticeships are marketed as entry level training and employment positions for young job seekers.

Participation in New Apprenticeships for 15 to 19 year olds has increased marginally from 4.3 per cent of the total age group in 1995 to 5.9 per cent in 2000. Participation in New Apprenticeships for 20 to 24 year olds has increased from 5.2 per cent of this age group in 1995 to 7.5 per cent in 2000.

However, as many in these age groups are still in education, a more accurate indication of the value of New Apprenticeships as a means to assist young people make a more successful transition to work is needed. The extent of the take up of New Apprenticeships by young people can be better gauged by looking at the take up among the non-student population. Using this as the base, the penetration rate of New Apprenticeships among 15 to 19 year olds not in education at the end of 2000 was only 19 per cent. For the total 15 to 24 year old age group as a whole at the end of 2000, it was only 12 per cent.
The persistence of a significant proportion of teenagers who are not in education or full time work indicates that New Apprenticeships are not helping the most vulnerable of school leavers. There is considerable scope to increase teenage participation rates in New Apprenticeships. Young people’s New Apprenticeship participation rate is far below that of Germany and Switzerland where more than 50 per cent of the upper secondary school age cohort participate in apprenticeship-type arrangements. They are also below the so called quasi-apprenticeship countries which have more than 20 per of young people in apprenticeship-type arrangements. These countries are Austria, Denmark, the Netherlands and Norway. The UK also has more of its upper secondary school cohort with 24 per cent participating in apprenticeship type programs in 1996.

**Young people and education attainment**

Most young people complete their full-time education between the ages of 20 and 24 years. Therefore the proportion of this age group that has completed Year 12 or holds a post school qualification is an important indicator of young people’s capacity to compete in demanding labour markets. In 18 out of 29 OECD countries, men aged 25 to 64 years with less than upper secondary education have an unemployment rate at least 1.5 times greater than those who have completed upper secondary education. In Australia, the difference in the unemployment rate is double.

The proportion of young Australian adults aged 20 to 24 years with Year 12 completed or a post school qualification in May 2000 is 83 per cent. The longer-term trend from 1994 shows an increase in education attainment for young people. However since 1998, the trend appears to have reached a plateau, with no significant increase in the education attainment rate in the last two years.

**Targets for post-compulsory education**

Commonwealth and state governments in 1991 set targets for post-compulsory education and training attainment for 19 and 22 year olds by the year 2001 (the Finn targets). However, the most recent data available indicate that the first of these targets are not likely to be met.

As of May 2000, only 83.4 per cent of 19 year olds had attained or were proceeding to these education levels. This means that 16.4 per cent of 19 year olds have not attained a minimum level of education necessary to be competitive in today’s labour market over the long-term. This proportion has not risen for the past two years, as noted above for 15 to 19 year olds as a group.

The second target is that by 2001, 60 per cent of 22 year olds are to be participating in education and training programs that lead to what is generally regarded as a qualification to denote a skilled worker. This refers to attainment of at least an AQF Level 3 qualification, or participating in or have completed higher education studies such as degrees or diplomas. May 2000 data show that this target has been reached with 65 per cent of 22 year olds having attained or still studying to reach this level or higher.

The proportion of 25 to 64 year old Australians who have post-school qualifications has not improved markedly over time, only increasing from 44 per cent to 50 per cent between 1994 and 2000. The proportion of the adult population aged 25 to 64 years holding degrees and post graduate qualifications has increased (from 13.4 in 1994 to 18.1 per cent in 2000). However, those holding skilled vocational or diploma qualifications has remained static (22.9 and 22.6 per cent in 1994 and 2000 respectively). Basic vocational qualification holders increased only marginally (7.6 and 8.8 per cent in 1994 and 2000 respectively).

**Need for new national education targets**

The Victorian government in October 2000 announced a new target for universal education attainment as part of its post compulsory education and training reforms. The target commits the Victorian government to achieving by 2010 a 90 per cent completion Year 12 rate or its equivalent for young people in Victoria.

In the light of this new target, how does Australia fare at present. In May 2000, only 73.1 per cent of 20 to 24 year olds have achieved at least Year 12 completion or its equivalent (a skilled vocational qualification or higher). This level of education attainment, accepted as the threshold requirement in many leading OECD countries, has in fact decreased slightly since 1994 when it stood at 74.2 per cent.

**Young people at risk due to low literacy numeracy**

A fundamental source of disadvantage for young people is a low level of literacy and numeracy skills. Students who perform poorly on literacy and numeracy are much less likely to participate in Year 12 and higher education, independently of their socio-economic background.

Australia compared to other countries has a high proportion of young people with low literacy and numeracy skills. Compared with Sweden, Australia

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has nearly twice the proportion of young people with low scores on a literacy assessment.

Other international comparisons show that young Australians with low levels of education have lower literacy levels on average than young people with the same level of education in other countries. Clearly some countries are more successful than others in helping those with low levels of formal education to gain competency in literacy and numeracy. This may be due to several factors such as better assistance to the less academically inclined students in primary school or providing opportunities independent of participation in the formal education system to improve literacy and numeracy skills.

The OECD also notes that countries with a greater variation in prose literacy scores (greater differences between high and low scorers) are more likely to have greater income inequality. The Nordic countries and the Netherlands have both low variation in literacy skills and low levels of income inequality. The United States, on the other hand, has both a wide variation in measured literacy scores and has a high level of measured income inequality.

Australia has both a relatively wide variation in literacy scores (it ranks fourth of thirteen countries behind the leaders USA, UK and Ireland) and a relatively high level of income inequality (also ranking fourth behind the same three countries). This is not to suggest that the distribution of literacy and numeracy is the only factor that causes increased income inequality. Nevertheless, in the words of the OECD, “it clearly has a role to play”. Efforts to lift the average level of literacy and numeracy among young people at the end of their compulsory schooling by focusing on those who have the greatest difficulty must be a key element of a medium strategy to lower income inequality in Australia.
Building effective local industry-education partnerships to sustain young people

Harris van Beek
Chief Executive Officer, Enterprise & Career Education Foundation (ECEF)

For more than 20 years Harris van Beek has led organisations that initiate, develop and support local level partnerships. Through that involvement he has developed a keen awareness of their potential while also understanding the challenges faced by such arrangements. Harris appreciates the importance of appropriate policy environments to enable such programs to be sustainable. Consequently he has actively advised governments and local communities about such policies and practices.

In 1992 Harris completed a Master of Management (Community) studies.

Harris was appointed Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Student Traineeship Foundation (ASTF) from February 1996. In January 2001 the Commonwealth government established a new body called the Enterprise & Career Education Foundation (ECEF), with Harris as the CEO. The Foundation is involved in reshaping schooling to facilitate successful school to work transitions for all Australian students, providing support to drive the cultural change necessary to extend and enhance school-industry partnerships.

Introduction

Local partnerships were the vehicle chosen by the ASTF, now ECEF, as a means of improving the transition of young people from school to a post-school environment, originally building on a small number of industry-education partnerships to become a national coverage with 250 partnerships. Typically, a partnership is an independent body that employs a coordinator and is overseen by a management committee consisting of representatives of education, industry and the community. The partnership provides services to young people from a cluster of local schools. To date, partnerships have focussed on the coordination of Structured Workplace Learning (SWL) but many now provide a broader based service such as Jobs Pathway Program. This paper presents what we have learned about building effective partnerships and why they are well positioned to facilitate the next phase of youth pathway options.

The benefits of partnerships

Partnerships exist because of mutual need and mutual benefit. The development of SWL, as an alternative to the traditional schooling curriculum, has been grabbed with both hands by young people as one way of meeting their needs for effective transition from school. The number of students undertaking SWL has grown from 2,800 in 1995 to over 80,000 in 75% of Australian secondary schools by 2000 (McIntyre, Pithers, 2001). Growth continued in 2001, with further growth forecast in 2002. Early indications of destinations are positive. Students who participated in SWL programs in 1999 had lower unemployment levels in 2000 than their age group in general and 20% who were employed were so by their SWL employer. The 1999 SWL participants were more likely to be studying or working full time by March 2000 than were others in the same age cohort (Misko, 2001).

Business is also seeing the benefits. A survey last year of over 2000 businesses found that 97% thought that SWL was a good idea. 42% thought it would be suitable for their organisation (AMR, 2001). Those who had participated reported that the outcomes were better than expected including improved staff satisfaction, increased productivity and improved recruitment.

More broadly, industry recognises the benefits of becoming involved in the community. Work by the Centre for Corporate Public Affairs and the Business Council of Australia (2000) indicates an extensive range of involvement by business in the community and a plethora of formal partnerships. Many involve large corporates who believe that community involvement is a social responsibility but also a way of contributing to business sustainability. In the shorter term, participation in partnerships increases business profile and provides learning opportunities for staff.

In small business the notion of partnership is looser and the motivation is less inspired by ‘business reasons’ than by ‘doing the right thing’ (COSBOA, 2000). A survey of over 10,000 small businesses found that 67% were involved in some way in their community and this involvement was willing, not coerced. Significantly for young people, the study found that education was the preferred area of engagement for small business.

This nascent industry interest can be harnessed and transformed into a robust mechanism capable of encouraging and sustaining young people along a variety of pathways and producing positive outcomes for all stakeholders. Some benefits are quantifiable, some not. ECEF has identified the primary outcomes as being:

- Enhanced vocational skills and employability skills of young people

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• Increased and improved pathway options for young people
• Improved status of vocational education within schools and the community
• Increased school retention and positive behaviours while at school
• Skill and recruitment needs of local industry being addressed
• Improved understanding between industry and education
• Involvement by the local community in identifying and meeting needs.

**Building effective partnerships**

Alliances between industry and education do not automatically produce such impressive outcomes. Some alliances are not authentic partnership and they have a narrow vision of their role (Malley *et al.*, 2001). SWL employers want students to be well prepared and they want regular and supportive contact with the partnership and the school (AMR, 2001). The COSBOA study identified that small business wants recognition for its in-kind contributions and not be taken for granted. While business is expressing interest, ECEF and local partnerships need to get it right if the potential of partnership is to be realised. Over the past 6 years, ECEF has learned a great deal about building partnerships that genuinely deliver benefits to all involved. It is clear that partnerships need to be modelled on local needs to engender success, but there are common ingredients.

Partnerships are more likely to be successful when they have:

• A clear purpose, based on need
• One or more individuals taking up a leadership role, driving the program
• At least one individual acting as an leader in operational matters including communication
• An articulated vision that describes where the program is heading
• Relationships built on trust and integrity
• All stakeholders strongly connected into the program
• Management structures that are self-determined according to need
• Management systems that are efficient and fiscally responsible
• An accountability framework.

These factors will interact with different amounts of force depending on the local exigencies and the stage of partnership development. There are also external factors that impinge on partnership effectiveness. Funding and policy certainty for example encourage partnerships to undertake planning and facilitate their retention of staff.

While partnerships are influenced by external factors, some demonstrate an ability to withstand external policy changes better than, say, a direct agency of government. As entities in their own right, our leading edge partnerships withstand changes in governments, are creative in the way that they obtain supplementary funding and take calculated planned risks in expanding their services to other programs such as Jobs Pathway. They have been characterised by a willingness to innovate, tempered by a steadfast recognition of purpose and maintenance of high levels of service in their core business.

Some of these partnerships have existed for many years and have helped us to view the developmental stages of partnerships (see Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Characterised by</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alliance.</td>
<td>Exploring and identifying needs of young people, industry and community Visioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-partnership</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fledgling</td>
<td>Connecting as partners Planning Establishing structures and processes Decision making Propensity to innovate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consolidation</td>
<td>Achieving results Learning Refining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enterprising</td>
<td>Review and lateral thinking Developmental/diversity External stimulus Propensity to innovate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maturity</td>
<td>Consistency Strong ownership Status quo Stagnate and decline or innovate and renew</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This tool is helpful in analysing partnerships and predicting when they might require additional support, even though it oversimplifies a complex process. For example, a mature partnership could begin to stagnate and risk ultimate dissolution or it might reach out for innovation. In the renewed aspect of its operations, it will return to a start-up position i.e. the cycle repeats itself. Another partnership may form for only a brief period in order to fulfil a specific, discrete purpose. When the purpose has been achieved, the partnership may decide to reform, merge with a compatible partnership or to dissolve. Small partnerships may exist within larger alliances. For example, ECEF funded partnerships are represented in the Victorian LLENs and the National Youth Commitment projects.
The role of partnerships in ECEF’s youth strategy

Partnership is dynamic, evolving and multi-layered. It is ideally suited to a complex environment in which alteration of one component has an effect on other components (Cocks, 2001). At the local level, partnership can occur between education and industry to meet local needs but also contribute to the fulfilment of national goals such as reduced unemployment and addressing industry skill shortages. In turn, ECEF is in partnership with its local entities to support the achievement of outcomes. ECEF is also in partnership or at the least, in alliance with other central agencies to energise and influence policy directions. Table 2 summarises some key purposes of partnerships and ECEF’s facilitating role.

The multi-dimensional nature of partnerships demands a richer and more flexible accountability framework. A 360-degree accountability framework requires that those in the leadership roles are accountable to those who give them that leadership (Turner, 2001).

Table 2: ECEF’s role in facilitating effective partnerships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Partnership activity</th>
<th>ECEF role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Target/outcome accountability</td>
<td>Report on their performance in meeting agreed outcomes/targets and to explain any variations to both each other, the people they serve, and to the funder</td>
<td>Support local partnerships in the process of specifying, monitoring and explaining targets/outcomes and any variations, to learn from that feedback.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial accountability</td>
<td>Report and rationalise expenditure to both the funder and to their own partners – requires transparency Accountable to central agency (ECEF) for appropriate use of funds</td>
<td>Work with the partnership to ensure that they have the expertise required to deliver financial accountability Report to government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuous improvement</td>
<td>Commit resources, monitor health of partnership, review for changing local needs and report on this to each other and to ECEF</td>
<td>Commit resources, support and monitor health of partnerships and own organisation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A recent extension of ECEF and partnerships working together to support and monitor partnership health is to undertake action research on the value of partnerships per se. Is a partnership the best mechanism for achieving the desired outcomes? ECEF has profoundly revisited this question. Other approaches such as franchising, competitive tendering and direct service delivery through government departments have been considered, as well as a raft of government programs that intersect with ECEF’s mission. This work identified that the local community is likely to hold the solutions to its needs. Programs are targeted at regions and many current initiatives reflect a ‘return to place’. The broad concept of ‘partnership’ as a tool for community renewal is a recurring theme in current social and economic initiatives.

Again and again the research says that programs need to be embedded in people and place. The evaluation of the Full Service Schools Program (FSS) noted that:

‘the best examples from the FSS program are almost invariably in those schools which have engaged in and with their local community in a community oriented approach’ (Strategic Partners, 2001, p107.)

A separate review of Indigenous programs found that success is derived from a ‘partnership of the parties to the educational process’ and that holistic approaches are essential. A further critical factor in the success of the Indigenous programs was ‘Localisation’ (SRP, 2000). In the report Building Relationships, the Centre for Equity in Education concludes that effective support for at risk youth should be multi-dimensional and capable of dealing with the complexities of young people’s lives. In addition it should encourage young people to make meaningful decisions and choices – they need a chance to try, to fail, to learn and to succeed (2001, p13).

Conclusion

Partnerships are going to be an increasingly important part of the creation of successful pathways for young people, and at the same time meeting the needs of industry and the community. ECEF’s experience, and that of many others referred to in this paper, confirms that is not enough to design structures and pathways. People and the relationships between them at the local level are at the heart of a better future for young Australians. ECEF’s expertise in the market of youth pathways is the ability to build effective local industry-education pathways and some ECEF supported partnerships have already expanded into a broader provision of youth services. There are some exciting opportunities ahead.
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Does VET in Schools make a difference to post-school pathways?

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Sue Fullarton is a Research Fellow at ACER, where she is primarily engaged on the program of Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth. She has wide-ranging professional experience in education; teaching mathematics at secondary and tertiary level, lecturing in statistics, computing and research methodology at tertiary level, working with medical doctors in using appropriate research methods and data analysis. Her major research interests lie in the area of engagement with learning, particularly in mathematics, but broadly as well. Her work at ACER has included management of a major international professional development project in science and mathematics, in-depth analysis of data from TIMSS examining school and teacher effects in addition to reports for the LSAY program on subject choice at Year 12 and VET in Schools.

Background

Most Year 12 curriculum structures in Australia have evolved from frameworks that were traditionally oriented towards university study. However, the 1980s saw profound changes to the face of secondary schools in Australia. Due to a combination of a declining youth labour market, changes in student financial support and efforts to broaden the appeal of senior secondary school, the apparent retention rate to Year 12 increased dramatically from 35 per cent in 1980 to a peak of 77 per cent nationally in 1992. This marked rise in school retention led to reconsideration of the emphasis of senior secondary schooling.

In all states and territories major changes were made to the provision of programs in the senior secondary school to accommodate the requirements of a broader range of students. A variety of alternative studies were introduced into the curriculum, however these were not usually linked to forms of continuing study. During the 1990s these alternatives were largely brought into the ‘fold’ of the senior secondary certificate. The 1990s also saw the emergence of another form of alternate program, Vocational Education and Training in Schools, which was linked to the VET system and provided pathways to employment or further education for students. The introduction of VET subjects into the senior secondary school was seen as a means of providing real choice for those students not inclined towards academic studies, and to provide alternatives for those students at-risk of early school leaving.

There are a number of reasons that students should be encouraged to remain and complete their secondary schooling. One is purely pragmatic. Evidence from a variety of research studies suggests that those who leave school early are at risk. Students who leave school early earn less money, face a greater chance of unemployment, a higher probability of obtaining low skilled work, and a higher probability of not being in the labour force at all, compared to their peers that remain and complete Year 12 (Lamb & Rumberger, 1999; Kirby, 2000; Marks et al., 2000).

There is also evidence that a curriculum that fosters closer links between school and work results in higher levels of student satisfaction (Warner, 1992; Batten & Russell, 1995), and a key aim of recent policy in post-compulsory education and training has been to strengthen these links. This focus has seen the development of structured workplace learning programs involving collaboration between schools and local industries, and collaborative arrangements between schools and local Technical and Further Education (TAFE) colleges and some private VET providers.

The inclusion of VET subjects in secondary schools also adds a further dimension to education. VET in Schools ideally promotes the concept of lifelong learning by presenting students with a picture of a world in which education and work are intertwined, providing them with opportunities to enter either work or tertiary education, or some combination of the two. For most young people, there will be a need for participation in some form of education and training throughout their lives, thereby “learning-to-learn’ for new job opportunities in an advanced knowledge, communications and technological society” (Kirby, 2000, p37). Students who remain in school and complete a recognised course of education are more likely to be able to respond to such requirements. Recognising this, MCEETYA (1999) stated explicitly in the Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century that all students should have had access to vocational education and training programs while in their senior secondary years, and access to education that provides clear and recognised pathways to employment and further education and training.

Nomenclature

The term ‘VET in Schools’ in Australia refers to vocational programs that comply with the National Training Framework and which also form part of a senior secondary certificate. This definition includes programs incorporating structured workplace learning as well as a large number of school-based vocational
programs that do not necessarily involve work-based learning or school/industry partnerships. The term refers to programs where the curriculum and assessment are based on designated competencies, and outcome standards are industry-based.

The largest portion of VET in Schools programs do not involve students being engaged in a work or wage-based training contract as part of their studies. Recent years have also seen the introduction of School-based New Apprenticeships (SBNA). In this type of program a young person attends school for off-the-job skills training and subjects associated with the end of school certificate, but also works as an employee engaged under a New Apprenticeship contract. The configuration of school and work in this type of program differs from state to state and between industry areas, but generally takes the form of a young person studying for their end of school certificate while simultaneously being indentured to an employer.

Data for this study: The Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth

The Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) program at ACER studies the progress of several cohorts of young Australians between school, post-secondary education and training and work. The oldest cohort in this study was born in 1961, while the youngest was a nationally representative sample of Year 9 students selected in 1998. The data used in this study were from the 1995 cohort of LSAY, which was first surveyed in their Year 9 class in 1995 and at the time of the 2000 interviews had, for the majority of sample members, completed Year 12 two years earlier in 1998. This cohort have been surveyed each year since 1995 and asked a broad range of questions examining participation in education, training and work, and including questions that tap into students’ beliefs about education, teachers and schools.

For this study, participation in VET in Schools was defined from positive responses to questions on the 1997 and 1998 surveys asking students whether (in Year 11 and Year 12 respectively) they were participating in any form of VET in Schools. Responses to these items helped categorise the respondents into one of three groups:
- those students who took no VET in Schools;
- those students who took VET in Schools in either Year 11 or Year 12; and
- those students who took VET in Schools in both Year 11 and Year 12.

The extent of VET participation is an indication in some ways of how seriously the student has taken participation in VET in Schools. Some students pursued vocational education to a greater extent than others, who may simply wish to “sample” VET during their senior years.

Around three-quarters of the original Y95 sample of students participated in Year 12 in 1998 (Marks et al., 2000). Of these students, 15 per cent said that they had taken some VET in Schools subjects at either Year 11 or 12, and around 7 per cent that they had completed subjects at both Year 11 and Year 12.

The question raised in this paper is “Does VET in Schools make a difference to post-school pathways?” There are difficulties in attributing causality that should be acknowledged. Outcomes may be more about the aspirations and preferences of students than about participation in VET in Schools, and choices may well reflect students’ interests or abilities. As well, we have only a brief period of time after completing school for which we can examine outcomes. In this study we are essentially looking at positive associations with VET in Schools, in which case we should begin by looking at which students participate in VET in Schools.

Participation in VET in Schools

A recent analysis of participation rates for VET in Schools for the Y95 data (Fullarton, in preparation) has described the following differences, from an “other things equal” analysis which included state, achievement in literacy and numeracy in Year 9, school sector, locality, parents’ country of birth, parents’ occupation and gender as controls.

- Compared to students in New South Wales (21% participation rate), students from Queensland (41%) and Western Australia (29%) were more likely to participate in VET in Schools and students in Victoria (12%) and South Australia (18%) were less likely to participate.
- Students from the lowest achievement level were the most likely to participate (37%, compared to 29% for the lower middle achievement level).
- Those from non-Catholic independent schools were less likely to participate than those in government schools (14% compared to 26% in government schools).
- Those students whose parental background was from a non-English speaking country, and those whose parents were employed in professional or managerial occupations were less likely to participate.
- There were no gender differences in participation, and, all other things equal, no differences by school locality.

A further multivariate analysis was carried out using data from the Quality of School Life subscales that students answered in Year 9. These subscales represented students’ general satisfaction with school, opportunity (the student’s belief in the relevance of schooling), achievement (a sense of confidence in one’s ability to succeed), and attitude to teachers (a feeling...
about the adequacy of the interaction between students and teachers). Holding other things equal, it was found that a student’s strong self-confidence in their ability was predictive of their non-participation in VET in Schools. However, students who held strong beliefs that what they learn in school will be useful in the future, that it will be a resource that will provide opportunities, in other words that schooling is relevant to them, are more likely to do VET in Schools.

Pathways from school to employment, education and training

The paper examines the immediate post-school destinations of the 1995 cohort of Year 9 students who completed secondary school in 1998. These outcomes were broadly categorised as working (full-time or part-time, with or without study, or enrolled in an apprenticeship or traineeship) or not working (studying, unemployed or not in the labour force).

VET in Schools participants were much more likely than their non-VET peers to be in the workforce in their first year after completing school. Of those students who did no VET in Schools, some 19 per cent were working full-time in 1999, compared to 29 per cent of those who did one year VET in Schools and 32 per cent of those with two years. A further 7 per cent of those with no VET entered into apprenticeships or traineeships, compared to 15 per cent of those with one year and 17 per cent of those with two years VET in Schools.

Correspondingly, students who had not participated in VET in Schools were more likely to be in tertiary education. Around 63 per cent of the students who did not participate went on to tertiary study in their first year after school, compared to around 44 per cent of the students who did VET in Schools. The latter group were more likely to move on to TAFE than university, with around one-quarter enrolling in TAFE and one in five enrolling at university. For those who did no VET in Schools, almost one-half enrolled at university while one in six enrolled in a TAFE course.

Gender differences: An example of the effect of participation in VET in Schools

Most noticeable when the data were disaggregated by gender were the marked gender differences in participation in full-time employment or tertiary study and the interaction with level of VET in Schools study. For young females, level of participation in VET in Schools was not associated with either the level of participation in full-time work or the level of enrolment in tertiary study. Participation in the full-time workforce was highest for those who had participated in VET in Schools and lowest for those who had not. Correspondingly, enrolment in tertiary education was highest for those females who did not participate in VET in Schools and lowest for those who had. Whether it was one year of VET in Schools or two years however, made little difference.

However, for young males there were striking differences. Levels of participation in full-time employment were lowest for those who did no VET in Schools, increased for those who had completed one year, and were substantially higher for those who had completed two years of VET in Schools. Correspondingly, levels of participation in tertiary education were highest for those males who had no VET participation, substantially lower for those with one year participation and lower still for those who had completed two years of VET in Schools. It may be that the types of program that young males and females undertake are substantially different, with a stronger likelihood that the type of program that is undertaken by young males will lead to full-time employment.

Conclusion

This research examines a number of ways in which participation in VET in Schools might be associated with different post-school pathways. There are a variety of reasons that participation in VET in Schools is of benefit to a significant proportion of students in our schools, and it is important that participation and outcomes are monitored.

This paper describes levels of participation in VET in Schools, finding that participation is higher in some states than others, and that participation is highest among those students in the lowest achievement quartile, from government schools, from an English-speaking background and among those whose parents are employed in unskilled manual occupations. The paper also examines post-school destinations, and presents evidence that there are gender differences in these destinations that are associated with the level of participation in VET in Schools.

References


How effective are apprenticeships and traineeship pathways

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National Centre for Vocational Education Research

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Chris was formerly a Senior Executive with the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, heading the area responsible for advising Prime Ministers on employment, education and training issues. He was also Senior Executive in the Australian Department of Employment, Education and Training in Canberra and the Training, Enterprise and Education Directorate of the UK Employment Department. He was Research Economist with the Bureau of Labour Market Research and the Bureau of Agricultural Economics. Chris has a Bachelor of Agricultural Economics degree and a Graduate Diploma of Social Sciences.

Introduction

Apprenticeships are a long standing form of vocational education and training (VET) that involves training and instruction in the workplace with skilled workers passing on their knowledge and know-how to those undertaking the instruction. Typically, since the mid 20th century, apprenticeships have also involved off-the-job training often through a Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institute. Until recent years, apprenticeships in Australia have been exclusively focussed on the skilled trades and related occupations, and limited to young people entering those occupations.

Traineeships were introduced in the mid 1980s to extend the apprenticeship system to a wider group of occupations, particularly to the retail, clerical and service occupations. Traineeships provided structured training (i.e. a combination of on- and off-the-job instruction) in these occupations, where prior to this no such formal training existed. In their original form, the focus of traineeships was on school leavers entering the labour market.

In 1992, age restrictions in apprenticeships and traineeships were lifted allowing the systems to be open to adults for the first time.


The purpose of this paper is to explore developments in the Australian apprenticeship and traineeship system, particularly in recent years, to ascertain how effective the system now is in catering for, and meeting the needs of, young Australians. The focus is on teenagers in the 15 to 19 year old age group (which does include a very small number aged less than 15 years) and on young adults in the 20 to 24 year old age group.

The changing opportunities for young people

These developments are depicted in Table 1.

Apprenticeships had reached in Australia 100 000 by 1970. Total apprentice numbers grew to just under 137 000 by 1980, declining to under 130 000 by the mid 1980s. Apprentice numbers reached an all time record of over 160 000 by 1990, with traineeship numbers being a modest 12 000 in 1990. Throughout this period all apprentices and trainees were under 25 years of age. The system was then exclusively focussed on the young.

Table 1: Apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities for young people, 1970–2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Apprenticeships in skilled trades/new apprenticeships in skilled trades at level III</th>
<th>Traineeships/other contracts of training</th>
<th>Total apprenticeships and traineeships/new apprenticeships(a)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. (’000)</td>
<td>Proportion age 15–24(b) (%)</td>
<td>No. (’000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>103.8</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>131.9</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>136.7</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>128.6</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>161.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>119.4</td>
<td>93.5</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>129.6</td>
<td>87.2</td>
<td>148.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) New apprenticeships since 1998  (b) Includes a small number aged less than 15 years
Source: NCVER apprentice and trainee data

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By the mid 1990s apprentice numbers had fallen to under 120 000 and traineeship numbers had only grown to 16 500. Even though age restrictions had been lifted in 1992, by 1995 nearly 93% of all apprentices and trainees were young people under 25 years of age. Nevertheless, because of the declining numbers overall, the opportunities for young people were fewer in 1995 than they had been at the beginning of the 1990s.

However, there was a substantial turnaround in the second half of the 1990s. By June 2000, the number of apprentice and trainee (i.e. new apprentices since 1998) opportunities taken up by young Australians reached a record 185 000 by 2000, even though one-third of the total of nearly 280 000 new apprenticeships in 2000 were taken up by adults over 25 years of age. Of the record 185 000 places for young people under 25 years of age, around 115 000 were in the skilled trades of traditional apprenticeships (at certificate III level). The remaining 70 000 were in new apprenticeships (i.e. traineeships in a wide range of other occupations) particularly in the retail sales, clerical and service industries. This includes young people in new apprenticeships at certificate III level in occupations outside the skilled trades.

Thus, the current record level of opportunities for young people in new apprenticeships has entailed some shift away from traditional apprenticeships towards new apprenticeships in a wider range of other occupations. Nevertheless, almost two-thirds of all new apprenticeships taken up by young people are still in the traditional trades at certificate III level.

Notwithstanding the above patterns, the opportunities for young people overall in apprenticeships and traineeships have increased markedly since the mid-1990s, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Participation rates in apprenticeships and traineeships and new apprenticeships by gender and age, June 1995–2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15–19 years(a)</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20–24 years</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25–39 years</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 years &amp; over</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) Includes a small number aged less than 15 years
Source: NCVET (2001, p.90)

The proportion of all 15 to 19 year olds in an apprenticeship or traineeship has risen from 5.7% to 7.5% between 1995 to 2000. The participation rate of young adults aged 20 to 24 years has grown even faster, from 3.7% in 1995 to 6.3% in 2000.

The participation rates of older Australians have grown more rapidly, but from a low or non-existent base in the mid-1990s. These adult participation rates remain relatively low compared with the new apprenticeship participation rates of young people, especially teenagers.

The type of new apprenticeships undertaken by young people

Three quarters of all new apprenticeships are at the certificate III level (although many are now in non-trade occupations). As shown in Table 3 this rate is reasonably consistent across all age groups, but noting that it is highest at 80% for the 20 to 24 year old age group.

Table 3: Occupation and level of new apprenticeships by age, 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of new apprenticeship</th>
<th>15–19 years(b)</th>
<th>20–24 years</th>
<th>25 years and over</th>
<th>All ages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level of new apprentices</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate I &amp; II(b)</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate III</td>
<td>73.0</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>72.8</td>
<td>75.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate IV or higher</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level not specified</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Occupation of new apprentices

| Managers & administrators | 1.2 | 0.8 | 1.1 | 1.0 |
| Professionals & associates | 3.0 | 3.2 | 5.6 | 3.9 |
| Tradepersons & related workers | 63.3 | 64.6 | 17.4 | 48.5 |
| Clerical, sales & service workers | 26.1 | 24.0 | 39.8 | 30.0 |
| Intermediate production & transport workers | 1.4 | 2.1 | 11.5 | 5.0 |
| Labourers & related workers | 5.0 | 5.3 | 24.6 | 11.6 |
| Total                      | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

(b) Includes a small number aged less than 15 years
(b) Certificate I is less than 0.5% of new apprenticeships
Source: NCVET apprentice and trainee data

The main differences by age in the level of new apprenticeships are that teenagers have a much higher incidence, than those in older age groups, of being in a new apprenticeship at certificate II level. Older new apprentices are more likely than younger new apprentices to be in a new apprenticeship at the certificate IV level (although overall numbers at this level are still small).

Younger new apprentices are much more likely to be in a trades apprenticeship (irrespective of whether they are teenagers or young adults) than are new apprentices over 25 years of age (Table 3). Moreover,
younger new apprentices are much less likely to be in new apprenticeships in the clerical, sales and service, production and transport or labouring occupations, than are new apprentices aged 25 years or more.

The age factor in new apprenticeship completions

Teenagers make up 37% of all new apprentices, yet only 15% of all completions occur while new apprentices are still teenagers. Such a statistic, however, reveals nothing about the relative success rates of people of different ages within the apprenticeship and traineeship system.

As shown in Table 4, apprenticeship completion rates for all age groups (calculated by following cohorts of commencers over time) are very high compared with the completion rates for other VET students and university students. Around three-quarters of all those commencing in a particular apprenticeship actually go on to complete that apprenticeship. However, traineeship completion rates are a very different story, with only 55% completing. The reasons for this are discussed more fully in NCVER (2001) and Smart (2001).

Table 4: Comparisons of completion rates from apprenticeships, traineeships, overall vocational education and training and university

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of education</th>
<th>Completion rate %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apprentices who commence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in 1995/96</td>
<td>70–74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traineeships who commence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in 1997</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAFE commences 1994–1996</td>
<td>76(a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VET module enrolers in 1997</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University undergraduates who commenced in 1992 and completed by 1997</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) The proportion who completed a full TAFE course (some 27%) plus all those who did not complete a full course but successfully completed all modules they commenced (49%)

Source: NCVER (2001, pp.126-127)

Some studies have examined the impact of age on completion rates in apprenticeships and traineeships. In analyses of longitudinal data, Lamb et al. (1998) found that 76% of all young people who had entered an apprenticeship by age 19 years had completed that apprenticeship by age 24 years.

Ray et al. (2000 p24) found that young people have higher completion rates in apprenticeships than people who commence at a later age. They found the probability of attrition from an apprenticeship increases with age (Ray et al., 2000, p29–30).

In the case of traineeships, Grey et al. (1999, p22) found that non-completion rates were slightly lower for teenagers in traineeships than for older trainees. However, when examining the interaction between age and education together, they found that older trainees with low levels of education experience relatively low chances of non-completion compared with younger trainees with similar education.

Thus, completion rates of young people in apprenticeships are very high, whereas traineeship completion rates for young people are much lower. However, the vast majority of traineeships undertaken by young people result in a job outcome, irrespective of whether or not they complete the traineeship (as discussed below).

The outcomes achieved by young people

New apprenticeships are an excellent pathway to jobs, irrespective of the age of the person completing the apprenticeship or traineeship.

Some 90% of new apprentices aged 15 to 19 years are retained in employment or have gained new employment within 3 months of completion of their new apprenticeship, as shown in Table 5. This employment rate rises to 92% for young adults aged 20 to 24 years, and is slightly higher for adult completors aged 25 years and over.

Table 5: Employment outcomes by age from new apprenticeships, 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Proportion employed in unsubsidised employment 3 months after cessation (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Completers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15–19 years(a)</td>
<td>90.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20–24 years</td>
<td>92.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 years &amp; over</td>
<td>96.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>93.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) Includes a small number aged less than 15 years

Source: Data from the post program monitoring system supplied by the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs and the Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business

The employment rates are particularly good for young apprentices if they undertook their off-the-job training at a TAFE institute as part of their apprenticeship. As shown in Table 6, the employment rates for apprentices who studied at TAFE were 97% for 15–19 year olds and 96% for 20 to 24 year olds. For traineeship completors who studied at TAFE, the employment rates are also very high, being 90% and 87% respectively, for these age groups.
Understanding Youth Pathways: What does the research tell us?

Even partial completion of a new apprenticeship provides very good job outcomes for young people. In 2000, the proportions of young people who did not complete their full apprenticeship or traineeship program, but who were employed in an unsubsidised job within three months of leaving their new apprenticeship, was 68% for those aged 15 to 19 years and 70% for 20 to 24 year olds (see Table 5). The employment rate for non-completers aged 25 years and over was slightly higher at 73%.

The employment outcomes from new apprenticeships for young people compare very favourably with those attained from other forms of education and training. NCVER (2001 pp138–139) reported that post-course employment rates were 73.4% for other TAFE courses and 67.0% for university graduates. However, it needs to be remembered that all new apprentices already have a job while they are studying (as part of their new apprenticeship), whereas many other TAFE and university students do not. Moreover, some 15% of TAFE graduates and 24% of university graduates go on to further study prior to entering the labour market.

Completion of new apprenticeships also leads to good outcomes for young people in terms of starting salaries. These average just over $500 per week for all new apprentices and just under $500 for those in their first full-time job, as shown in Table 7. Starting salaries for new apprentices increase with age (table 7) in line with wage levels by age in the economy overall.

Table 6: Employment and labour force status by age at the end of May 2000 of new apprentices(a) who gained a qualification during 1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment and labour force status at end May 2000</th>
<th>Proportion of completers by age (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15–19 year olds</td>
<td>20–24 year olds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed after course</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprenticeships(b)</td>
<td>97.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traineeships</td>
<td>89.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total new apprenticeships(c)</td>
<td>94.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed after course</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New apprenticeships(c)</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not in labour force after course</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New apprenticeships(c)</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) New apprentices are all those who completed a qualification from a TAFE course during 1999 and who indicated that their source of income while doing the course was an apprenticeship, or a traineeship or a new apprenticeship.
(b) Apprenticeships include the small number who stated that their source of income was both an apprenticeship and traineeship.
(c) New apprenticeships are the total of apprenticeships and traineeships.

Table 7: Average starting salaries by age, 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Starting salary</th>
<th>Age group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15–19 years ($ per week)</td>
<td>20–24 years ($ per week)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All new apprentices(a)</td>
<td>408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New apprentices in first full-time job(b)</td>
<td>417</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) Average gross weekly earnings at end May 2000 of all persons who completed/gained a qualification from a TAFE course during 1999 and who were in a new apprenticeship when doing the course.
(b) As above but only for those in their first full-time job at end May 2000. Source: NCVER student outcome survey data.

NCVER (2000, p142) reported that while starting salaries for apprentices and trainees are, on average, slightly higher than for other TAFE graduates, they remain well below those for university graduates. For instance, in 1999 the weekly starting salaries for first full-time job holders were $473 for apprentices and trainees, $462 for all TAFE graduates and $635 for university graduates.

Conclusion

Over the past decade, we have seen major changes in the nature of Australia’s apprenticeship and traineeship system. These changes have included the opening up of the system to adults and a doubling of the numbers of apprentices and trainees since the mid 1990s.

The total number of opportunities for young people have risen over the 1990s by nearly 10%. In 1990, Australia provided a then record level of just over 170 000 apprenticeship and traineeship places for people under the age of 25. By 2000 some 185 000 new apprenticeship opportunities were taken up by young people aged 15–24 years, which is the highest number of apprentice and trainee opportunities for young people ever recorded in Australia.

The 1990s were a decade which saw an expansion in opportunities beyond apprenticeships in the traditional trades to a much wider range of apprenticeships and traineeships in certificate II, III and IV programs in a much larger number of occupational areas of the labour market.

New apprenticeships are now an effective pathway for young people to a much wider range of occupations beyond the traditional trade occupations. However, the number of apprenticeship opportunities for young people in the skilled trades have fallen from the record levels that existed at the beginning of the 1990s, in line with the decline in the relative importance of skilled trades employment overall in Australia over the 1990s.
The job outcomes for young people undertaking new apprenticeships are excellent with 90% or more of young people in an unsubsidised job within three months of completing a new apprenticeship. Most important, is that the job outcomes are very good across the full range of occupations covered by new apprenticeships.

References


What are some of the distinctive features of youth pathways in Australia?

In education

The pathways that young Australians take through education, from the end of compulsory schooling to working life, have a number of features that are distinctive although rarely unique in a comparative context. First, and despite change over time and variation between the states and territories, it is more common in Australia than in most OECD countries except Ireland and New Zealand for upper secondary education to take place in the same institution as lower secondary schooling. Elsewhere in the OECD separate institutions for upper secondary education are the norm. This has important implications for the breadth of curriculum choice available.

Second, the great majority of young Australians take a general education programme in upper secondary education or its equivalent. Eighty per cent of Australian 15–19 year-old students are in general education programmes, compared to an average of 50% for the OECD as a whole (OECD, 2000a). Entry to programmes that provide a specific occupational qualification is generally delayed to a later age in Australia than in countries such as Germany and Austria.

Some caveats. The first is that upper secondary general education programmes vary widely. In countries such as the Czech Republic and Austria, where only around one in five take this route, the curriculum seems fairly narrowly designed to prepare the student for university-level tertiary study. In many countries – for example Sweden – general education programmes allow relatively little subject choice. In countries such as Australia, Canada and the United States where 80% or more are in general education programmes, curriculum choice seems wider, and more options related to work, to general citizenship and to cultural and recreational interests appear to be included. Furthermore the situation is changing rapidly in Australia, it seems to differ somewhat between the states and territories, and in other OECD countries pressures to either delay or soften the nature of early specific occupational choices are evident.

Third, the proportion of Australian students who enrol in private, although government dependent, institutions is around twice the OECD average.

Fourth, those young people who enter university-level tertiary education in Australia do so at the relatively early average age of 19. This compares to 23 in Denmark and Sweden, which lie at the other end of the OECD spectrum. The difference is partly due to differences in school starting ages, partly to different typical lengths of upper secondary education, and partly to different patterns of delay between finishing school and starting university.

Fifth, Australia has TAFE colleges. These are relatively unique in the OECD, although they do have something in common with community colleges in Canada and the United States. They offer a wide range of courses at several levels in a highly flexible way: modular in structure, serving a range of purposes, providing a range of qualifications, with a diverse client base, and delivered in a variety of learning modes. They have recently been described by the OECD as “adult friendly” (2001a, 2001b). Although they provide more openings for early school leavers than do community colleges in the United States (Lamb and Rumberger, 1999) and have traditionally had strong apprenticeship programmes in which young people have been concentrated, their attractiveness to adults is one of their important features. Unlike the vocational schools that play a key role in Austria’s and Germany’s apprenticeship systems they are not almost exclusively youth-focused. Footnote 5 provides more details of TAFE participation by those of upper-secondary school age.
In the labour market

The Australian labour market has some distinctive structural features that affect the nature of Australian youth pathways. First, Australia’s economy was among the more successful at sustaining GDP growth during the 1990s and employment growth during the 1990s was strong, even if not as strong as during the 1980s (OECD, 2001b; OECD, 2001c; OECD, 2001d). A sound economy and labour market are among the most important factors determining youth transition outcomes: poorer countries generate fewer jobs for their citizens and spend less on education than do wealthier ones.

Second, there is a higher incidence of part-time employment than in any OECD country except the Netherlands. Slightly over 26% of Australian jobs are part-time compared to an average of just over 15% across the OECD as a whole. Among males the incidence of part-time employment is, at 15%, the highest in the OECD (OECD, 2001c).

This is related to a third key feature: employment protection is not excessively strict. It is relatively easy to fire but also relatively easy to hire; limitations that are placed upon the duration of fixed term contracts are comparatively few; and temporary work agencies are lightly regulated (OECD, 1999). This gives the Australian labour market a relatively open nature compared to countries such as Greece and Italy, where stricter employment protection and the high social costs associated with employment make it much harder for new entrants to break into the labour market.

This helps to explain another key feature of the Australian labour market: a high proportion of students have jobs. Half of all 15–19 year-old students had a job in 1999, more than twice the OECD average, exceeded only by Denmark, The Netherlands and Switzerland. Among 20–24 year-old students 72% had a job in 1999, the highest level in the OECD. Here Australia contrasts sharply with France, Greece, Italy, Hungary, Portugal and Spain where five per cent or less of teenage students work, and only around one in five 20–24 year-old students combine study with a job (OECD, 2001d).

The incidence of student employment has a lot to do with how the labour market is organised – the existence of appropriate wages and employment contracts for example. It has something to do with social attitudes: in some countries there is a belief that young people should concentrate upon their studies; in others that work is good for youth. And it has something to do with how schools operate. In France for example school opening hours and homework loads would make it difficult for many teenage students to work, however the labour market was organised.

The Australian labour market is also a relatively easy one for young graduates to find work in. In 1998 the unemployment rate among 25–29 year-old graduates was, at 2.7%, the fourth lowest in the OECD, well below the OECD average of 7.7%, and in marked contrast to the unemployment rates of over ten per cent experienced by graduates of this age in France and Turkey and of over 20% in Greece, Italy and Spain (OECD, 2000b).

Finally, young Australians’ post-school pathways are extremely diverse. McKenzie (2000) points out that in the first seven years after leaving school almost 500 different activity patterns can be identified. There is as yet little data to allow us to assess whether this is unusual when compared to other countries. McKenzie speculates that in a country such as Germany, where pathways are more structured, such a multiplicity of individual routes would be unlikely. We do know that the time spent employed in the first years out of school is, on average, higher in Germany than in Australia (OECD, 1998).

How do the outcomes of youth pathways in Australia compare to those of other OECD countries?

Transition policies try to achieve multiple objectives: for example both high rates of school completion and low rates of youth joblessness. And so outcomes need to be compared using many indicators, not just a single indicator such as youth unemployment rates.

Figure 1 shows Australia’s relative position on 14 indicators converted to a common mean (one) and a common standard deviation (zero). Compared to the OECD as a whole, Australia’s transition outcomes are mixed. On the one hand, employment rates for young adults are above the OECD average, and relatively large numbers of young adults achieve university-level tertiary qualifications. On the other hand teenage unemployment in Australia is worse than the OECD average, early school leaving appears to be comparatively high, and early school leavers appear to be relatively highly disadvantaged in the labour market, compared to their better educated peers.

Another way to make comparisons is on the basis of countries of comparable wealth and with comparable overall unemployment rates. Where the correlation between the 14 indicators and either GDP per capita or

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When averaged over the 14 indicators Australia is right in the centre of the OECD pack with a mean of zero.
overall unemployment rates is significant\(^3\), Table 1 shows the relationship between the observed value of the indicators and the value that would be expected on the basis of GDP per capita or the overall unemployment rate.

Table 1 suggests the following cautious conclusions:

- **Teenage unemployment in Australia seems to be somewhat worse than might be expected from overall levels of unemployment, but levels of unemployment among 20–24 year-olds are much as would be expected from Australia’s national wealth and its overall unemployment levels.**

- **Employment outcomes among 20–24 year-olds seem to be somewhat better than would be expected both from Australia’s level of GDP per capita and from its overall unemployment levels.**

- **Rates of upper secondary completion (both Year 12 and its VET equivalents such as apprenticeship) among those in their mid to late 20s seem to be a little lower than might be expected from a country with Australia’s levels of national wealth.**

The extent to which Australia departs from expectations should not be exaggerated, as there are other countries that depart even more. Absolute levels also need to be considered. For example, unemployment among non-student 15–19 year-olds was 4.4% in 1994, over half a standard deviation worse than the OECD average. Denmark might treat this as a problem. Spain might be thankful to achieve it. How serious it is also depends upon whether it is confined to the same hard core group of youth over an extended period, or spread over a wide group of young people and multiple, brief, intermittent spells of unemployment. Also to be considered in interpreting absolute levels is that the number of Australian teenagers who are neither in education nor in work is substantially larger than the group that is formally looking for work. And ACER longitudinal data tells us that perhaps nine per cent of young people drift in and out of unemployment, inactivity and marginal work for a considerable period after leaving school (McClelland et. al., 1998).

### Can these comparative outcomes be related to the nature of Australia’s youth pathways?

Transition outcomes for Australian youth are something of a curate’s egg: some parts good, some parts less so. Compared to other OECD countries employment outcomes for young adults are quite good. Young adults graduate from university at a rate that is somewhat above the OECD average and are able to move easily into work compared to graduates in many other OECD countries. On the other hand teenage unemployment is somewhat above the OECD average, rates of early school leaving are somewhat higher, and the disadvantage that young adults without upper secondary qualifications suffer in the labour market is on the high side of OECD experience.

This pattern is unlikely to be coincidental. On the one hand student employment rates are high, and these are a strong predictor of the employment prospects of young adults, both for individuals and across countries (Robinson, 1999; OECD, 2000). A relatively open labour market seems good at creating opportunities for those able to take advantage of them. An open and flexible labour market is complemented by an accessible\(^4\) and flexible tertiary education system, including a large non-university sector (TAFE) that is particularly well adapted to meet the learning needs of adults.

On the other hand school completion rates in Australia are somewhat low\(^5\) and early school leaving seems somewhat high. By increasing the youth labour supply this is likely to contribute to teenage unemployment, and to add to the difficulties that are experienced by poorly qualified youth. A large non-university level tertiary education system does not seem to provide an effective alternative for those who leave school early, offering them largely courses leading to low-level qualifications from which drop out rates seem to be very high.

A picture emerges of transition pathways that serve the able, qualified and enterprising relatively well, but which are not as well suited to the needs of the less able, less qualified and less enterprising.

### What could be done to improve Australian youth transition outcomes? From Newton to Heisenberg

Wherever you stand on the question of whether Australia’s performance is good or bad, one thing is clear. There is room for improvement. And the key challenge is to improve outcomes for those most at

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\(^3\) At the five per cent level.

\(^4\) Using expected numbers of years of university-level tertiary study in 1999 as an indicator of access to university-level study, Australia falls eighth out of 28 OECD countries and is somewhat above the OECD mean (OECD, 2001d).

\(^5\) Comparative educational participation data for 16–17 year-olds tends to obscure this, as it includes both TAFE and school students. NCVER data shows that 62% of 16–17 year-old non-student school students enrol in TAFE in 2000 were doing courses that lead to either awards below Certificate III level or to no award. Both estimates by Foyster, Fai and Shah (2000) and analysis of Queensland cohort data by Smith et al. (2000) indicate that actual course completion rates by early school leavers of upper secondary age who enrol in TAFE are very low indeed: 20% or less. The ABS estimates that 31,110 16–17 year olds were participating in TAFE in September 1999. NCVER data shows that 100,055 non-school student 16–17 year-olds participated in TAFE during 2000. Differences of this order suggest either very high drop out rates, high rates of completion of courses of less than one year in duration, or both.
risk, as other OECD countries have shown themselves able to do. In particular the focus needs to be on those who leave school before the end of Year 12.

There is a longstanding tension in the transition literature between structure and agency. On the one hand there is a belief that the best outcomes will be achieved if young people have formal, structured institutional arrangements linked to coherent qualification pathways. This view was highly influential in shaping the school-to-work initiatives of the early Clinton administration in the United States and it has been strongly influenced by the apparent success of apprenticeship systems in German speaking countries in keeping youth unemployment low. On the other hand there is a belief that young people will be best served by systems that develop self reliance, responsibility and initiative, that provide plenty of choice, and that allow self actualisation and career exploration. While received policy wisdom has tended to favour the former view, it also has its sceptics. Ryan (1999) for example worries about the extent to which Japan’s highly structured system for managing links between schools and the labour market hammers too many square pegs into too many round holes, at a cost not only to individual satisfaction but also to labour market flexibility, no matter how good its formal outcomes.

Between the late 1980s and mid 1990s Australian transition policy seems to have been strongly influenced by the vision of a Newtonian universe of tightly organised and coherent vocational qualification pathways. More recently it has broadened its emphasis, taking into account a wider range of the factors that help to achieve successful transition outcomes (see Box 1). There have been efforts to strengthen the relationship between schools and employers; to diversify and expand opportunities to combine learning with workplace experience; to improve career guidance; and to reform income support arrangements. It has also been suggested that there is now a stronger emphasis upon developing young people’s initiative in shaping their own transition pathways (OECD, 1997). The features of Australia’s transition pathways that seem to be associated with its good outcomes for young adults seem to have much to do with those that allow the enterprising, able and qualified to take advantage of opportunity. However this strength of the Australian system needs to be matched by better and more structured support for the less able in order to improve overall transition outcomes.

Given the key role that Year 12 completion plays as a sorting device in the Australian labour market, a key goal must be to increase upper secondary qualification rates by raising school completion. This strategy seems more likely to pay off than efforts to increase upper secondary qualification rates through the vocational education system outside of secondary schools. Despite the fact that school retention rates have stalled in Australia during the 1990s, TAFE participation by youth has stalled for a far longer period, and the considerable expansion in non-school apprenticeship and traineeship numbers that has occurred in recent years has been of little benefit to those of school age. TAFE’s real strength lies in the flexible ways in which it meets adult learning needs.

We know that young people in Australia leave school because they are not interested in what is offered and because they do not like school (McIntyre and Melville, 2000). One of the keys to raising Year 12 completion rates must be to give young people wider curriculum choice and allow a wider range of adolescent’s developing personal and vocational interests to be satisfied. Another must be to make schools more enjoyable places. Despite the success of the VET in Schools initiative, it will remain hamstrung while most young people are educated in the small grade cohorts that result from combining lower and upper secondary schooling in the same institution. Adopting senior high schooling for all, in separate senior high schools, as a national goal would allow larger grade cohorts to be created. In turn this would allow Year 11 and 12 students a far wider choice of subjects. It would also lead to the creation of the more adult learning environments that young people find an attractive feature both of TAFE and of senior high schools. Larger senior high schools as the national model would also permit more specialised advice, guidance and support services to be provided. These key features of effective transition systems are needed not only in adopting an actively preventative approach to early school leaving, but also to allow better careers advice to support the educational pathways of all young people. One form of support service that seems particularly weak in Australia are re-entry programmes for those who have dropped out of school but who wish to come back.

If overall transition outcomes are to be improved, much can also be done outside the school to build stronger safety nets for early school leavers, and to encourage them to return to learning to gain a Year 12

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* A more considered view would point out that when a wider range of outcome indicators is considered, it is clear that countries without such arrangements can also obtain good transition outcomes. For example whilst Germany’s teenage unemployment indicators are among the best in the OECD and far better than Australia’s, in 1999 the employment rate among non-student 20–24 year-olds in Australia was above Germany’s.

* International classifications of educational qualifications treat both Year 12 school qualifications and vocational qualifications based upon extended programmes such as apprenticeship as upper secondary qualifications.

* At around 20% for 15–19 year-olds.

* It is also a far cheaper option than a national strategy of smaller class sizes as a way of increasing curriculum choice.
qualification. Reformed financial support arrangements and the adoption of a mutual obligation approach to welfare assistance have both been important. However they are only half of the story. The very successful Scandinavian safety nets for early leavers (OECD, 2000a) are characterised not only by comparable income support arrangements, but also by integrated, locally managed early intervention services that stop the early leaver drifting into unemployment and other marginal activities over an extended period.

One of the most important lessons to have emerged from both Australian (McKenzie, 2000) and international (OECD, 1998) research is the importance of early intervention in the first year out of school.

Figure 1: Australia compared to the OECD average on 14 indicators of transition outcomes

Source: OECD education and labour force data bases. For each indicator country values have been converted to a common mean (one) and a common standard deviation (zero). The sign of the resulting standard scores has been adjusted so that negative values (for example on unemployment) indicate outcomes that are worse than the OECD average and positive values (for example on educational attainment) indicate outcomes that are better than the OECD average.

Key:
Teenage unemployment (1): 15–19 year-old unemployed non-students as a percentage of all 15–19 year-olds, 1999
Teenage unemployment (2): Unemployed 15–19 year-olds as a per cent of all 15–19 year-olds, 2000
20–24 unemployment: Unemployed 20–24 year-olds as a per cent of all 20–24 year-olds, 2000
Long term unemployment 15–19: Per cent of unemployed 15–19 year-olds unemployed for six months or more, 2000
Long term unemployment 20–24: Per cent of unemployed 20–24 year-olds unemployed for six months or more, 2000
Youth to adult unemployment ratio: Ratio of unemployment rate among 15–24 year olds to unemployment rate among 25–54 year-olds, 2000
20–24 employment (1): Per cent of 20–24 year-old non-students employed, 1999
20–24 employment (2): Employed 20–24 year-olds as a per cent of all 20–24 year-olds, 2000
Low qualified 20–24 year-olds: Per cent of 20–24 year-olds who have completed no more than lower secondary education, 1999
Early school leaving: Per cent not in education one year after the end of compulsory education, 1999
Early leavers employment disadvantage: Share of total 20–24 year-old employment represented by those with no more than lower secondary education divided by the share of total 20–24 year-old unemployment represented by those with no more than lower secondary education, 1999
25–34 year-olds with tertiary qualifications: Per cent of 25–34 year-olds with a tertiary qualification (ISCED-97 Type-A or advanced research programme), 1999
Literacy skills of poorly qualified 20–25 year-olds: Mean document literacy score of 20–25 year-olds with no more than lower secondary education, 1994–98.
Table 1: Observed transition indicator values and values predicted on the basis of GDP per capita and total unemployment rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observed</th>
<th>Predicted on the basis of:</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GDP per capita</td>
<td>R²</td>
<td>Unemployment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-19 year-old unemployed non-students as a percentage of all 15-19 year-olds, 1999</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unemployed 15-19 year-olds as a per cent of all 15-19 year-olds, 2000</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unemployed 20-24 year-olds as a per cent of all 20-24 year-olds, 2000</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Per cent of unemployed 15-19 year-olds unemployed for six months or more, 2000</td>
<td>34.1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per cent of unemployed 20-24 year-olds unemployed for six months or more, 2000</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>32.1</td>
<td>.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per cent of 20-24 year-old non-students employed, 1999</td>
<td>77.7</td>
<td>75.4</td>
<td>.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed 20-24 year-olds as a per cent of all 20-24 year-olds, 2000</td>
<td>73.5</td>
<td>62.1</td>
<td>.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per cent of 25-29 year olds with at least upper secondary education, 1999</td>
<td>70.5</td>
<td>77.7</td>
<td>.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: OECD education and labour force data bases

Box 1: The key ingredients of successful transition systems

- A healthy economy and a well-functioning labour market
- Well organised pathways to connect initial education with work and further study
- Workplace experience combined with education
- Tightly knit safety nets for those at risk
- Good information and guidance
- Effective institutions and processes

Source: OECD (2000a)

References


Improving pathways outcomes for young Indigenous Australians

Mr Peter Buckskin PSM
Assistant Secretary, Indigenous Education Branch, Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs

Introduction

In 1998, the Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs reviewed the access to departmental programmes and services by young Indigenous Australians moving from school to work with a view to varying the programmes to overcome identified access barriers.

As part of this process, ACER was commissioned to produce a report that reviewed the literature and analysed available statistical data. The report showed that at nearly every stage, Indigenous youth experience substantial disadvantage in terms of their participation in education, their attainment of educational qualifications, and their participation in the labour market.

These findings were supported by the recent work of the PM’s Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce. In its report entitled Footprints to the Future, the Taskforce found that young Indigenous Australians generally seem disproportionately represented among young people who are having difficulty in successfully negotiating the transition from school to independence and active participation in their communities.

Successfully navigating multiple pathways was the focus of recent work undertaken by the MCEETYA Taskforce on Indigenous Education. Its paper entitled Exploring Multiple Pathways for Indigenous Peoples pointed out that young Indigenous Australians are subject to the same range of issues as their peers, but often more intensely. Many of the difficulties that they experience are exacerbated by our still poor understanding of the diversity of cultures and life world knowledges that make up Australian society and the populations of our educational and training institutions.

In my conference presentation, I propose to summarise current advice regarding the achievement of seamless transition for Indigenous Australians within a context of lifelong learning and to identify some current work that is generating some success.

Goal of seamless transition

The national policy agenda of the Australian education and training sector now includes the achievement of educational equality for Indigenous Australians as an urgent national priority. It is generally agreed that this goal will be achieved when the range and mean of educational outcomes for Indigenous students are the same as those for all Australian students.

But the goal of seamless transition within a context of lifelong learning is more stringent and difficult to achieve.

The achievement of lifelong learning is a widely recognised success factor in the world today. It is critical for both individual’s and communities’ capacity to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing and globalised world.

People who have less education and are at most risk in the labour market, are least likely to receive training. Those with acute learning needs are therefore most at risk of being marginalised or excluded, while being also least likely to become lifelong learners. Any expansion of lifelong learning may in itself potentially exacerbate rather than reduce existing inequalities.

Transition issues emerge at different points in the education/work continuum for students from 12 to 25 years. There is the transition from primary to secondary school, from compulsory to post-compulsory secondary education, from school to work, from school to further or higher education, and from unemployment to further education or training and work.

Effective transition is seamless and ensures that:

• young people should have a set of interrelated experiences providing for progression. This would include early warning signals so that preventative and early intervention strategies can be put in place;
• education and training should have a sense of continuity even when individuals cross institutional and sectoral boundaries;
• young people should have access to a range of different pathways and should be able to move from one to another without losing ground;
• effective credit transfer and articulation arrangements are needed to provide smooth bridges between pathways; and
• signposts (information and career advice) are needed at the start of each pathway and at each junction between pathways.

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Each of these elements of a coherent structure of pathways through education and training and into work has figured in various ways in government policies during the last decade. The difficulty seems to be in bringing it all together on a large scale for many groups of Australians, especially Indigenous Australians.

**Systemic weaknesses**

The Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce found that a major issue is that institutions that young people need along the way often do not recognise themselves as part of a coherent youth transition system. The Taskforce was of the view that it is the failure of the services in the system to work together as part of a co-ordinated whole, which is at the core of systemic weaknesses. This failure does not derive solely from the ways that agencies work. It is due in part to the ways that programmes are designed, funded and implemented to address specific issues or particular groups of young people.

This lack of a broader vision about a coherent youth transition system has led to:

- poor linkages between programmes;
- different and sometimes competing programme accountability requirements;
- haphazard exchange of best practice;
- gaps in local service provision;
- lack of responsiveness within services;
- lack of accountability for broader outcomes;
- lack of information about the transition system for young people;
- lack of information about young people’s progress through the system hampers follow up.

**Poor understanding of pathways**

In theory, Australia’s Indigenous communities are well positioned in terms of the lifelong learning agenda. Lifelong learning has been a valued part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and societies throughout the ages. This is directly attributable to Indigenous Australia having some of the longest living cultures in the world.

Numerous reviews, inquiries and consultations conducted in recent years have all demonstrated that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people place a high priority on education.

Nevertheless, many young Indigenous Australians have a poor understanding of the pathways within and between school and post-school options, and their Indigenous cultures and experiences, because the connections are often not apparent or available to them. Therefore they may drop out of education and training or restrict themselves to one pathway, rather than explore the multiple pathways available to them.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the Indigenous population of Australia is younger and growing at a faster rate compared to other Australians. Existing concerns about the difficulty many Indigenous youth experience in successfully negotiating the transition from school to independence and active participation in their communities are therefore likely to increase as the population expands in proportion to other Australian youth.

**Primary school transition**

A smoother transition from primary to secondary school increases the possibility of students remaining in secondary school.

The experience of schooling for Indigenous primary school children may include a number of factors which affect learning and subsequently influence their transition to secondary school. For example, Indigenous children have a higher incidence of health problems and their cultural capital is often poorly recognised and valued by the school.

In addition, there are substantial differences in the average literacy and numeracy achievement levels of Indigenous and non-Indigenous primary school students. The results of the 1999 national Year 3 reading standards show that despite recent improvements, nationally one third of Indigenous students are still below the standard. There is considerable variation across the states and territories in the proportion of Indigenous students failing to meet the standard.

**Junior secondary school transition**

Indigenous youth share the universal development tasks of their age group with their non-Indigenous peers. These include the need to develop a strong sense of personal identity and self esteem. Indigenous youth, however, have a distinctive sense of identity as Indigenous people and in early adolescence it may be a source of confusion and embarrassment.

The transition from primary school to secondary school is a difficult one for many young people but it can be traumatic for Indigenous young people who have to leave their communities to undertake secondary studies.

Australia has one of the highest rates of student absenteeism among OECD countries, with an average rate of over 7%. Recent research across the primary and secondary years shows that in Year 10, which is the lowest point in attendance for both Indigenous and
non-Indigenous students, Indigenous students are absent up to three times more often than non-Indigenous students.

Suspension rates are highest for students aged between 13 and 15 years, and are markedly higher for boys.

Apparent retention rates show that only 83% of Indigenous students remained in schooling to year 10 in 1998, compared to just under 100% for non-Indigenous students. This year 10 retention rate varies considerably across the country and in some parts of the country was just over 50% in 1997.

Many school systems require high levels of attendance before awarding Year 10 completion certificates.

The unemployment rate is higher for 15–19 year olds than for any other age group. For Indigenous people, completing Year 10 or 11 increases employment chances by 40 per cent, a post-secondary qualification increases employment chances by 13–23 per cent, and education also reduces the likelihood of arrest, which itself significantly reduces the probability of employment.

Vocational learning is one way that schools can meet the heightening challenge of preparing young people for a complex world, including the world of work. However there are ongoing concerns that vocational learning and VET in Schools may be seen as the only pathway being explored for these students. Often there are few obvious incentives or alternatives visible to Indigenous young people other than vocational learning at school through community.

The difficulty for many Indigenous youth in making a commitment to learning is that there is often no clear relationship between formal schooling and employment. However, even where young Indigenous Australians achieve the same levels of educational qualification as their non-Indigenous counterparts, they subsequently experience higher rates of unemployment – even when geographic and other differences are taken into account, and this is probably due to racism.

Junior to senior secondary transition

Indigenous students are much less likely to continue their education beyond the compulsory years. Only about 38% of Indigenous students remain at school from the commencement of their secondary schooling to year 12, compared to about 75% of non-Indigenous students in 2000.

The 1994 ACER study on subject choice in years 11 and 12 and more recent trend data shows that early school achievement is a significant influence on enrolments in particular subject areas and therefore on post-school options.

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early school leavers have already left the school system before being able to access the ‘VET in Schools’ programs, which are usually offered at years 11 and 12. 1999 ASTF data showed that only 3.3% of students participating in Structured Workplace Learning programmes are Indigenous Australians.

Transition from school to VET

Indigenous school students have a better perception of VET than of schools, and feel that VET contributes to their employability and career options, even though the quantitative and qualitative data show that the employment outcomes from VET for Indigenous students are not as good as for the general community.

Although Indigenous people are well represented in VET overall, they tend to be in lower level and shorter courses compared with non-Indigenous Australians. The differences persist across age groups and are therefore less likely to be simply the result of Indigenous students having lower levels of schooling.

A significant proportion of Indigenous participation in VET is in preparatory or pre-vocational courses, but there does not appear to be any literature documenting the success of these courses in terms of transition to employment or to further education involving courses of a higher skill level.

The VET sector is to some extent serving different purposes for younger Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. For younger Indigenous Australians, VET is principally an alternative to schooling as a means for continuing education and training, while for younger non-Indigenous Australians it complements 12 years of schooling. There appears to be little available detailed advice on this disparity, on its impact on the nature of schooling for Indigenous students, on whether the VET ‘culture’ is more inclusive for Indigenous students compared to schooling or whether it is simply the longer period of education and training that is meeting requirements.

Transition to higher education

For many years it has been recognised that many students experience difficulties when making the transition from secondary school to university study.

Indigenous people are often encouraged into post-schooling educational opportunities only to experience disappointment, which can lead to a lowering of self-expectation, a lowering of opportunity by educational agencies and furthering of the myth that Indigenous people can not be educated to attain...
professional status. A range of academic and institutional factors are generally recognised as influencing Indigenous student retention, participation and success. These include teaching and learning, institutional policies and practices, and the institutional environment.
Aims

In this paper, I plan to:

- unpack the idea of pathways a little more to see what illumination it offers for thinking about the journey from school onwards for young people;
- discuss some emerging issues for linkages between education, health, community and other services;
- introduce some of the relevant bodies of interdisciplinary research pertinent to Youth Pathways;
- point to needs for research and indicate where research and other activities: e.g. practice, program management and policy development need to be closely linked (that is, discuss the implications for the development of an evidence base in youth pathways);
- discuss those young people who have fallen off the pathway – and those about to – that is, those young people who have left school early. I’ll say a lot about this group through the paper.

Background – the journey and pathways

The idea of a pathway is (and as David Raffe points in his paper) simply a metaphor. As presently used it has some limitations. The fundamental value provided by the pathways metaphor is the idea of a journey. Several experiences from my own cultural background will illuminate this, but everyone in the audience has their own store of cultural memories about journeys.

One journey from my childhood which impressed me was John Bunyan’s seventeenth century life travel story, Pilgrim’s Progress. Bunyan’s pilgrim, named Christian, struggled through major obstacles and difficulties to his distant goal, the Celestial City. Via the city of destruction, the lake of despondency and the valley of humiliation, Christian was vulnerable to the manipulations, aggression and lies of Mr Facing Both Ways, Mr Worldly Wiseman, Mr Civility-Hypocrite and the Giant Despair (amongst others). The progress of Christian depended on the difficulty of the terrain and the climate as well as the barriers erected by those he met on the way. He also met people and groups who assisted and supported him.

A popular, secular new-age reinterpretation of ‘Pilgrim’s Progress’ is the novel The Pilgrimage, by the South American magic realist writer, Paulo Coelho. He sets his metaphorical journey on a literal pathway, the Franco-Spanish pilgrimage known as the Camino de Santiago – the St James Way. This medieval walk, through the Pyrenees from France to Santiago where St James is said to be buried, has recently been revived and is very popular with young people, secular and religious, walking and cycling. When I saw part of the walking track last year, I was interested in the variety of routes that constituted the pilgrimage – there is no one official pathway, but a range of possible routes which eventually join up. Furthermore, over the years these routes have evolved into different types of roadways: walking paths, mountain tracks, back roads and even in parts, major Spanish roads. Some days, walkers mix it with large trucks and fast European cars. Where the pathway goes into inhospitable and rough mountainous country, the traveller-pilgrim is isolated and must watch out for wild dogs. Even today people are advised to carry big sticks to ward off hostile dogs.

As in any journey, its completion is significant. The pilgrims are received at the Cathedral of Santiago with ceremony and hospitality. Completing the Camino de Santiago for the medieval pilgrim increased the chances of eventually arriving at the Celestial City. Even the modern pilgrim, whether or not religious, feels an enormous sense of joy and completed effort. As well as making a choice of routes, the Santiago pilgrims can journey alone, or in groups. Even the lone traveller joins groups of other pilgrims in the ‘refugios’ which provide basic overnight accommodation. Swapping travellers’ tales, encouragement and support through difficulties are part of the social life of the Camino, even for the solo traveller.

This is just one pathways journey which I have enjoyed: everyone has their own special memory of a journey and the human and environmental obstacles and assistance surrounding it. There are also many special Australian stories which touch us all, particularly those, from Albert Facey to Cathy Freeman, who have triumphed over adversity. And as I will discuss, there are also stories of particular communities which have done the same. The paths to the fall and rise of many small rural communities, for example Mirboo North and Dunkeld in Victoria are inspiring examples of regeneration.
Premises and pathways

Highways – official pathways

Pathways can be regarded as officially engineered routes which build in and around them an architecture of incentives and disincentives which drive young people along one of several routes (which may or may not be connected) until they reach the goal of attachment to the labor market and settlement in a job. This seems to be the image of the pathway implicit within the OECD pathways metaphor. This official view has a strongly economistic and instrumental flavor, believing that the chief end of education is the preparation of young people for the workforce (OECD 1999).

The first view of pathways is more like that of highways, as it identifies three trunk routes identified by OECD research: general education, vocational education and apprenticeships. But (as noted by David Raffe 2001) these highways are not meant to be circular or enclosed. Not every young person’s volition, motivation, opinions, preferences and capabilities can be tied to one of the few main highways. Highways are there for young people taking part in general education (who wish to get to higher education); for those in vocational education and for those in apprenticeships. In descending order, the maps for each range from ‘very clear’, to ‘less clear’.

The central task for any young person traversing any of the official highways is the accumulation of certain competencies.

The problem is that no present highway exists for young people who won’t, can’t or don’t wish to take part in any of the above three highways.

Individual pathways

On the other hand, the Australian view of pathways, as outlined in Footprints to the Future (2001), the recent report of the Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce argues that pathways are individual to particular young people. Whereas any official pathway takes a heavy load of traffic – and thereby might more accurately be called a highway – the individual pathway of any young person is customised to his or her aspirations and choices. The young person is the driver, essentially in charge of the direction on this pathway, albeit with support, advice and information (or opposition and lack of interest) from bystanders. The young person as driver can use the maps of others or not, can respond to opportunities and challenges, can divert from the pathway, or lose the path and find it again. In its focus on the young person as the driver, this might be considered the human capital view of pathways, maximising, as it sets out to do, the capabilities and enterprise of the young person and a choice between different paths.

One other advantage of this approach is that it allows us to consider particular subgroups of young people such as those from particular ethnic groups, or age groups or disabilities. Aggregating a special group into a cohort can be useful in describing characteristics of particular groups, especially and as viewed by the ‘Footprints’ Report, those at ‘risk’ of leaving the pathway and not completing secondary education, or those who have fallen off or deliberately left a pathway. Thus we can study the epidemiology of pathways taken and left behind by young people.

Individual pathways are:

- Chronological, that is they extend to the future and they come out of the past;
- They are not necessarily linear, but the vertical image of a ladder, or the climb up a steep hill is relevant;
- They are driven by a young person but can be navigated by his or her advisors; family, school staff and peers;
- They need, for effectiveness, for some young people to draw in service resources beyond the family and the school: resources such as health services, income support, counselling services and family agency services;
- Individual paths maybe vertical, but the progress is not necessarily so. Individual pathways can loop around, double back, cross bridges (and occasionally go under waterfalls or over dry creek beds).

The central psychological task for young people on individual pathways may be the quest for and the achieving of an individual identity.

Ring roads – social pathways

The heavily engineered highway is fairly standardised while the individual pathway, in theory at least, sees the young person in control of choices and route decisions. But not all young people are accommodated by highways and pathways. As already noted, some are already off the map and I will return to this group later. For the moment, we need to question whether highways and pathways can provide young people with all the navigation they require.

Between highways and pathways, sometimes ring roads provide useful integration and linkages. Ring roads are not exclusively instrumental or individualistic: they cater for groups other than young people – of all age groups – and their lateral links provide connections to many facets of the road other than official highways and individual pathways.
Ring roads are not generationally oriented or cohort selective. They may support all age groups and various adult roles. They are best described as ring roads because they are best at linking the customised pathways and/or the highways. Or they may have a life of their own, being mapped quite separately to either type of route outlined above. They can add value to highways and pathways or they can function as routes of their own and be mapped quite separately. Ring roads crisscross and interconnect with individual pathways and feed into highways. Thus ring roads are essentially social pathways which connect and reinforce individual journeys and assist young people into the highways. To date, these have not been part of the pathways debate.

Central to social pathways are:

- connections with other young people;
- connections with other generations; people who comprise part of a local community and who may have no official duty of care to the young person;
- the conferring of a social identity and a social role (which includes responsibilities) beyond that of achieving competencies (as on the highway) or in achieving individual and identity (as in the individual pathway).

Relationships and associations are central to understanding the linking power of ring roads or social pathways. These relationships and associations can be grounded in the roles, tasks, responsibilities and activities of place communities or in communities of interest. As far as we know at present, face to face talk and interaction on an extended (i.e. not one off) basis is central to understanding the nature of the social pathway. These repeated associations build a sense of ‘connectedness’ which is more than the sum of its parts. The resultant sense of cohesion, the glue that binds people together has become known as ‘social capital’. (Puttman 2001). The aim is to encircle young people on a pathway with peers and adults, on the basis that peer and adult networks can add cohesion and meaning to young people’s journeys and help young people achieve a state of being connected to peers and adults of continuing significance.

Routes and their connections

Highways

I will spend little time on discussing these, as two other speakers at this conference, David Raffe and Richard Sweet, are ably discussing the official routes.

I have two particular points:

- First, highway engineers and researchers need to consider how to connect up the highways, individual pathways and ring roads; to construct a map that is both vertical and lateral, as well as denser and ‘thicker’ than that constructed to this point. (Remember, the more complex map allows for a more diverse set of navigators than previously.)
- Second, there is a group who do not appear on any pathway who have left (or commonly been excluded) from school. By tradition, educators give up at the time of school leaving. Formerly this group went to jobs, but in the absence of full time, permanent entry level jobs, the early school leaver is frequently unemployed. (Sweet 2001)

Routes back into education for early school leavers are idiosyncratic and no one’s particular responsibility. (The ‘Footprints’ report advocates the tracking of such young people through the development of better data and DETYA is preparing to run a series of pilots about ‘alternative’ schools.)

To this point, the establishment of pathways for this group and the level of navigation required have been deeply underestimated. After school leaving age young people are less likely to return to school (which many dislike) and thus often move out of the education policy domain into the welfare/work policy domain, via registration with Centrelink and possible referral to Job Network. As ‘Footprints’ points out (albeit tactfully) this route is less than satisfactory for young people. Not only are they disconnected from education (their best hope for a decent job) but to succeed with Job Network, individuals require a level of persistence and disclosure which many young people reject. There is no data which matches early school leaving and its reasons (voluntary, involuntary or assisted) with Centrelink application and approval data and in turn with Job Network agency referral and outcomes. As a result our knowledge of the outcomes for many early school leavers who become unemployed is patchy, and confined to

- qualitative studies of young people in community sector sponsored projects; and
- cohort information about young people supposedly in the care of the state as state wards, but where in particular states, state guardians have given up on offering schooling and providing homes for young people. Many roam the streets, live in unsuitable accommodation and may suffer from health problems or substance disorders. (Carter 2000).

(The Boston Consulting Group’s report on youth unemployment recommended that a named individual become accountable for the pathway outcome of every early school leaver. (BCA 2000)

Whilst the ‘Footprints’ report did not fully endorse the BCG proposal, the point remains that this group are largely no one’s responsibility. ‘Footprints’ did however, recommend developing ‘tracking’ information on all young people, post school and on,
developing a comprehensive transition system within schools, to prevent early school leaving and to intervene early with young people for whom difficulties are apparent.

A recent research report from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in the UK studied six Scottish secondary schools to examine their policies to prevent school exclusion. It found that school based coordination with community agencies, aimed at ‘joined up’ working were effective at avoiding or reducing exclusion from school. The chief mechanism was school based interagency meetings, which could include case planning, participation of young people and parents and flexible, individual plans with young people. This method

- developed a wider view of the school role;
- provided a youth centred perspective;
- offered support for staff;
- developed a resource base outside the school;
- kept trying with challenging students with complex needs. (JRF 2001)

Based on the potential long term unemployment of early school leavers, there have been a number of attempts to measure the costs of the exclusion of young people from school, costs in long term projections of the cost of social security, the cost of tax forgone and the costs of institutional support or confinement (mental hospital, juvenile justice and detention, prisons, substance abuse services, homelessness refugees). Failed transitions via a major highway represent a high cost for the individual, the family and/or community and the society at large, not only in this generation but in the next.

We know now that jobs or joblessness clusters in families and communities which is why aggregate outcomes measures can be very misleading.

As Sweet’s paper (Sweet 2001) makes clear, the social and economic case for devising another highway for young people not in school, VET, or apprenticeships is thus compelling. ‘Footprints’ found a few projects which cater for this group – not run by educational authorities, but by community agencies and often without an educational component.

The main problem about the official institutional pathways research is that so far at least, it tends to ignore the research about the dynamics of inequality and social and economic exclusion. Its relatively narrow and exclusively institutional focus makes it impervious to the research debate about structural inequality. First, there is now no doubt that income inequality widened in Australia within the past decade, with the top enjoying a 19% rise in spending power over the 90s while the bottom 10% suffered a 5% loss. Second, the net increase in jobs in the decade 1990-2000 was in part time/casual low paid jobs (less than $700 per week). There was a massive loss of jobs in the middle income groups and a massive increase in families with 2 jobs who can be contrasted with families with no jobs at all. One in 6 children grows up in a home with no jobs (NATSEM 2001).

**Individual pathways**

The most salutary lesson for those of us who were members of the 1999–2000 Youth Pathways Taskforce, was the insistent reminder to members that we were indulging in policy talk yet again and quite forgetting – again – young people’s interests, issues and aspirations, which had nothing to do with our discourse. It was the tutelage of our younger colleagues that made us all focus on the need for individual pathways to connect, intersect, meander or at times deviate from the highways. Individual pathways are the tracks of human agency, by adolescence directed by the young person, in earlier years usually directed by parents and families theme that bears on the subject of individual pathways for young people.

**First, a pathway comes from somewhere.**

The journey on the pathway for a young person is more complex than pathway theorists to date allow. According to a relatively new body of US research evidence, many of the psychosocial and educational problems experienced by young people appear in early childhood and can be prevented, or their risk reduced or minimized by suitable prevention and early intervention programs. (Centre for Community Child Health 2000). Furthermore, major long term savings in special education, income security, mental health and reduced incarceration can be made by investment in early interventions. The assertions behind this body of research are powerful and it is important that youth pathways researchers review it carefully as its key assumption is that early childhood interventions, being developmentally related, cannot be substituted later on, say in adolescence. This research then does not allow for second or third chances.

**Key findings are:**

- Without appropriate care and stimulation in babies, normal brain development will not take place (Perry 2000).
- Participation in a preschool program promotes positive cognitive development in the short term and prepares children to succeed in school.
- Preschool experience is a positive force in the life of low-income children more so than in the life of advantaged children.
- Maternal employment and participation in ‘out of home’ care, even during infancy, seems not to harm children, and can yield benefits if the childcare is regulated and of high quality.
Early childhood and early development programs can produce a large increase in IQ during the early childhood years, as well as sizeable, persistent improvement in reading and maths, decreased need for grade retention and special education, and improved socialisation for disadvantaged children.

Guidance can improve nutrition, some aspects of child behaviour and development, and parenting.

Home-visiting programs can be effective, particularly for very disadvantaged mothers.

Group-based parenting education programs for parents produce more changes in children’s behaviour. (Centre for Community Child health, 1999, quoted in Carter 2000)

On the other hand, there is a separate body of research which concerns resilience and vulnerability, which allows for continuing influences beyond early childhood and for second chances. The image is that of the resilient child or young person, the young person who fares well in the face of risks or adverse events, with a strong sense of autonomy, a sense of purpose and future and strong problem solving skills.

Protective factors shape personal resources which cope, overcome adversity and ‘bounce back’. The idea here is that protective factors can be encouraged and learned in adolescence as well as early childhood and that risk factors which compound in the face of adversity can be reduced. (Rayner and Montague 2001, ACER 2001).

Second, a pathway journey has to go somewhere

This perhaps is one of the contributions of pathways research, its emphasis on the importance of arrival. Whilst the emphasis on arrival is welcome, however, technically, very few programs or measurement systems are in a position to measure and/or explain the outcomes. Arrivals are often called outcomes but should be more properly called outputs. And there is often the assumption that outcome/outputs are explained by the pathways taken. As already discussed, it could be that events not measured by the outcomes may be substantial influences on the destinations.

What are the signposts to the future saying?

Signposts contain the signals to the would be pathways journeyer. At present the signposting seems clearer to some young people than to others. For example, signposting for university seems fairly clear; signposting for apprenticeships is now being established. As noted, signals for those about to and likely to drop out of school at the compulsory age are weak. This is where the recommended improvements in the ‘Pathways’ report, for careers and transition advisors are so important. Although we all know that there is no longer a signpost to a fulltime job in adult working life, many young people do not know this and the question is whether we should tell them more clearly.

Inherent in the idea of an individual pathway is a guide. The proportion of young people who finish high school whose parents have no jobs, or unskilled jobs, has fallen away. We also know that the proportion in university from families with disadvantaged backgrounds has remained constant. Not only are there no signposts for this group, but again, no one person or authority is responsible. A patchwork of activities supported by some programs mostly (and inappropriately) originating in community services and health services means that whether or not young people who leave school will ever return is a matter of their luck in finding a community program close to home. And as an earlier speaker observed, the present pathway system does not allow for a young person to be guided through (most community programs are provisional and temporary and so are their staff).

As Peter Travers notes, the relatively high rates of upward mobility found in yesterday’s Australia are over. He points out that high social mobility depended on three factors: very low unemployment rates, on-the-job learning, and changes in the occupational structure that allowed for upward mobility (Travers 2000). These conditions are no longer there. Young people who have left school early and who don’t move into fulltime work have been converted to welfare problems; in general, educators have washed their hands of them.

Given the variation in individual young people and the quantity and quality of their life guides, there need to be resources available in the form of services to help some young people stay on pathways. There are a number of school-based programs which contribute at points of time to individuals facing adversity but the most convincing model, because of its coherence and continuity is the Full Service School Program. This offers education and support services in a comprehensive collaborative way to provide a community oriented school with a governance structure that includes the community and ideally young people.

The Full Service school is not just about positioning health, community and leisure services in a school ad hoc. It requires a purpose and sense of direction to which all participants – parents, young people, teachers, community organisations and a community itself, sign off.
Over recent years, I’ve been involved with several programs which have attempted to experiment with re-engaging young people who refuse to go or return to school and who have been officially or unofficially expelled. ‘Comebacks’ can be achieved via programs which:

- offer a mentor who works informally and achieves an individual ‘connection’ to at least some of the young people;
- links a young person with educational options at his or her own pace (WorkPlacement 2000);
- provides a role in a creative project (for example, a play) for which young people carry major design and implementation responsibility.

A great challenge for action research and practitioners is the involvement of young people in the governance of institutions in planning, prescribing and directing pathways.

**Ring roads**

When I was growing up I had many ‘uncles’ and ‘aunts’ who were not blood relations, but acquired through my parents’ interests in local associations, including churches and neighbourhood activity.

Pathway journeys are laden with individual meanings but common meanings are important for young people. The highways rightly emphasise competencies and the individual pathways emphasise identity and self esteem, but social experiences and associations are important too. So I’m interested in what place communities make of pathways for their young people.

I’ve visited some demoralised communities which make nothing of pathways at all; the civic heartbeat of the community has all but been destroyed by high levels of unemployment, removal of essential services and hard economic times. Its friendships, clubs, churches, professional and civic associations, sporting clubs have fragmented. (I visited an alpine community recently which could no longer get volunteers to run the cemetery committee). Young people hang around or leave town. Social connectedness has all but disappeared.

According to one researcher in the stream of research on resilience (Resnick) a community can impact on a young person’s development. It provides external supports that reinforce the individual’s identity and self esteem through providing involvement with active community members; by exposure to values of social support, by opportunities for participation, by a belief system through church, prayer or other forms of spirituality. Not all communities are up to providing these capacities. Communities can be ‘high’ or ‘low’ on social connectedness, or social capital as it is now known.

Robert Puttman’s (2000) study Bowling Alone which examines America’s loss of social capital or civic engagement over the 20th century, argues that networks of organised reciprocity and civic solidarity are not a byproduct of healthy and wealthy communities. Rather, he says, they are its precondition. Better schools, less crime, faster economic development and effective local governance rests on understanding social capital – those networks, norms and associations of trust that facilitate collaboration for mutual benefit and allowing collective local dilemmas to be resolved. Ring roads for groups of young people need to be developed in local communities; ring roads which are constructed and owned by the communities according to local need and which cross individual pathways, joint to the highways and eventually end in a job.

I’ve been involved with the Rural Environmental Employment program for unemployed young people in rural Victoria. A town invites us in, sets up a committee to govern a program with many partnerships:

- TAFE
- Public employers
- Private employers
- Local government
- State and Federal Government
- Community organisations.

Young people work together for twelve months, solving local environmental problems. The unanticipated outcome for these early school leavers has been their interest in continuing in conservation training and education. The young people also said the thing they liked the most was meeting adults, including employers – expanding their social networks. All wanted to stay in their community and all have found jobs. (WorkPlacement 2000).

How powerful it would be if the schools were at the centre of community networks, if the principal’s chief role became that of a local social capital builder, creating community partnerships which built out from the school. If the principal aim of the school were creating social capital, the US research implies that higher levels of educational achievement would follow, along with reduced levels of social disorder, ie, no youth suicide or teenage pregnancy or crime. This provides a hypothesis for an important future study.

So, can a school generate community social capital through developing a deep civic focus, even in an area with few middle class jobs and high levels of child poverty? According to a recent US school social capital study, whilst ‘social capital’ is not a panacea for under resourced communities, nor a panacea for educational under achievements, its connects institutions, cultures, values and norms and individuals. ‘Essentially it fills in the space between families and schools, between
school and society, between policy and programs and between programs and practice’. Said Shirley, who studies social capital formation in three Texan schools between schools and partnership organisations in a very disadvantaged area: ‘It has brought hope and small victories’. The ‘Footprints’ report is the first substantial Federal Government statement to take social networking seriously, that is to promote joint efforts, good contacts, brokerage and negotiation. Our present Australian networks are grafted onto organisations inured with other governance philosophies, such as bureaucracy, corporate management or markets and contracts. And sometimes bureaucracies reject the challenge of community based networks outright (cf Carter 2000, Edgar 2001). Networks can be complex and threatening because they don’t rely on a linear notion of accountability. They are collegial and collaborative, crosscutting and oriented to subsidiarity (decisions taken at the lowest level). Trust, discretion and partnerships are preferred to procedures. And this makes research more difficult too.

Comments

This paper attempts to take a abstract notion – pathways – and give it some substance, in a way which provides a useful organising framework for researchers and program managers and a set of understandings to assist practitioners. pathway. It has also allowed for attention to that group of young people at present excluded from pathways. None of this is to say that the pathways metaphor is any more than a device to help us understand, plan for and communicate the complexity of young people’s transitions. Of itself, as a disconnected idea, pathways make little sense. So it is for the pathway(s) to:

- support the transitions on the journey;
- go somewhere;
- come from somewhere;
- be well signposted;
- have guides;
- connect up all types of routes, from highways to ring roads;
- take account of the terrain and the climate (and be well graded, well guarded and lit);
- take account of the individual’s reactions and needs; and
- connect the common meanings of all on the journey.

References

Edgar, D (2001) the Patchwork Nation: re thinking government – rebuilding community (Harper Collins)
2. Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth
Introduction

Longitudinal data can make a distinctive and significant contribution to knowledge about the education, training and the labour market experiences of young people. An understanding of changes over time, and how they affect young people as they age, is especially important for understanding the impact of policy initiatives on longer-term outcomes in further education, training and the labour market.

Australia has in place a national longitudinal program called the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY), which is jointly managed by the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) and the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER). The LSAY program begins when young people are still in school allowing the information collected about schooling experiences to play a major role in analysis.

A strength of longitudinal data is that the influence of policies and practices can be isolated from confounding influences such as social background and context. Each longitudinal record contains information about the past social and educational background of that individual as well as their current occupational or educational status. Allowance can therefore be made for relevant aspects of background when investigating the impact of policy or practice on outcomes.

Previous longitudinal studies

Since the late 1970s major contributions to improving the knowledge base on youth have been made by two programs of longitudinal studies. One of these was the ACER program called Youth in Transition (YIT) and the other was the Australian Youth Survey (AYS) (and its predecessor the Australian Longitudinal Survey) conducted by the Commonwealth government.

Research based on those studies has examined the causes and consequences of educational and labour market participation among different groups in the Australian population, and how these patterns have changed over time.

From July 1995 the two studies were brought together as part of the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) program. In addition, a new program of surveys of students progressing through school and into post-school education and the labour force was established in 1995. A national sample of Year 9 students was drawn in 1995, and a second sample of Year 9 students was drawn in 1998.

Table 1 summarises the range of different cohorts of young people for which longitudinal data have been collected by either ACER and/or the Commonwealth.

Table 1: The longitudinal cohorts, 1978 to now

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Cohort name</strong></th>
<th><strong>First survey (year &amp; age)</strong></th>
<th><strong>Last survey (year &amp; age)</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Youth in Transition (ACER)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C61</td>
<td>1978, age 17 (school data in 1975 at age 14)</td>
<td>1994, age 33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C65</td>
<td>1981, age 16 (school data in 1975 at age 10)</td>
<td>1995, age 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C75</td>
<td>1989, age 14</td>
<td>2001, age 26, ongoing annual surveys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Australian Longitudinal Survey (Commonwealth)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waves 1 to 4</td>
<td>1994, ages 15-24</td>
<td>1987, ages 18 to 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Australian Youth Survey (Commonwealth)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (ACER &amp; DETYA)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y95</td>
<td>1995, average age 14 (Year 9 in school)</td>
<td>2001, average age 20, ongoing annual surveys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y98</td>
<td>1998, average age 14 (Year 9 in school)</td>
<td>2001, average age 17, ongoing annual surveys</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: The cohorts were surveyed annually from the first to the last year shown, with the exception of the C61 cohort which was not surveyed in 1985 or 1988; the ALS surveys were managed by the Bureau of Labour Market Research; and the AYS surveys by the Commonwealth government predecessors of DETYA.

The new Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth cohorts

The LSAY program commenced in its present form in 1995 with the selection of a nationally representative sample of over 13,000 Year 9 students (Y95). A second Year 9 cohort was selected in 1998 (Y98). The new survey bases its sample on year of schooling. Year 9 is the final year of schooling in which virtually all members of a given age cohort are still enrolled at school.
The major objective of the LSAY program is to improve the knowledge base that informs debate and policy development concerning young people in Australia through:

- the collection of a rich and comprehensive set of data on young Australians as they move from school to further education and training and into the labour force; and
- research into and analysis of transition issues based on these data which is policy relevant, rigorous and accessible to policy makers and the wider community.

LSAY is based upon school survey and mail data collections in the first and second years of contact, and telephone surveys thereafter. The first contact occurs when young people in the sample are still in school. At that point extensive information is collected on their social background, their achievement in literacy and numeracy, and their attitudes and aspirations. In the following year a wide range of information about school structures and curricula is collected from the school principal and a sample of Year 10 teachers in the schools concerned.

Table 2 shows the method of data collection, the types of data collected for each year of the survey, and how the data evolve as the cohorts age. A common core of education, training and labour market participation data is collected each year as follows:

- Education experiences (program, institution, type of enrolment, performance)
- Labour market experiences (employment, type of job, occupation, industry, earnings, job training, job history, job search activity)
- Non-work and education activities
- Health, living arrangements and financial support
- Attitudes and aspirations

Table 2: Structure of the LSAY Cohort Data Collections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year data collected</th>
<th>Modal age</th>
<th>Young people's activities</th>
<th>Data collection method</th>
<th>Main data collected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>All in Year 9</td>
<td>In-school tests and survey</td>
<td>Social background, Literacy &amp; numeracy, Attitudes to school, Aspirations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Almost all in Year 10; small number of early school leavers</td>
<td>At-home mail survey (cohort), In-school mail surveys (school principal &amp; Year 10 teachers)</td>
<td>Schooling &amp; labour market activities, School structure, programs and environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Most in Year 11; some in VET or the labour market</td>
<td>Phone survey</td>
<td>School activities, Transition from school, Post-school education &amp; training, Employment, Job search, Not in the labour market, Living arrangements &amp; health, General attitudes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Most in Year 12; some in VET, the labour market, or outside the labour force</td>
<td>Phone survey</td>
<td>As above, with more detailed questions on Year 12 courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Almost all have left school; wide variety of higher education, VET, labour market and non-work activities</td>
<td>Phone survey</td>
<td>As above, with new questions on post-school study and training, and participation in non-formal learning, Final school certification and results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Wide variety of higher education, VET, labour market and non-work activities</td>
<td>Phone survey</td>
<td>As above, with new questions on family formation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 and onwards</td>
<td>20 and onwards</td>
<td>Increasingly differentiated education, training and employment pathways and outcomes</td>
<td>Phone survey</td>
<td>As above, with new questions to reflect increasing variety of experiences and outcomes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**LSAY analytic program**

ACER analyses and reports on data from the longitudinal surveys. The LSAY analytical program is structured around three broad themes:

- participation in different forms of education and training;
- school and educational effects; and
- transitions from education and training to the labour market and adult life.

The themes reflect enduring policy concerns that longitudinal studies are particularly well placed to inform. Projects relating to each of these themes are included in the annual LSAY analytical program. Key issues for analysis across the analytical program are questions of change over time and the independent influence of background characteristics and prior experiences on education and employment outcomes.

The Appendix lists the LSAY research reports published to date by ACER.

In addition to the ACER analytical program, DETYA also supports applications from other researchers to analyse the LSAY data.

**Accessing LSAY data**

Data collected through LSAY are deposited with the Social Sciences Data Archive (SSDA) to facilitate access and analysis by other researchers. The SSDA is located in the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University. The data do not allow the identification of schools or individuals that participated in the various studies.


**Management of LSAY**

The LSAY programme is managed jointly by ACER and the Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA). ACER are responsible for developing, analysing and reporting on the LSAY surveys on behalf of DETYA. DETYA is the LSAY program’s main funding body and therefore has a crucial role in developing the content and output of the study.

Oversight of the program is provided by a Steering Committee that includes representatives of DETYA and other Commonwealth departments, the Australian Education Systems Officials Committee, the Conference of ANTA Chief Executive Officers, non-government schools, academics, and ACER.

**Further information about LSAY**

Further information about the LSAY program can be found at ACER’s web site: www.acer.edu.au. The site includes technical information about the surveys and datasets, as well as published research reports.

People are welcome to join an electronic information group that receives regular updates on the program. Email details should be sent to lsay@acer.edu.au

Other queries about LSAY can be sent to:

ACER
19 Prospect Hill Rd
Private Bag 55
Camberwell Vic 3124
Phone 03 9277 5555
Fax 03 9277 5500
Web: www.acer.edu.au

**Appendix: The LSAY Research Reports Series**


3. Conference program
SUNDAY 14 OCTOBER

6.00 pm – 7.30 pm
Opening reception
Huntingfield Room

MONDAY 15 OCTOBER

8.15 am
Registration and coffee

9.00 am
Opening session
Welcome
Geoff Masters, Executive Director, ACER
Ballroom 2/3

9.30 am
Plenary address
What are pathways? Concepts and evidence from cross-national research.
David Raffe, University of Edinburgh
Chair: John Ainley, ACER
Respondents: Helen Praetz, RMIT University and Victorian Qualifications Authority
Margaret Vickers, University of Western Sydney
Discussion

11.00 am
Morning tea

11.30 am
Concurrent sessions 1

Session A: Early school leavers: who are they, why do they leave, and what are the consequences?
Gary Marks and Julie McMillan, ACER
Chair: Paul White, DETYA
Delacombe Room

Session B: Great divides in learning: youth learning pathways in rural and remote Australian towns
Barry Golding, Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE
Chair: Jacqueline Shimeld, Enterprise and Career Education Foundation
Ballroom 1

Session C: Identifying and meeting the needs of at risk young people
Robin Sullivan, Commission for Children & Young People Queensland
Chair: Marion Meiers, ACER
Ballroom 2/3

Session D: Building business-education partnerships
Mary Nicholson, Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry
Chair: Phil McKenzie
Stradbroke/Huntingfield Room

12.30 pm
Panel Discussion
Chair: Phil McKenzie, ACER
Ballroom 2/3

1.00 pm
Lunch and Poster Sessions (see next page)

2.00 pm
The Prime Minister’s Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce Report, Footprints to the Future
Overview: Shelagh Whittleston, DETYA
Chair: John Ainley, ACER
Respondents: Matthew Savoa, trainee, DEET Victoria
Mylinh Hardham, DETYA
Ballroom 2/3
Discussion

3.30 pm
Afternoon tea

4.00 pm
Concurrent sessions 2

Session E: Do what it takes: options and opportunities for supporting Australian youth
Jane Figgis, Western Australia, Director, AAAJ Consulting
Chair: Marion Meiers, ACER
Stradbroke/Huntingfield Room

Session F: How young people are faring in 2001: learning, work and transition
Richard Curtain, Curtain Consulting
Chair: Sheldon Rothman, ACER
Delacombe Room

Session G: Pathways policy and new directions
Jill Anwyl and Jenni King, DEET Victoria
Chair: Julie McMillan, ACER
Ballroom 1

Session H: Building effective local industry-education partnerships to sustain young people
Harris van Beek, Enterprise and Career Education Foundation
Chair: Sue Fullarton, ACER
Ballroom 2/3
5.00 pm
Close of discussion

7.00 pm
Conference dinner
Speaker: David Eldridge, Captain, Salvation Army, and Chair, Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce
Ballroom

TUESDAY 16 OCTOBER

9.00 am
Plenary address
Paths through the maze: route maps for education, community and health services.
Jan Carter, Consultant
Chair: Geoff Masters, ACER
Respondents: Janet Jukes, Youth Affairs Council of Victoria
David Maunders, RMIT University
Ballroom 2/3
Discussion

10.30 am
Morning tea

11.00 am
Concurrent sessions 3

Session I: Does VET in schools make a difference to post-school pathways?
Sue Fullarton, ACER
Chair: Geoff Parkinson, DETYA
Delacombe Room

Session J: How effective are the apprentice and traineeship pathways?
Chris Robinson, NCVER
Chair: Sue Foster, DEETYA
Ballroom 2/3

12.00 noon
Panel session

12.45 pm
Lunch and Poster Sessions

1.45 pm
Plenary Session
Meandering, diversions and steadfast purpose: Australian youth pathways in a comparative perspective
Richard Sweet, OECD, Paris
Chair: Howard Kelly, DEET Victoria
Ballroom 2/3

2.45 pm
Panel – Next steps: Moving forward with the pathways agenda
David Raffe, Jan Carter and Richard Sweet

3.15 pm
Closing comments
Geoff Masters, Executive Director, ACER

3.30 pm
Close of conference

Poster sessions

Jo Balatti, James Cook University
Clarice Ballenden and Carmel Byrne, Aspire Training and Consulting
Inara Gehling, Adelaide High School
Lisa Kelly, DETYA
Nadya Kouzma, Victoria University
Leslie Pyke and Pamela Matters, SEMC and James Cook University
Ros Rangott, DETYA
Glenn Virgo and Anne Kinne, East Gippsland TAFE

Community-based mentoring for youth

Post-school destinations of VET in school participants
Adelaide High School’s City Links program
The Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce
Stress among senior high school students

Education of youth as future leaders
Assisting New Apprenticeship completions

At risk 15–17 year olds