

Australian National Schools Network

Draft policy paper on an Inter-generational Youth Compact

Introduction

ABS data (2005) indicate that over half of Australia's high school students' work part-time while studying full-time, and that the level of student part-time employment has increased rapidly over the past 15 years. As a result, the problems young people face as they attempt to juggle school and work are coming under increasing scrutiny from teachers, parents, employers, unions, and young people themselves.

The Australian National Schools Network (ANSN) is developing an advocacy campaign to promote the adoption of an Intergenerational Compact for Australia's Young People. ANSN launched this campaign on 21 August at a National Forum in Sydney. Sharan Burrow (ACTU), John Speirings (Dusseldorp Skills Forum) and Margaret Vickers (UWS) addressed the Forum and it was attended by over 80 of Australia's leaders in the fields of education, industrial relations, youth services, employment, community development, and philanthropy. The goal of the Intergenerational Youth Compact is to promote safe and fair conditions for young people at school and at work, and to encourage effective management of the competing demands of study and part-time employment. Stakeholders including schools, employers, unions, and young people are invited to contribute to framing the Compact and commit themselves to actions supporting its goals.

1. Policy Relevance

Public policy has not kept pace with the level of student participation in part-time work. There are four key issues that need to be addressed through policy reform. They are –

- a) Long hours of part-time student employment appear to lead to early school leaving and low retention rates. This can be countered if additional supports are provided to help students balance the demands of work and study;
- b) Institutional constraints make it difficult for traditionally-structured high schools to support young people who are juggling study and work (some also must juggle family responsibilities). Alternative approaches to educating these young people need to be put in place;
- c) Young people are not well protected at work. An unacceptably large proportion of high school students report suffering physical injury or verbal harassment in their workplaces; and
- d) Part-time student employment is a precursor to effective labour market attachment. However, opportunities for part-time student work are inequitably distributed. Therefore, students from low-income regions, and students receiving Youth Allowance suffer negative impacts which may reduce the likelihood of their gaining full employment.

A number of possible options for policy reform are outlined in Section 4.

A synopsis of background data relevant to the proposed reforms is provided in the next section.

2. Background Data

Current ABS data indicate that 42% of young Australians go from school to full-time study at a University, TAFE College, or other institution. However, 38% of schools leavers enter full-time or part-time employment directly, without enrolling in further study. For young people who go directly from school to work, part-time student employment makes an important contribution to labour market entry.

Young People

- The boundary between school and work is now blurred, so that most young people will be performing both as students and as employees for some years before they enter a full-time career (Dolby & Dimitriadis, 2004);
- Recent ABS data indicate that 66.5% of Australia's 15-19 year olds are working part-time, and that 79% of these are studying on a full-time basis (ABS, 2005);
- Young people in school and part-time work lead hectic lives trying to juggle schooling and work; (White & Wyn, 2004);
- Young people express high levels of satisfaction about being in part time work but lack an understanding about their workplace rights and entitlements; (NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2005);
- Young people living in disadvantaged areas experience more difficulty in obtaining work, because they are competing for jobs that are similar to those sought for by their adult peers; (NSW Commission for Young People, 2005); and
- Young people are more job-mobile than older age groups; (Smith and Patton, 2007).

School Related Data

- Above an initial threshold, the more hours per week a student works, the more likely s/he is to drop out of school (Vickers, Lamb & Hinkley, 2003); however --
- Part-time work offers strategic benefits for students who want to enter full time employment upon leaving school. Students who have been employed during HS are more likely to get a job when they leave school (Vickers, Lamb & Hinkley, 2003);
- The workplace is an important site for adolescent career development (Smith and Patton, 2007);
- Academic achievement and part-time employment both facilitate labour-market entry. It follows that low-achieving students who do not have part-time jobs are doubly disadvantaged. This suggests that schools should play a role in helping low-achieving students to gain experience in part-time employment (Vickers, 2002);
- Students who work long hours are most likely to go to school tired, with homework incomplete; (NSW Teachers Federation, 2007).

Employer Related Data

- Transitions from part-time jobs to other part-time jobs, or to full-time jobs, are more probable than transitions from unemployment to employment. In other words, casual employment increases the likelihood of continued labour market attachment (Buddelmeyer & Wooden, 2007).
- There is a high turnover of young people in part-time employment with the highest rates of separation occurring amongst the youngest workers;
- The hospitality/food and retail sectors offer the largest proportion of part-time student jobs. (Smith and Green, 2001);
- Greater responsibility in the workplace is generally related to age. The newest and youngest workers generally get the most repetitive work and carry less responsibility; (Smith and Patton, 2007); and
- Employers have learned to shape their human resource management strategies around the nature of their student workforce, and continually adapt their strategies to make themselves more attractive to their current and potential workforce (Smith and Patton, 2007);

Industrial Relations Issues and Data

- Students want jobs that pay a reasonable wage, are enjoyable, offering flexible working hours and security; however,
- Most young people have insecure work, irregular work hours and non-standard shifts; (NSW Commission for Children and Young People – CCYP - 2005)
- Young people show little understanding of their workplace entitlements and the role of labour unions (NSW CCYP 2005);

- Two out of every five children sustain some form of work injury, 20% of injuries requiring intensive medical treatment (NSW CCYP 2005);
- Students are not vocal in the face of unfair working conditions (NSW Teachers Federation, 2007);
- Young people can be especially susceptible to exploitation if their employers are not acting in good faith (NSW Teachers Federation, 2007).

Recent research studies show that student workers often find it difficult to balance the demands of study and employment; they rarely know what their rights are, and many of them suffer injury or harassment at work. They need to set work rosters that fit with their studies, yet they are uncertain about how to negotiate with their employers.

3. Policy Options

Whilst we acknowledge that we are still canvassing the scope and extent of the issues involved, the ANSN proposes three policy initiatives that we believe will make a difference:

- 4.1 Develop a commitment to an Intergenerational Youth Compact;
- 4.2 Promote alternative approaches to the provision of secondary schooling; and
- 4.3 Introduce of a voluntary work-study scheme that may linked to Youth Allowance

These options are outlined below.

3.1 Develop a commitment to an Intergenerational Youth Compact:

A range of policies and programs are emerging across Australia in response to the issues outlined above. ANSN has started gathering information on these, and will incorporate this information in its awareness and advocacy campaign. Employers, non-government organizations, local community partnerships, schools, unions, and young people themselves have all undertaken promising initiatives. Often these are isolated and not well known.

The ANSN is proposing the adoption of an Intergenerational Compact that will connect these initiatives and the people who manage them into a mutually supportive network. Through this network, different agencies will be able to share information and support each others' strategies. Already, through the ANSN National Forum (21 August 2008) we have connected stakeholders with a range of initiatives, such as the research and advocacy of the NSW Commission for Children and Young People on working conditions affecting young people, the NSW Teachers Federation (students@work web site), the role of Re-Entry High Schools in South Australia, the Education and Training Reforms for the Future in Queensland, and the initiatives of high school students through their Student Representative Councils that support student research on participation in part-time work,

Principles for an Intergenerational Youth Compact

1. The whole community is responsible for the wellbeing of our young people. Responsibility includes being compassionate, respectful and helpful. Helping young people to manage the many transitions along the diverse paths that lead to their adult lives is something that requires joint effort from teachers, parents, employers, and others in the community.
2. Young people have a right to live, study and work in safe environments. As they take their first steps into paid employment, it is their right to be protected against harassment, exploitation, and physical injury.
3. Providing quality education and learning opportunities for all young people is fundamental to building a society of competent adults. The worksite should also be a place of learning for young people who are starting out. Within our schools, there is a need to provide flexible programs that respond to the pressures involved in juggling school and work. Teachers and other school staff should provide guidance to young people on how to combine study and work effectively.

What education systems, schools, and teachers need to do:

- Recognise that for many students, part-time jobs are an essential activity that qualifies them for future employment
- Offer opportunities through the curriculum to learn about how to manage at work, about rights at work, and the development of personal track records
- Support flexible approaches during the senior secondary years so that students who are working can take an extended time to achieve their year 12 certificate
- Talk with young people: seek to understand and accommodate the complexities of students' in- and out-of-school commitments
- Engage in dialogue with employer organizations: work *with* employers (where possible) to support student outcomes
- Engage with parents to assist them to understand the demands of both study and work, and to help parents set realistic goals and time demands in collaboration with their children.

What employer organizations, employers, and unions need to do:

- Provide clear information for young people about the knowledge, skills, and behaviours needed in particular work settings, including an understanding of their rights as employees, and occupational health and safety issues
- Develop constructive relationships with young people: be respectful and helpful
- Provide structured support and advice to help young people manage work rosters and roster changes
- Provide education and training for young people to ensure that they can acquire the knowledge and skills they need in the workplace
- Improve access to employment for young people who live in areas of low socio-economic status
- Visit and discuss issues with schools in order to understand the context of young people's non-work commitments

What young people need to do:

- Focus on balancing work and study commitments, develop skills in planning ahead, and learn to communicate their needs to employers and teachers
- Develop constructive relationships with teachers and employers: be respectful and helpful
- Take advantage of the opportunities to learn about work and about rights at work, and about occupational health and safety issues. Be attentive, and act on what they know.
- Take advantage of opportunities to communicate with teachers and employers about how they are seeking to balance in and out of school responsibilities
- Develop an understanding of not just their rights at work but also their responsibilities.

An Intergenerational Compact will only work if the right combinations of people commit themselves to it. As the ANSN begins to develop the Compact, it will call on government and community agencies, employers and employer organizations, unions, schools, teachers, parents, and young people themselves, to help define the programs, actions, and behaviours that will really make a difference.

3.2 Promote alternative approaches to the provision of secondary schooling

The second policy option the ANSN advocates is support for alternative approaches to the provision of secondary schooling. This option might realistically be offered through TAFE, or through community providers, to young people who have dropped out of school at an early stage, and who are seeking to re-enter the education stream with the intention of completing Year 12 or an equivalent qualification. Evidence available to the ANSN suggests that in most states there is a dearth of appropriate opportunities for young people who wish to re-enter secondary education and complete year 12 or an equivalent qualification.

Through their experiences both in and out of school, young people are inventing who they are and who they will become. Their identity and sense of self-worth is being constantly constructed and influenced by their participation in school, in part-time work, and in other social activities. If young people need to juggle the competing demands of work, school and social life, it makes sense that these challenges should be recognised by schools.

Despite the huge increase in the proportion of each cohort now engaged in senior secondary schooling, most Australian high schools have changed very little. While VET in schools is now slotted into the senior curriculum as a study option, in most states, the overall structure of the Year 12 certificates is not much different from what it was fifteen years ago. It is clear that schooling policy, structure and learning approaches have not kept pace with key economic changes and technological advances.

School structures include the school timetable, counselling services, curriculum offerings, uniforms, meetings, and the policies and practices of the school leadership. The timetable in a secondary school is generally a 'line timetable', so that students undertaking senior subjects have those subjects offered at different times during the school week. Thus, students who are engaged in VET, or traineeships or apprenticeships are likely to miss lesson time in their other subjects and may fall behind as a consequence.

The ANSN is advocating a new approach to secondary schooling that would meet the challenges faced by young people who are combining study and work. ANSN proposes adoption of the internationally-recognised Big Picture Schools model, where high schools are designed to:

- 1) Place students needs and concerns at the heart of the curriculum, promoting student engagement, parent involvement, and community connections;
- 2) Develop personalised education programs that are unique for every student;
- 3) Offer and sustain a culture of innovation in partnership with the greater community;
- 4) Use block time arrangements with high level vocational and work placements and research expectations;
- 5) Demonstrate commitment to rigour, while also valuing relationships and relevance; and
- 6) Use mentors, teacher mentors and counsellors to advance student thinking in career planning, future learning requirements and possible work placement options.

Across Australia, there are some significant moves towards establishing schools based on the principles outlined above.

Schools need to offer flexible senior schooling study arrangements with an extended timeline for part-time workers, allowing them to complete Year 12 over several years. Flexi-schooling arrangements are essential.

A 'slow-road' to Year 12 completion has been made possible in South Australia, through the development of Adult Re-Entry High Schools. There are four adult re-entry high schools in South Australia, all in the suburbs of Adelaide and strategically placed to maximise access across the greater metropolitan area. These adult re-entry schools were established as adult second chance schools at the beginning of the last decade, as a social justice commitment by the State Government, aiming to open study and employment opportunities to adults who had not completed their secondary education. Approximately 6,000 adults have accessed such education each year since the early 1990s.

The New Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE) represents an approach that is different from that of South Australia. It is well adapted to meeting the needs of young people who are combining school and work in that:

- The QCE recognises a range of learning experiences e.g. academic study, work recognition, extra-curricula activity, & extension activities;
- A QCE may include VET Certificate I, II or III qualifications with varying points allocated for each; and

- The duration of a senior learning program aimed at achieving the QCE is defined through a student's Individual Learning Account. This account remains open for 9 years from date of registration with the Queensland Studies Authority;

In both Queensland and South Australia, *self-directed community or workplace learning* is part of the senior secondary curriculum. Various kinds of community make learning count towards the year 12 certificate: for example, (a) Learning based on participation in a *community-developed programs* (e.g. St John Ambulance, Country Fire Service, Duke of Edinburgh awards), and (b) Learning based on students' *own plans* (e.g. volunteering in their community, coaching and managing sports teams, caring for an elderly or invalid person, or carrying out a well-designed study in their place of employment).

With half our students now in part-time work, studies that allow young people to understand ethical practices and workplace rights should be included in the curriculum. These studies should develop critical thinking skills, and offer opportunities for rigorous career and workplace research projects that can be accredited in the senior secondary curriculum.

3.3 Create local work-study or job-creation schemes in neighbourhoods where there is a high level of socio-economic disadvantage

A third policy option would be the introduction of a voluntary work-study or job-creation scheme that would be supported by High Schools and Local Community Partnerships.

Research studies suggest that high school students from backgrounds of lower socio-economic status are *less likely to gain part-time jobs* than middle-class students, yet they are more likely than their relatively advantaged peers to depend on part-time student employment as the first stepping stone into the workforce.

It is possible that current Youth Allowance (YA) regulations create an employment-participation disincentive for YA recipients, since their YA levels are reduced when their earnings rise above a certain level. While they are free to work for a certain number of hours without penalty, it is not clear that this creates an incentive to work. A more serious problem is the lack of suitable employment opportunities in depressed rural areas and in urban areas characterised by high levels of socio-economic disadvantage.

The development of (voluntary) job creation schemes that might be managed by schools or by local community partnerships could provide employment opportunities in these areas. These opportunities would target young people who may, in many cases, lack the skills or personal connections needed to secure part-time employment. It is possible that the wages for such local community projects be covered by YA, so that schools and community organizations could gain useful services based on the paid labour of YA recipients. The scheme would need to be voluntary and it would be appropriate in this context to pay an 'expenses' allowance to YA recipients who participated.

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