

Support for students at risk

...we also need to consider those students in the small rural communities and remote communities where only one in five is likely to complete Year 12 anyway. Add to that that they get no opportunity to be involved in part-time work that perhaps builds a pathway. So we really need to look very carefully at those groups that they do not increasingly suffer disadvantage purely because of where they live and the nature of the communities that they are in.¹

Introduction

- 7.1 Chapters five and six canvassed protections and flexibilities that education systems should endeavour to deliver to students who seek to combine school and work. However, not all young people have equal access to opportunities to participate in part-time work. A significant minority among those students who do work also work out of financial necessity rather than for discretionary spending. The circumstances of these two groups of students provide further obstacles to successful transitioning that require additional support.

¹ Ms Cheryl O'Connor, Australian College of Educators, *Transcript of Evidence*, 2 February 2009, p. 21.

- 7.2 Students from lower-income households are less likely to engage in paid work than those from higher income households² and those in metropolitan areas tend to have greater access to work than those in regional, remote and isolated communities.³ Students from disadvantaged backgrounds also have disproportionately high rates of early school leaving.⁴ Indigenous students, young carers, students with a disability, young migrants and homeless youth were also identified as groups who are more likely to face multiple disadvantages with regard to accessing part-time work.
- 7.3 Individuals at risk of low achievement, disengagement and early school leaving can experience significant difficulty in navigating pathways to progress their learning.
- 7.4 The Australian National Schools Network (ANSN) emphasised that no single program and policy can meet the diverse needs of these groups. Instead, these young people:
- ...must be supported through programs that are crafted and integrated locally, resourced both locally and centrally, and designed to meet their needs.⁵
- 7.5 DEEWR also acknowledged the role of local communities in keeping students engaged in their learning:
- Families, business and local community agencies have an important role to play in supporting schools to keep students engaged and manage their needs, especially those at risk of disengaging. Facilitating connections between relevant players in the local community have been widely recognised as a valuable approach to achieving this.⁶
- 7.6 ANSN suggested that the major problem with Australia's provision of transition support is that too many disadvantaged young people are completely missing out.⁷
- 7.7 Chapter six presented some case studies regarding flexible senior secondary programs and re-entry or 'second chance' colleges, but it was acknowledged that there are many regions where there is no access to

2 Australian Council of Trade Unions, *Submission no. 21*, p. 7.

3 Australian College of Educators, *Submission no. 49*, p. 1.

4 The Smith Family, *Submission no. 50*, p. 2.

5 Australian National Schools Network, *Submission no. 13*, p. 4.

6 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Submission no. 53*, p. 19.

7 Australian National Schools Network, *Submission no. 13*, p. 4.

such opportunities. Even where some of these options do exist, often little is known about them outside their immediate contexts.⁸

- 7.8 This chapter attends particularly to opportunities for disadvantaged students to gain exposure to the workforce while staying engaged in their education.

Income support policies encouraging work and study

- 7.9 The provision of government student income support is administered through programs including Youth Allowance, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Study Assistance Scheme and Family Tax Benefit payments.

- Youth Allowance provides assistance for young people from 16 to 24 years of age (or 15 years of age if considered independent) with three streams for full-time students or students undertaking an Australian Apprenticeship [Youth Allowance (student)], and unemployed youth [Youth Allowance (other)]. For students under 18 years of age, Youth Allowance payments are usually paid to a nominated parent.⁹
- The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Study (ABSTUDY) assistance scheme assists Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to stay at school or go on to further studies.
- Family Tax Benefit (FTB) is an Australian Government payment that assists families with the costs of dependent children, particularly while children are at school or in full-time tertiary education.¹⁰

- 7.10 At June 2009, of 97,296 Youth Allowance recipients in the school sector (86 per cent of whom were aged 16 or 17), 21,984 or 23 per cent had earnings as at June 2008.¹¹

- 7.11 Of those 21,984 students, 11,528 or 52 per cent resided in a major city, 6,561 or 30 per cent resided in inner regional areas, 3,425 or 16 per cent resided in outer regional areas, and 470 or 2 per cent resided in remote or very remote areas or in unidentified locations.¹²

8 Australian National Schools Network, *Submission no. 13*, p. 4.

9 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Submission no. 53*, pp. 22-23.

10 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Submission no. 53*, pp. 22-24.

11 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Submission 53.1*, p. 1.

12 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Submission 53.1*, p. 1.

- 7.12 DEEWR reported that, in total, approximately 18 per cent of young people receiving Youth Allowance (student) combine work and study throughout the school year. Eligibility for Youth Allowance (student) for those who have not completed Year 12 or equivalent is dependent upon their participation in full time education or training (with exemptions available where it is unreasonable to expect the young person to undertake full time study).¹³
- 7.13 ABSTUDY recipients combining work and study are significantly fewer than those on Youth Allowance (student) with 10 per cent Indigenous females and 5 per cent Indigenous males combining work and study.¹⁴
- 7.14 An analysis which investigated the long-term outcomes of young people who receive Youth Allowance or ABSTUDY and combine school and work found that young people combining school and work make better transition off income support and into employment.¹⁵ However DEEWR noted difficulties in establishing causality and suggested that the data did not necessarily indicate that working while studying is the reason for better outcomes. For example, young people combining study and work 'may be more self-motivated and have other inherent characteristics that affect long-term outcomes.'¹⁶
- 7.15 A package of reforms to student income support arrangements is currently being considered by the Parliament.

Improving access to work for disadvantaged students

- 7.16 Students experiencing disadvantage can face a series of barriers to part-time work opportunities. The benefits to students from participation in part-time work which were described in chapter three highlight the importance of access to work opportunities for those at risk of not making successful transitions. The NSW Commission for Children and Young People stated:

Given the benefits that work has for children and young people's present and future well-being we need to develop ways to support those who want to work to find work. For those children and young people from low socio economic areas, the long term

13 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Submission no. 53*, p. 71.

14 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Submission no. 53*, p. 25.

15 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Submission no. 53*, p. 28.

16 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Submission no. 53*, p. 28.

benefits of part-time work are even more salient in order to break the cycle of disadvantage. As research has shown, access to education, employment or training are key factors in reducing the risk of unsuccessful transitions from education to full-time work and a life of disadvantage.¹⁷

- 7.17 The Australian Council of Trade Unions suggested that any move to formally recognise the employability skills of senior secondary students should be complemented by initiatives to facilitate paid work opportunities for those students who would otherwise struggle to find paid casual employment.¹⁸
- 7.18 Accessing paid part-time work can be an issue where vocationally-oriented students are competing for the same paid work opportunities as students pursuing a university pathway. For example, during a hearing in Burnie, the Tasmanian Academy presented findings from a survey of senior-secondary students on the Hellyer Campus of the Tasmanian Academy and the Tasmanian Polytechnic. The survey showed 'a clear bias by employers for Academy students', with a much higher percentage of Academy students engaged in paid part-time work than in the Polytechnic, despite the observation that 'many Polytechnic students would be in work rather than education if they could obtain it.'¹⁹
- 7.19 The survey also found that Polytechnic students are more likely to be independent and working to pay for rent and living costs than Academy students, who are more likely to be working for discretionary spending. Ms Kathy Cameron from the Tasmanian Academy stated:
- ...there are a lot of polytechnic students who would like part-time work and would see that as a pathway into full-time work. But they miss out on a lot of the jobs that are taken by Academy students. We have been aware of that anecdotally for some time.²⁰
- 7.20 The difficulties that the more vulnerable students face with regards to accessing paid part-time work opportunities were also noted by Ms Julie Harcourt from the Queensland Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, who stated that young people at greatest risk of disengaging with their education:

17 NSW Commission for Children and Young People, *Submission no. 33.1*, p. 5.

18 Australian Council of Trade Unions, *Submission no. 21*, p. 8.

19 Tasmanian Academy (Hellyer Campus), *Submission no. 58*, p. 3.

20 Ms Kathy Cameron, Tasmanian Academy (Hellyer Campus), *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 April 2009, p. 27.

...are probably not even the prime employees of fast-food outlets, because you have to have certain skills, presentation and sociability.²¹

7.21 Stakeholders noted the lack of opportunities available to students in rural and remote communities with respect to participation in part-time or casual work – including through school-managed and/or local employment programs – compared to their counterparts in metropolitan areas.²² Mrs Lesley Tobin from the Dusseldorp Skills Forum noted, for example, that:

...the young people in our schools who probably most need access to part-time employment opportunities are not the ones who are getting those employment opportunities.²³

7.22 Mrs Tobin also noted that the proportion of Indigenous young people in part-time employment is much lower than for non-Indigenous Australians.²⁴

7.23 Access to work opportunities for students, particularly those in rural and remote communities, can be significantly affected by a lack of transport options.²⁵

7.24 It was suggested that the lack of experienced staff in many schools in rural areas can affect the access to opportunities which arise through relationships developed with other schools, training providers and employers, often resulting in parents seeking out suitable placements on students' behalf.²⁶

7.25 The Federation of Parents and Friends Associations of Catholic Schools Queensland suggested that one possible way of enhancing access to work opportunities for students in isolated communities is through the formation of relationships between metropolitan and rural/remote

21 Ms Julie Harcourt, Queensland Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, *Transcript of Evidence*, 29 April 2009, p. 11.

22 See, for example, Australian College of Educators, *Submission no. 29*, p. 1; Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, *Submission no. 40*, p. 4; Federation of Parents and Friends Associations of Catholic Schools Queensland, *Submission no. 32*, p. 4; Careers Education Association Victoria, *Submission no. 52*, p. 2; Chamber of Commerce and Industry WA, *Submission no. 30*, p. 5.

23 Mrs Lesley Tobin, Dusseldorp Skills Forum, *Transcript of Evidence*, 2 February 2009, p. 17.

24 Mrs Lesley Tobin, Dusseldorp Skills Forum, *Transcript of Evidence*, 2 February 2009, p. 17.

25 See Ms Gillian Calvert, NSW Commission for Children and Young People, *Transcript of Evidence*, 30 April 2009, p. 3.

26 Federation of Parents and Friends Associations of Catholic Schools Queensland, *Submission no. 32*, p. 4.

schools which facilitate short exchanges allowing remote students to experience 'real life' employment opportunities.²⁷

- 7.26 The Queensland Government advocated enhancing opportunities to combine school and work for Indigenous students through the provision of 'out of community' schooling through residential colleges:

"Out of community" schooling options include a matrix of low cost to high cost residential options ranging from share houses, dormitory accommodation, twin and single room accommodation and low to high cost student support ranging from minimal support to provision of house parents, case managers and tutorial support, i.e. from hostel to educational residential accommodation.²⁸

- 7.27 Various case studies indicated that the provision of mentoring programs which connect young students to their local community is a vital component of strategies to assist disadvantaged groups.²⁹ Dr Scott Phillips suggested that if mentors are linked to the part-time work and study arrangements of young people, it is more likely to result in successful transitions.³⁰

- 7.28 Mission Australia conducted a review of local initiatives aimed at enhancing the social and economic participation of young people and identified effective models for students at risk. According to Mission Australia:

...these models tend to be intensive, comprehensive and highly flexible but are generally local (rather than systemic) initiatives that rely heavily on philanthropic funding, often making them financially fragile and vulnerable to closure.³¹

- 7.29 The Australian College of Educators (ACE) acknowledged that the associated costs of local provision for disadvantaged students are 'hard to avoid', with students at risk of disengaging from education often requiring considerable assistance due to issues such as low literacy and numeracy and poor social and organisational skills.³² However ACE

27 Federation of Parents and Friends Associations of Catholic Schools Queensland, *Submission no. 32*, p. 5.

28 Queensland Government, *Submission no. 41*, p. 10.

29 See, for example, Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, *Submission no. 27*, p. 10, Queensland Catholic Education Commission, *Submission no. 18*, p. 5. Also see case studies in this chapter on the Gwydir Learning Initiative and V Tracks.

30 Dr Scott Phillips, *Submission no. 11*, p. 2.

31 Mission Australia, *Submission no. 42*, p. 3.

32 Australian College of Educations, *Submission no. 49*, pp. 3-4.

suggested that supporting students to acquire education and employment skills outside their local communities ‘has in fact led to long term fracturing of those communities.’³³

7.30 Ms Michelle Scott, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA also reinforced the need for the provision of local training in rural/remote communities where possible:

...a number of remote communities are looking to their students to take on key roles in their towns such as rangers and lifesavers. In these areas, sustainability is paramount. On a recent trip I undertook to a remote community, the new local swimming pool was closed due to a lack of suitably qualified staff. In these circumstances, offering local training would be better placed to ensure sustainability and improved outcomes for children and young people.³⁴

7.31 The following case studies offer examples of two initiatives which target disadvantaged students through community-based approaches.

Figure 7.1 Case study: V Tracks

Case Study: *V Tracks*: an early intervention program for Aboriginal secondary students on the NSW North Coast

V Tracks is a program developed by the North Coast Aboriginal Learning Partnerships (NCALP) team at North Coast Institute in NSW which seeks to provide Aboriginal students with opportunities to participate in combinations of: TAFE-based delivery; school based planning, delivery and reflections; work placement and cultural mentoring.

The program aims to minimise disengagement from education, training and work for Aboriginal students and to support the career choices of students through collaborative partnerships between TAFE and schools, and between these sectors and Industry and Aboriginal community organisations. Through TAFE taster programs and school-based vocational learning, students are provided with ‘opportunities to taste, think about, choose and plan school and vocational pathways whilst exploring individual, workplace, educational and cultural values.’

33 Australian College of Educations, *Submission no. 49*, p. 4.

34 Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, *Submission no. 40*, p. 4.

In its first year (2008), V Tracks provided vocational learning opportunities to over 700 Aboriginal school students on the North Coast of NSW. An evaluation of the program sponsored by the National Centre for Vocational Educational Research identified positive outcomes of the program for learners which included:

- Greater insight into education, training and employment pathways including future: study options at school; study options at TAFE; career and job options; and skills needed for work.
- Improved attendance and engagement in school including increased appreciation of: school programs and their relevance to further education, training and employment; the importance of completing the NSW Higher School Certificate (HSC); their relationships with school staff.
- Increased self-esteem and confidence in: gaining new skills; recognising their abilities and interests; seeing a 'future pathway'; and taking on part or full time work.³⁵

North Coast TAFE/NCALP acknowledged that while V Tracks had 'demonstrated significant success' in its first year, there were opportunities to build on this success and further expand the program.

Figure 7.2 Case study: Gwydir Learning Region initiative

Case study: Gwydir Learning Region Initiative

The Gwydir Learning Region (GLR) initiative was presented as an example of what can be achieved in a socially disadvantaged rural area 'through a collaborative partnership of stakeholders from education, local council, business and the local community', who are committed to achieving positive outcomes for each individual student.³⁶

The GLR initiative is the Gwydir Shire Council's 'policy response to the general lack of educational achievement within the Shire and the need to up-skill our population in order to provide, as far as possible, a skilled workforce to meet the employment market demands that exist.'³⁷

The GLR's key mission is to coordinate all learning in the region to ensure educational needs are met which will foster community capacity building and regeneration into a sustainable geographical region in northern NSW.

35 North Coast TAFE, North Coast Aboriginal Learning Partnerships, *Submission no. 57*, p. 11.

36 Gwydir Learning Region, *Submission no. 48*, Attachment B, p. 3.

37 Gwydir Learning Region, *Submission no. 48*, p. 2.

A feature of the GLR initiative is its commitment to developing individual learning programs for every student as a pathway to successful transition into further education or work.

The GLR provides an environment where nearly all students in Years 11 and 12 are individually case managed, and there is a strong emphasis on mentoring and support. As a majority of the students do not immediately progress onto university studies the focus becomes a vocational education pathway.

The GLR advised that of the 184 students who emerged from Year 12 between 2002 and 2006, 22% went on to university, 29% to further training, and 37% to a job, a total success rate of 88%. During the same period, 92% of the 38 mature aged students gained employment (68%) or went on to further education (24%).³⁸

In its submission, the GLR stated that 'the model developed within the GLR with the close involvement of local government should be encouraged within rural areas across Australia to ensure that the available resources are firmly focussed on achieving the best possible outcome for each student and the broader community.'³⁹

Young carers

7.32 Young carers were identified as an 'at risk' group who often slip 'under the radar'. Carers Australia presented the following statistics to demonstrate that young primary carers are at much greater risk than the general youth population of not making successful transitions:

- only 4 per cent of primary carers between the ages of 15-25 years are still in education compared to 23 per cent of the general population in that age group.
- 60 per cent of young primary carers aged 15-25 are unemployed or not in the paid workforce compared to 38 per cent of the general population of the same age group.⁴⁰

7.33 The Australian Government's *Young Carers Respite and Information Services Program* targets young carers (up to 25 years old). The Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs' website explains that the program:

- provides support to young carers who are at risk of not completing secondary education or vocational equivalent due to the demands of their caring role;

38 Gwydir Learning Region, *Submission no. 48, Attachment A*, p. 9.

39 Gwydir Learning Region, *Submission no. 48*, p. 6.

40 Carers Australia, *Young Carers Research Project – Background Papers*, 2001, Canberra.

- assists young carers to better manage their educational and caring responsibilities;
 - enables young carers to access age appropriate support and respite services to undertake activities such as studying for exams, to attend education, training or recreation; and
 - provides a range of information, advice and referral services, including referral to counselling, to support young carers in managing the challenges they face as part of their caring role.⁴¹
- 7.34 DEEWR noted that the program was allocated \$7.6 million in funding to provide assistance to 3,100 young carers in 2008-09, having provided assistance for 2,500 young carers in 2007-08.⁴² \$7.7 million has been allocated for 2009-10. Carers Australia argued that the program is 'seriously under-funded and (does) not meet the needs of all young carers.'⁴³
- 7.35 In April 2009, the House of Representative Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth tabled a report on its inquiry into better support for carers. The report made a number of recommendations which sought to improve the situation for young carers. Recommendation 44, for example, called for the development of flexible policies to make it easier for students to combine education with caring.⁴⁴
- 7.36 The report also noted that certain aspects of the carer income support system may compromise the capacity for young carers to participate in education. The Family, Community, Housing and Youth Committee recommended that restrictions on the number of hours that those on Carer Payment can work, volunteer or study should be eased.⁴⁵ Recommendations which assist young carers to combine school with their caring role are supported by the committee. The Government is currently preparing its response to the report.

41 Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Young Carers Respite and Information Services, <http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/carers/progserv/Documents/Young_Carers.pdf>, accessed 21 September 2009.

42 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Submission no. 53*, p. 21.

43 Carers Australia, *Submission no. 45*, p. 9.

44 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth, *Who cares? Report on the inquiry into better support for carers*, April 2009, Canberra. P. 230.

45 See Recommendation 43, House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth, *Who cares? Report on the inquiry into better support for carers*, April 2009, Canberra. P. 226.

Students working out of financial necessity

- 7.37 Not all students undertake part-time work as a source of discretionary income for technological commodities, socialising or maintaining a car. A significant proportion of students, estimated to be around 10 per cent, are working to meet personal living expenses, pay for their education or to supplement the family income.⁴⁶
- 7.38 The incidence of students working out of economic necessity was reflected in evidence from McCarthy Catholic College, which stated:
- It is true that for many families it is a necessity for their school aged children to work part time, or at least to relieve some of the financial burden of supplying discretionary funding to their offspring. We do have a minority of students living out of home and attempting to obtain their HSC or School Certificate qualifications who are also working, some for considerable hours per week.⁴⁷
- 7.39 Some respondents to the committee's student survey also indicated that their part-time work was borne out of economic circumstances and despite its impact upon their study, did not feel that quitting their job was an option:

I am the main earner in my family because most of my mother's [salary] goes on rent and bills. I buy food and pay board every fortnight, to support my family. Without me doing a traineeship or having a job we would go hungry.

– Caitlyn (Qld), 9-12 hrs per week.

I feel that having a part time job is disadvantaging my HSC due to the amount of hours I study or have time and energy to study. I have no choice but to take up a part time job, given that I do not receive any payments from Centrelink nor my family. I have to pay board weekly, which has left me with no choice but to get a part time job... Centrelink's policies are not right, where if the child is under the age of 18 they are not to receive any payments if their parents earn over \$60 000 a year which is not fair. I don't see my parents nor live with them and I'm struggling to study, pay school fees and manage my doctor bills if I become sick or unwell and find time to complete school work to my full potential due to

46 L. Robinson, *School students and part-time work*, LSAY Research Report no. 2, ACER, Melbourne, 1996, p. v.

47 McCarthy Catholic College, *Submission no. 51*, p. 1.

the amount of hours I have to work.

– Emma (NSW), 15-20 hrs per week.

- 7.40 Some individuals stated that they lived independently, but did not have direct access to government income support, and therefore paid employment constituted an essential source of income. A former student from Adelaide explained how she had moved out of home at a young age and was supporting herself financially through two jobs while still at school. When questioned as to whether she was eligible for Youth Allowance, she responded:

No, I was not, because I think my mum was earning too much, but I did not understand it as a child because I was out fighting against the odds trying to keep my head above water. My mum was not supporting me, and neither was my father. They would not help me out in any way, so I had to go out and work for that to keep surviving. That is one thing I did find difficult. I was out there trying my hardest to keep my head above water, and I had no help.⁴⁸

- 7.41 A consistent theme in submissions was that young people's participation in secondary schooling should not be dependent on the income derived from their part-time work. The Australian Education Union, for example, stated:

The key rationale that should inform policy related to youth transitions, pathways and education overall, should be to create a society where all young people receive the opportunity and support to achieve satisfying and full adult lives, socially, culturally and economically. Fundamental to this is the principle that all young people have the right to access a complete secondary education and its equivalent in training or employment...When students miss out on educational opportunities, or have their level of achievement affected because they are forced to work for economic reasons or reasons related to their social background it negates this principle.⁴⁹

- 7.42 Yet there was evidence from some students who were devoting in excess of 60 hours a week in total between attendance at school and their part-time jobs – before taking into account time spent doing homework or further study. While these may be isolated cases, such arrangements are clearly unsustainable and should not have to be faced by any student.

48 Nikita, former student, Para Hills High School, *Transcript of Evidence*, 7 April 2009, p. 56.

49 Australian Education Union, *Submission no. 24*, p. 3.

- 7.43 DEEWR acknowledged that where a student moves out of the care and control of the parent, it is not appropriate that the parent continue to receive income support benefits. However, 'how that information comes to Centrelink's attention is really an issue.'⁵⁰ Ms Robyn Shannon from DEEWR's Income Support Policy Branch, added:

The parent actually has a requirement under law to notify of a change of circumstances, so there is actually an onus on the parent to report that within 14 days. But I guess the reality is that that kind of investigation into a change of circumstances within that family is usually triggered by the young person going into Centrelink to seek financial support in their own right.

...Generally, youth allowance is not payable to young people under the age of 16. It can be paid to some 15-year-olds if they are independent and generally have reached the school-leaving age in their state or territory... There is policy tension between making youth allowance widely available to young people as independents at a very early age and the concern that this may potentially create more pressure around family break-up. Usually what happens in those circumstances is that, because it is an 'unable to live at home' assessment, a Centrelink social worker will be involved. In those circumstances, one would hope that the social worker would not only be trying to give advice about financial support that the young person might be able to receive but also be trying to use their local networks to connect that young person into other appropriate programs. In that sense, it is actually a professional contact that occurs with the young person.⁵¹

- 7.44 The Queensland Catholic Education Commission suggested that students reliant on income from their part-time jobs to support themselves need special care and mentoring if they are to complete their schooling.⁵²

Supporting engagement, attainment and successful transitions for students at risk

- 7.45 The Foundation for Young Australians (FYA) noted that social disadvantage promotes lower rates of attainment for some groups of
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50 Ms Robyn Shannon, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Transcript of Evidence*, 14 May 2009, p. 5.

51 Ms Robyn Shannon, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Transcript of Evidence*, 14 May 2009, p. 5.

52 Queensland Catholic Education Commission, *Submission no. 18*, p. 4.

young Australians. Drawing on data from the its 2008 *How Young People Are Faring* (HYPAF) report, FYA stated that:

Broadly, indigenous students and students from rural and remote regions, and low socio economic status regions and households are less likely to complete Year 12 and enter post school education and are more likely to face unemployment and patterns of contingent employment.

Table 7.1 Proportions of 19 and 24 year-olds who have completed Year 12 or equivalent, by selected background characteristics

	19 year-olds	24 year-olds
	%	%
SEX		
Male	66.3	72.6
Female	76.2	78.4
SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS		
Low	58.3	64.4
Lower middle	66.9	70.0
Upper middle	73.8	75.9
High	84.4	86.2
ACHIEVEMENT AT YEAR 9		
Low	51.5	57.4
Lower middle	67.9	71.7
Upper middle	78.7	83.8
High	90.1	92.7
LOCATION		
Urban	73.0	75.5
Rural	65.7	70.0
Remote	67.6	69.8

Source: Foundation for Young Australians, *How Young People are Faring 2008*, p. 32.

7.46 FYA suggested that HYPAF data indicated where efforts would need to be made if COAG targets for Year 12 or equivalent retention are to be realised. For example, the report found that:

- teenagers living in areas of high socio-economic status are twice as likely to be in full time education compared with those living in areas of social disadvantage; and

- almost every second 19 year old who lives in a major city is engaged in full-time education, compared with less than one in five in regional areas and barely one in 20 in remote areas.⁵³

7.47 FYA suggested that ‘the patterns and balance of private and public investment in schooling over the past decade have not been directed at these locations and these groups.’⁵⁴ Although FYA did acknowledge that governments are subject to sets of constraints in responding to transition needs of young Australians – including ‘financial and logistical restraints and the capacity for some initiatives to generate high levels of contestation.’⁵⁵

Australian Government initiatives

7.48 DEEWR provided examples of two initiatives, through Career Advice Australia, by which the Australian Government provides support for young people who have disconnected, or are at risk of disconnecting from their education:

- *Youth Pathways* is an early intervention program which offers personalised support to over 25,000 participants each year to help young people at risk of disengaging with their education to attain Year 12 or equivalent qualifications and make a successful transition through to further education, training or work. DEEWR reported that:

In 2007, approximately 90 per cent of Youth Pathways participants for whom a known outcome was recorded at the end of their participation, were engaged in some form of productive activity, such as education, training or work.⁵⁶

- *Connections* targets early school-leavers and provides them with another chance at learning through flexible accredited education and training options delivered in supportive community settings for approximately 3,000 young people each year. Preliminary analysis of 2008 Connections participant data suggests approximately 70 per cent of participants achieved desired program outcomes.⁵⁷

53 Foundation for Young Australians (2008) *Major research shows one in five young Australians are not engaged in either full-time learning or earning*, media release, 15 October 2008. Available online at: <<http://www.fya.org.au/media/15-october-2008-how-young-people-are-faring-report-2008/>>.

54 Foundation for Young Australians, *Submission no. 26*, p. 31.

55 Foundation for Young Australians, *Submission no. 26*, pp. 41-42.

56 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Submission no. 53*, p. 21.

57 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Submission no. 53*, p. 21.

7.49 It should be noted that these initiatives are among a range of youth, career and transition programs currently funded by the Australian Government which are set to be consolidated under new program arrangements after 2009 following COAG's National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions agreement.⁵⁸ Existing programs are to be restructured into targeted programs to be developed in consultation with the states and territories. Two new elements which target students at risk of disengaging include School Business Community Partnership Brokers and Youth Connections:

School Business Community Partnership Brokers will broker partnerships and improve community and business engagement with schools. This program will assist schools to extend learning beyond the classroom, increase student engagement, lift attainment and improve educational outcomes.

Youth Connections will provide an improved safety net for young people who have disconnected from education or their community, or are at risk of disengaging. It will be flexible, offering a combination of case-managed support as well as linkages with wider community activities to help young people to re-connect with education or training and build resilience, skills and attributes that promote positive choices and wellbeing.

Committee comment

7.50 Disadvantaged students can face an increased risk of disengaging with their education where they are denied access to opportunities to develop skills through formal and informal work placements.

7.51 Evidence suggests that opportunities to access paid part-time work tend to be greater for higher socio-economic status students. These students are generally seen by employers as a more attractive prospect in terms of presentation, self-confidence, and so on, while those who would arguably obtain the most benefit from paid work opportunities are finding access difficult.

58 Further details about changes to the Government's Youth, Career and Transitions programs are available from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations' website at: <<http://www.deewr.gov.au/Youth/YouthAttainmentandTransitions/Pages/Home.aspx>>.

- 7.52 While some barriers are faced by disadvantaged people with respect to accessing work opportunities, the inquiry was presented a diverse range of programs, pilot sites and flexible schooling models where local and community-based approaches focused on building and maintaining collaborative links between schools, parents, business and communities are well-established. Some of these programs have been presented in this and the previous chapter.
- 7.53 Local strategies which give disadvantaged students exposure to work opportunities while being responsive to the needs of the community can be effective in helping young people to remain engaged in their learning. Local, community-based approaches were widely considered to be the most effective for developing pathways for disadvantaged students.
- 7.54 While there are a wide variety of local programs in place to cater to the needs of disadvantaged students, whose needs can vary from community to community, the costs of maintaining these programs can be significant.
- 7.55 Frustratingly, there appears to be a lack of information available about outcomes achieved from many of these programs targeting disadvantaged students. Further evaluation of the aspects of these programs that provide positive outcomes for young people who are disadvantaged is needed. Ongoing review and evaluation of programs would highlight elements of successful strategies which could potentially be replicated or adapted to local conditions and implemented at a national level.

Recommendation 12

- 7.56 **That the Minister for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, through the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs, encourage evaluation and reporting on outcomes from local programs targeting disadvantaged students with a view to highlighting positive aspects of programs which could potentially be replicated.**
- 7.57 Some of the scenarios which were presented in evidence about students working excessively long hours to support their living arrangements also reinforced the need for mechanisms to better inform students about potential ways in which they could gain support. Feedback from students via public forums and responses to the committee's student survey suggested that students are misinformed about their eligibility for benefits

or other entitlements, who payments are made to and for what purposes. While Centrelink has a comprehensive repository of information available online, students' lack of awareness of the options available to them indicate that more could be done to convey information to students to help them to understand and navigate access to government income support benefits and services. This is particularly important for those secondary students who may be living independently.

Recommendation 13

- 7.58 **That the Australian Government increase the provision of promotional material and information in secondary schools regarding access to government income support benefits and services for students.**

Sharon Bird MP
Chair

22 October 2009

