

School and work: a delicate balance

It is very important to me to have a job – it means I am earning money – yet the HSC is also vital. Finding the balance is so important. I don't think many people know how to do this.

- (Stephanie, student, NSW)

Introduction

- 3.1 Consistent with evidence presented during the inquiry, research suggests that there is an inherent value in young people undertaking work during their school years. However, at some point, work can start to become an impediment and students' school performance deteriorates as work demands increase.
- 3.2 It is a significant challenge to address the point at which work can turn from a benefit into a negative because this can be highly variable depending on the circumstances of the individual. The ability of a student to cope with balancing school and work can be affected by a range of factors, including their extra-curricular activities, their schooling arrangements and their personal development. A student's decision to work longer hours may also be an indicator of their disengagement from school rather than contributing to a reduced educational achievement.¹

¹ Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Submission no. 53*, p. 12.

This makes it difficult to establish a causal link between participation in part-time work and academic performance.

- 3.3 Establishing whether part-time work affects a student's likelihood to complete Year 12 is also problematic. There is evidence which suggests that, above an initial threshold, the likelihood of a student dropping out of school increases as the number of hours they spend in part-time work increases.² The significance of Year 12 completion rates lies in early school leavers being at greater and ongoing risk of labour force marginalisation.³
- 3.4 A key finding from the 2008 How Young People are Faring (HYPAF) report is that school completers are more likely than early school leavers to enter further study, and have an advantage entering the labour market. They are also more likely to secure full-time employment. For young people no longer in education and training after seven post-school years, 17.2 per cent of early leavers are unemployed or not in the labour force, compared to only 5.8 per cent of Year 12 completers.⁴
- 3.5 While research suggests a correlation between part-time work and early school-leaving, the relationship is not necessarily causal. Some students, for example, make the decision to leave school prior to Year 12 from an early age, and their engagement in part-time work is a deliberate strategy to establish an employment history. Vickers, Lamb and Hinkley's 2003 Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) study which examined the effects of part-time employment on participation in education, training and work, stated:
- It cannot be assumed that part-time work simply erodes commitment to study, so that those who work during high school inevitably drop out.⁵
- 3.6 There were a number of submissions which acknowledged the complex relationship between school and work and cautioned against making

2 M. Vickers, S. Lamb and J. Hinkley, *Student Workers in High School and Beyond: The effects of part-time employment on participation in education, training and work*, LSAY Research Report No. 30, February 2003.

3 Foundation for Young Australians, *Submission no. 26*, p. 5.

4 Foundation for Young Australians, *How Young People are Faring*, 2008, p. ix.

5 M. Vickers, S. Lamb and J. Hinkley, *Student Workers in High School and Beyond: The effects of part-time employment on participation in education, training and work*, LSAY Research Report No. 30, February 2003.

definitive assumptions about the potential benefits or risks of working while at school.⁶ Professor Erica Smith, for example, stated:

While some studies have shown a negative impact on grades when more than about 10 hours a week are worked, it is hard to tell whether this is a result of the part-time job or whether the students working long hours are not particularly engaged with schooling anyway. Our research has shown a substantial minority of students working quite long hours in Year 12, for example, and these could well be students who are not particularly interested in academic achievement. In some cases they may already have commenced their 'full-time post-school jobs' and are fitting in schooling around them.⁷

3.7 Similarly, DEEWR noted:

...the relationship between school and work is complex and can be affected by a range of factors, including the personal characteristics of the student and their level of engagement in school. This makes it difficult to establish direct causal links and means that some evidence on the potential benefits or risks of working while at school needs to be treated with caution.⁸

3.8 The National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) advised that it was undertaking a study which sought to answer the question of 'whether combining school and work is detrimental or beneficial to students in terms of their school outcomes, their post-school study outcomes and their post-school employment outcomes.'⁹ Ms Alison Anlezark, Manager, LSAY, NCVER, added:

We felt this was the critical question at the nub of a lot of the anecdotal stories that you hear.¹⁰

3.9 NCVER's study examines the effect of combining school and work on retention to Year 11, Year 12, on Tertiary Entrance Rank (TER) score, post-

6 See, for example, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Submission no. 53*, p. 8; Brotherhood of St Laurence, *Submission no. 12*, p. 3; Australian Industry Group, *Submission no. 37*, p. 6.

7 Prof. Erica Smith, *Submission no. 9*, p. 3.

8 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Submission no. 53*, p. 8.

9 Ms Alison Anlezark, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, *Transcript of Evidence*, 7 April 2009, p. 2.

10 Ms Alison Anlezark, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, *Transcript of Evidence*, 7 April 2009, p. 2.

school full time study and full-time employment for people who complete Year 12.¹¹

- 3.10 The committee eagerly anticipates the findings from this research. However, at the time this report was prepared, a draft of the findings was still being considered by DEEWR, who commissioned the research.
- 3.11 The following chapter examines the positive aspects of having a part-time job during high school. It also looks at the extent to which schools provide flexibility to help students meet the demands of balancing work and study. Finally, the complex relationship between having a job while studying and how this impacts on educational achievement and Year 12 completion is considered.

The positive aspects of part-time work for students

- 3.12 There is a general consensus that young people's participation in some form of work while at school holds an inherent value. This was acknowledged widely by students, parents and teachers, as well as peak bodies and academics. Combining school and work can:
- enhance a student's confidence and self esteem;
 - contribute to their financial well-being;
 - facilitate the development of social networks;
 - allow students to gain useful knowledge and independence and exercise greater responsibility and self-reliance;
 - instil a work ethic and attitude; and
 - enable students to develop work and organisational skills, including time management skills.
- 3.13 Dr Phil McKenzie, Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), noted that 'working is a very positive experience in the main, as long as it is not an unreasonable number of hours or in an exploitative situation.'¹² The NSW Teachers Federation agreed, citing research which suggests that

11 Ms Alison Anlezark, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, *Transcript of Evidence*, 7 April 2009, p. 3.

12 Dr Phillip McKenzie, Australian Council for Educational Research, *Transcript of Evidence*, 2 February 2009, p. 49.

‘the positive aspects of work for young people far outweighed the negatives.’¹³

- 3.14 VETnetwork Australia suggested that the biggest advantage of part-time work for students is that it provides experience of work in a relatively adult way.¹⁴ Students identified one of the major positives of their part-time jobs as communication skills and confidence gained from being in an environment which required regular interaction with adults:

Belinda: I work with a lot of adults and it is nice to be treated like an adult when they talk to me. It is having the confidence to speak to strangers and everything like that.¹⁵

Sam: I have met a lot of great people through my work...Through them I have got to know other people. It has improved my communication skills in talking to adults.¹⁶

- 3.15 Mrs Deborah Richardson, President, Leeming Senior High School Parents and Citizens Association in Perth, reflected on the benefits her son had gained from his part-time work experience:

He gets an awful lot out of his work – responsibility and dealing with customers...The responsibility is fantastic.¹⁷

- 3.16 Another benefit for students in undertaking part-time work is that they learn a range of organisational skills and how to manage their time effectively. For example, a focus group of students from Bendigo Senior Secondary College reported that:

...the experience of combining work and study promoted good organisational skills and thus helped with time management – a skill vital to being a successful student and good employee.¹⁸

- 3.17 Para Hills High School’s survey of some of its students asked respondents to indicate the positive effects of their part-time work on their learning at school. Principal Ms Janette Scott relayed some of the feedback collected from the survey:

The positive effects were that it improved their attitude to school; work harder to get good grades; feel more organised; better time

13 Ms Sally Edsall, NSW Teachers Federation, *Transcript of Evidence*, 30 April 2009, p. 9.

14 VETnetwork Australia, *Submission no. 34*, p. 5.

15 Belinda, student, Reece High School, *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 April 2009, p. 50.

16 Sam, student, Latrobe High School, *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 April 2009, p. 50.

17 Mrs Deborah Richardson, Leeming Senior High School Parents and Citizens Committee, *Transcript of Evidence*, 8 April 2009, p. 32.

18 Bendigo Senior Secondary College, *Submission no. 55*, p. 8.

management. There were quite a few students who said that it built their confidence. They can talk better to staff and peers. A number said that they had developed better communication skills and they use those at school. They learn about money. One said that it improved maths because they cannot use calculators at work. One said that it provided money for lunch and excursions, so that child is paying for some of the expenses of coming to school.¹⁹

- 3.18 Professor Erica Smith expressed concern about the often negative manner in which students' jobs are perceived. She maintained that there are positive aspects of work which are of interest to students:

There is a worrying consensus among many stakeholders that the jobs that students do while at school are menial, boring, and sometimes dangerous and exploitative. Students' jobs in fact seem to offer interest to most young people, and many offer career paths so that students are already working in supervisory capacities before they leave school.²⁰

- 3.19 Professor Smith also suggested that rather than being seen as 'pocket-money' jobs, the part-time work undertaken by students should be seen as 'a legitimate and important part of the economy and of young people's working careers.'²¹

- 3.20 Vickers, Lamb and Hinkley's 2003 LSAY study which looked at the effects of part-time employment on participation in education, training and work found that while having a job in Year 9 correlated with a reduced likelihood of completing school, it generated substantial and lasting labour market benefits for young people once they leave school. For example, students who had a job in Year 9 were more likely to enter apprenticeships or traineeships and were also more likely to find full-time employment than be unemployed.²²

- 3.21 Many students provided feedback that they believed having a part-time job while studying would enhance their future job prospects. However, some of those planning tertiary education did not think their retail/hospitality jobs offered much benefit because they were pursuing

19 Ms Janette Scott, Principal, Para Hills High School, *Transcript of Evidence*, 7 April 2009, p. 19.

20 Prof. Erica Smith, *Submission no. 9*, pp. 4-5.

21 Prof. Erica Smith, *Submission no. 9*, p. 5.

22 M. Vickers, S. Lamb and J. Hinkley, *Student Workers in High School and Beyond: The effects of part-time employment on participation in education, training and work*, LSAY Research Report No. 30, February 2003, p. 29.

careers in much different fields. A selection of students' views on their workplace experience is included in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1 Committee survey responses: Students' views on their workplace experience

Q. Do you think that your work experience will help you find a job when you leave school?

'My work has trained me in lots of ways including talking to people, food preparation, money handling and fast service. These are skills needed in lots of jobs.' – Helen (NSW), 20-25 hrs per week.

'I hope that future employers will look favourably on my work experience in customer service and retail and that it may give me an edge against other applicants.' – Sarah (Qld), 6-9 hrs per week.

'Yes and no. It will benefit me as it will give me insights on how to treat customers, interact with workers and follow instructions. However the part-time job I have now is nothing like the career I intend to do after University.' – Aneta (Vic.), 3-6 hrs per week.

'I have gained confidence and people and management skills through being a waitress.' – Becky (WA), 3-6 hrs per week.

'I have increased my confidence, understand how to work within teams and [it] will look good on my resume.' – Charley (Tas.), 9-12 hrs per week.

'I work in hospitality after school, and that experience has given me the opportunity to handle money, deal with customers, be organised, manage my time better, get along with different personalities and learn how to budget my own money.' – Allison (NSW), 6-9 hrs per week.

'I'll have the experience of time management and prioritising—qualities required in any job.' – Claire (ACT), 9-12 hrs per week.

'Very nearly everything that you do is going to give you something to put on a résumé. I don't intend to go into retail, but being on the checkout means that I develop people skills, which is a useful skill to have.' – Carmen (ACT), 6-9 hrs per week.

'I have more experience in dealing with money, challenging situations and people.' – Maddison (WA), 9-12 hrs per week.

'I've learnt many skills that I know will help me later on. Without work I don't think I would have enough knowledge about work life for when I leave school. Working is learning in a practical way that I believe is needed to understand work-life.' – Iva (NSW), 9-12 hrs per week.

'I have practical skills in dealing with young children and their parents, and my job requires initiative, quick thinking, and discipline.' – Georgia (ACT), 3-6 hrs per week.

'Employers will look on me more highly than someone who doesn't know what working is like.' – Anna (NSW), 6-9 hrs per week.

'I have learnt consumer service skills and confidence that can only be taught through the workforce. I have also learnt time management and commitment, by giving up things to work.' – Simone (WA), 3-6 hrs per week.

'My part-time work gives me the skills and knowledge of retail and the inner workings of the shop. My job also gives me the experience and skills of working together in a team environment, and also dealing with the public through customer service. These things obtained from my work experience will definitely assist me in finding, holding and succeeding in my chosen profession when I leave school.' – Michelle (NSW), 9-12 hrs per week.

'Tutoring is always good to have on a resume. I have also worked at Bakers Delight and that has provided me with team working skills, customer service skills and a good working experience. I hope to get another job on top of tutoring as soon as I finish my bar course. With all these experiences in the working field I hope that I will be able to present myself as a dedicated and skilled worker in the future.' – Rose (ACT), 1-3 hrs per week.

'Now that I have been in the workforce in a casual position for over two years now, it has given me the experience to handle working in the workplace, dealing with employers and applying basic skills to new environments.' – Sophie (NSW), 3-6 hrs per week.

'Yes. Because my job has taught me many things, particularly about customer relations, that are undeniably applicable in later jobs.' – Ashley (ACT), 12-15 hrs per week.

'My experience working with a team of others and communication skills with both fellow workers and customers will help me separate myself from others with lesser experience.' – Meggan (NSW), 9-12 hrs per week.

'It provides basic skills within the retail industry (e.g. dealing with people, operating a till), and will provide a reference for future work, showing that I have experience and making me more employable.' – Miles (NSW), 6-9 hrs per week.

'The training that has been provided to me as a Woolworths employee will stay with me throughout any future career.' – Declan (NSW), 9-12 hrs per week.

'Any job looks good on your CV, but it won't help that much, especially as I don't aim for a career in retail. I'm guessing that a Uni degree will influence job finding a lot more than casual work experience at a budget department store.' – Jane (Tas.), 6-9 hrs per week.

The impact of part-time jobs on students' study time

3.22 A 2001 NCVER study surveyed students with part-time jobs to examine how hard they found it to fit time in for schoolwork as well as their job (see Table 3.1). 9.2 per cent of 665 students surveyed reported that they found it 'very hard' to fit in their school work as well as paid work, 27.7 per cent responded that they found it 'quite hard', while the remaining 63.2 per cent said that it was 'not hard' to fit time in for school work around their paid work.

Table 3.1 Students' reporting on how hard they found it to fit in their schoolwork as well as their paid work

	Very hard		Quite hard		Not hard		Total	
1-5 hours per week	10	5.2%	37	19.4%	144	75.4%	191	100.0%
6-10 hours per week	17	7.6%	72	32.1%	135	60.3%	224	100.0%
11-15 hours per week	10	9.2%	39	35.8%	60	55.0%	109	100.0%
16-20 hours per week	17	20.5%	27	32.5%	39	47.0%	83	100.0%
21+ hours per week	7	12.1%	9	15.5%	42	72.4%	58	100.0%
Total number of students	61	9.2%	184	27.7%	420	63.2%	665	100.0%

Source: NCVER, *School students learning from their paid and unpaid work*, 2001, p. 53.

3.23 The report noted:

As might be expected, students working longer hours were generally finding it harder to fit in their schoolwork. However, even amongst the 83 students working 16–20 hours a week nearly a half did not find it hard at all, with only a fifth finding it very hard. It should be borne in mind that some students ascribe more importance to time spent studying than others, and there is a possibility that those choosing to work reasonably high numbers of hours might not have spent much time studying anyway. This might help to explain why a large proportion of student workers working over 21 hours a week did not find much difficulty fitting in their studies when it might be expected that they would have the greatest difficulty.²³

3.24 Almost half (46.4 per cent) of approximately 1,700 students with part-time jobs who completed the committee's survey indicated that their work affected the amount of time they have to study (see Figure 3.2).

3.25 The proportion of students affected generally increased as the hours spent at work increased, excepting those students working in excess of 30 hours a week, of which 71 per cent did not believe their working hours affected their study time.

3.26 This finding is consistent with the 2001 NCVER study and may be a reflection of the fact that 'many young people who are not succeeding at school pursue part-time work as an important step towards the workplace'²⁴ and therefore the time spent at work would not be otherwise utilised for study. The more recent body of research conducted by NCVER based on LSAY data, which has yet to be released, appears to confirm this finding. Ms Alison Anlezark from NCVER stated:

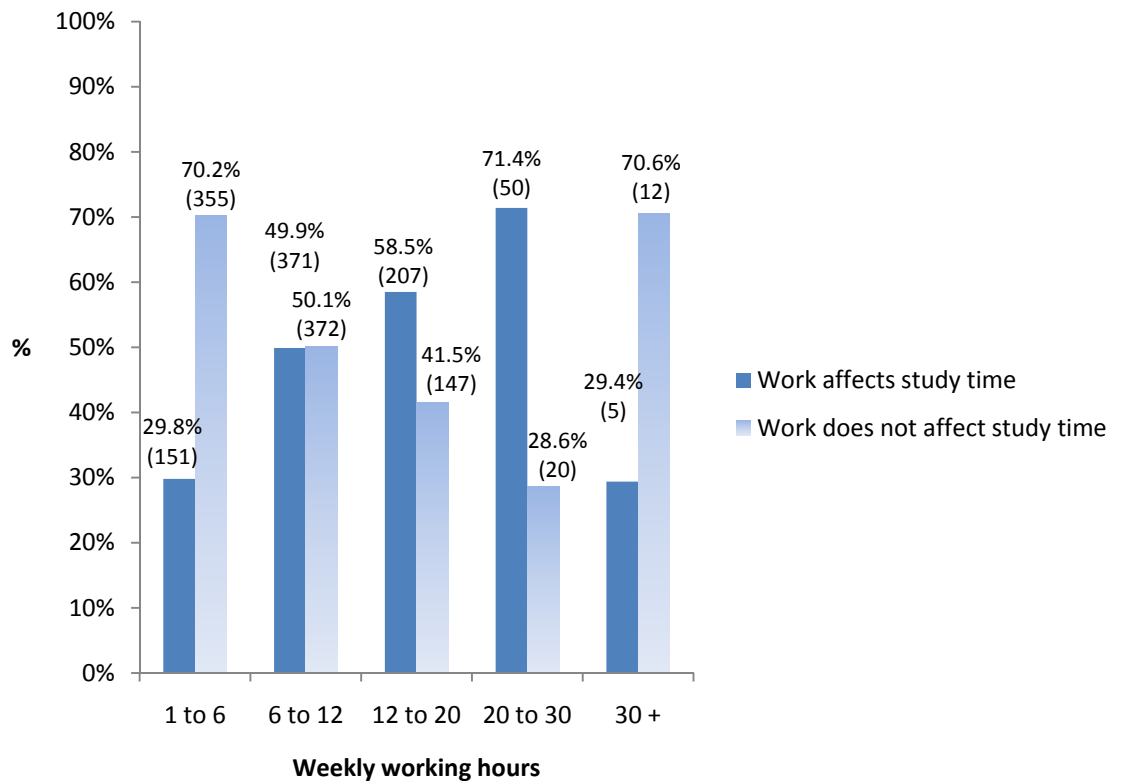
Where hours are longer it appears that individuals show a stronger orientation towards employment rather than academic pursuits. It is almost as though they become a bit disengaged with the school and they are more interested in work than they are in their schoolwork.²⁵

23 E. Smith and A. Green, *School students' learning from their paid and unpaid work*, NCVER, Adelaide, 2001 p. 54.

24 Brotherhood of St Laurence, *Submission no. 12*, p. 3.

25 Ms Alison Anlezark, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, *Transcript of Evidence*, 7 April 2009, p. 3.

Figure 3.2 Committee survey data: The impact of part-time work on students' study time



Source: Committee student survey data, 2009.

3.27 Figure 3.3 contains a selection of survey responses from students relating to the impact of their work on the time they have to study. The responses suggest that there are a significant number of students who experience fatigue owing to the number of hours they spend at work, or the lateness of the hours they are working. During student forums, some students who worked in excess of 25 hours per week during a school week were adamant that they were coping. However, teachers told a different story. Mr Con Apostolopoulos from Para Hills High School stated:

They do come to school tired. I have noticed, in particular this year, that there has been an increase in the amount of *Mother* soft drink or these ... high energy little booster [drinks] that they are using to get them through the morning. They are coming to school in six packs. They could be sharing them or keeping them throughout the day.²⁶

26 Mr Con Apostolopoulos, Para Hills High School, *Transcript of Evidence*, 7 April 2009, p. 21.

- 3.28 The Queensland Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian stated that the negative impacts on students working long hours include 'difficulties with concentration, fatigue, inadequate exam preparation and incomplete homework.'²⁷

Figure 3.3 Committee survey responses: The impact of work on study

Q. Does your work affect the amount of time you have to study?

'Yes. On the weekends, the time I get to study and finish assignments are limited due to sport and work.' – Rhiannon (NSW), 6-9 hrs per week

'By the time I get home from work it's at least 8:30pm and then I have tea and by then it's too late and I'm too tired.' – Rebecca (Vic.), 9-12 hrs per week.

'I work after school a lot, so homework is a struggle as I have to do it when I get back home, so I go to bed late and am always tired the next day.' – Joseph (WA), 15-20 hrs per week.

'I work Thursday nights, Saturday and Sunday around the middle of the day usually which is very frustrating because they are usually only 3 hour shifts which disturbs my day, I never have a day off to do anything that I want or need to do, meaning when I do have some leisure time in the afternoon or night I usually do not have the energy or motivation to do my study.' – Briannon (NSW), 9-12 hrs per week.

'They roster me on for too many hours and too late at night on school nights.' – Nic (Qld), 20-25 hrs per week.

'I sometimes have to work both days on the weekend during the day from 8-3 and this effects the amount of time I have to study as that is most of my weekend gone.' – Emily (NSW), 9-12 hrs per week.

'Often work impedes with my opportunity to study out of school time. This makes life in general much more stressful and school more difficult than it has to be.' – Matthew (Tas.), 9-12 hrs per week.

'I do not study on Saturday or Sunday, my main study times. Thursday nights are also out and I only have about half of Monday.' – Samuel (WA), 9-12 hrs per week.

'I don't work long enough for work to affect my study.' - Ben (NSW), 6-9 hrs per week.

'I work 4 hours every Thursday afternoon from 5-9. Sometimes 2 or 3 times a week depending on roster. It makes it difficult to get any substantial work done such as homework and general study because by the time I get home and have dinner I'm too tired!' – Lilly (NSW), 3-6 hrs per week.

'I work late nights most Thursdays and every Friday and Saturday so I tend to sleep in Saturday and Sunday mornings restricting the amount of time I have to study. In addition after a long week at school, and then two late and long nights at work I'm too tired to even think about studying most weekends.' - Erin (ACT), 9-12 hrs per week.

'I work on Wednesdays and that's during the middle of the week - the most crucial time to get everything done for the weekend and for the end of the week's work. If I don't have a lot of time to do my homework after work then that's my weekends gone... which means 'no life!!!' – Elysia (ACT), 1-3 hrs per week.

'No time for study on weekends as work and basketball use up my weekend.' – Justin (WA), 9-12 hrs per week.

27 The Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian [Qld], *Submission no. 46*, p. 4.

'I tend to work on Thursday and Friday evenings, and Saturday and Sunday mornings. Throughout the week I do mostly light study, going over class work and finishing off notes. I use the weekends for my assignments, major study, and projects. This means however juggling a social life, work and study into a few hours.' - Claire (ACT), 9-12 hrs per week.

'There is no time left to study... After work (9-5 on Saturday and Sundays, and 4 hours on Thursdays) I'm too tired and unmotivated to do much study.' – Lauren (NSW), 15-20 hrs per week.

'I do work after school. That's at least 5 hours I won't be studying. And if I have a shift after school, that's from 4:30 (I catch the bus) typically to 8:30, so I don't study all night unless it's urgent. I still get it done though- just means I can't watch as much TV!' – Carmen (ACT), 6-9 hrs per week.

'When I used to work 3 days a week it definitely affected my study because I was working up to 15 or more hours. Now I keep it to one day a week in order to achieve proper time management and a regular study habit.' – Paige (NSW), 6-9 hrs per week.

'I often work on weekends so it effects the time I have on the weekends. It becomes difficult to complete tasks which require a large amount of time. When working shifts during the weekday I will go straight to work and usually will not leave until at least 9pm. It becomes difficult on these nights to complete any form of school work.' – Simone (NSW), 12-15 hrs per week.

'If I work a four hour shift after school (4pm til 8pm) then I am left with very little study time for that night after eventually getting home then having dinner etc.' – Jackson (Vic.), 9-12 hrs per week.

'If I have to work long hours on the weekend I find I'm too tired to study much. Also doing late shifts through the week affects my energy levels for school the next day.' – Emma (NSW), 12-15 hrs per week.

'Seeing as I work the Thursday late-night shopping shift, it means that I have less time to complete homework and assessments that are due in over the weekdays. When I come home from work, I experience fatigue and therefore, I'm not motivated enough to do work.' – Emily (NSW), 3-6 hrs per week.

'I work 7am- 3pm on a Saturday and am too tired or unmotivated to do homework or assessments that have been set for the weekend. I play sport on Sunday, either Tennis or I go sailing, so that doesn't leave much time for me to get homework done either.' – Samantha (NSW), 6-9 hrs per week.

3.29 Bendigo Senior Secondary College suggested that working longer hours 'can also lead to absenteeism from school as students take time to catch up on homework and reduce the stress of keeping up with study.'²⁸

3.30 Lachlan from Leeming Senior High School was working a couple of different jobs which included a position in the fast-food industry. He explained that the long hours he sometimes worked and the lateness of those hours impacted on his ability to complete school work:

Sometimes I would come home at 1 o'clock and I would have an assignment that was due the next day and I would be struggling at the computer. I remember a couple of times my mother coming in and waking me up because I was asleep on the keyboard.

Sometimes they like to pressure you into taking someone else's shift if they call in sick. One time I had to do an 11½ hour shift with only one break. You get a break only every six hours and that

break would be only half an hour at the most. They then get you up and you have to work again. That is pure time standing up making or taking orders.²⁹

'Something has to give'

- 3.31 Inquiry participants emphasised that for young people, it is not just about balancing school and work, as students also spend much of their time outside school socialising or engaging in sport and recreation or other extra-curricular activities. While some students indicated that they are prepared to put their social lives or sporting activities on hold to maintain a part-time job, it is clear that many are not. The competing demands on a student's time can have a significant impact on their study. The Federation of Parents and Friends Associations of Catholic Schools Queensland noted:

In a recent study, students were asked to apportion their time for study, sport, socializing and work commitments. Where the school authorities suggested that senior students required at least 15-20 hours per week of organized study to complete their commitments effectively, some were actually working for this amount of time and school responsibilities took up fewer than 5 hours each week. Work commitments in some instances commenced on Thursday, involved weekend work usually with a late closing and some shifts on other weekdays. Add to that sporting and social commitments and, for some students, schooling becomes incidental.³⁰

- 3.32 Ms Jennifer Marks, VET Manager, Sandringham College, indicated that in some cases, the value which students place on their part-time work, socialising and sporting activities means that school becomes a lesser priority:

Something has to give. Some of our students...talked about the fact that it is not just a question of balancing school and work; they have to balance sport, friends and everything else that goes on. Often school is a lower priority for a teenager than all the other things. Some students will say 'Work is important because that provides me with the money to do all the things that I want to do.' Of course their friends and their sports are also really important,

29 Lachlan, student, Leeming Senior High School, *Transcript of Evidence*, 8 April 2009, p. 51.

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

so school is a poor last. If we want them to do well in school we have to address those issues. It will not be hard to ensure that they are serious about their work.³¹

Juggling part-time work and set homework

- 3.33 Individual schools generally have their own homework policy which is developed in consultation with the school community including the school's parents and friends association or parents and citizens association. Schools' homework policies reflect the needs of their students so they are able to maintain an appropriate balance in their lives between school, family, recreation and part-time work.
- 3.34 Evidence to the inquiry suggests that students with part-time jobs can experience difficulties meeting homework requirements, particularly in their final years of schooling where the workload increases significantly. They can often find themselves caught out between completing homework tasks or complying with their rostered work shifts. Fulfilling the requirements of both can require students to complete schoolwork at an unreasonably late hour.
- 3.35 James from Salisbury High School in Adelaide explained that he was working five nights a week, from 4pm until around 11pm or midnight each night, to save money to support himself through university. James indicated that his work arrangements were impacting heavily on his school work, and that he would often be up until 5am in the morning just to complete homework, yet he was convinced that what he was doing was sustainable and that he was managing to find a balance.³² While this is an extreme example, it does highlight the kind of pressure that some students with part-time jobs can be confronted with.
- 3.36 A problem highlighted during discussions with students is that often students fail to communicate with their teachers about the challenges they are facing combining school and work. Students tend not to tell their teachers about their work commitments because they feel that choosing to work is their decision, and that it should not be offered up as an excuse for failing to complete homework. Some of the comments from students via the committee's survey which reflected this view are reproduced in Figure 3.4.

31 Ms Jennifer Marks, Sandringham College, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 April 2009, p. 9.

32 See *Transcript of Evidence*, 7 April 2009, pp. 50-51.

3.37 Mrs Jo-Anne Fletcher, the parent of a teenager combining school and work, described the dilemma that can confront student workers when they are allocated significant overnight homework tasks:

...she has had nights when she has had so much homework that she has rung her boss and said, 'I cannot come in. Can someone else work the shift because I have heaps of homework?' and her work will not let her have the night off and she has to go to work. I understand that they have a business to run but she is stuck in the middle. 'Do I do the homework and lose my job, or do I go to work and then have to sit up until midnight to do the homework?' It is a bit of a battle for them, but they do it for the experience as well as for the money. They are also learning what is out there.³³

Figure 3.4 Committee survey responses: 'We chose to work: it's our problem'

'Working part time is our choice so it is always out of school hours. There is really nothing the school can do to make combining school with work easier.' – Madeline (NSW), 3-6 hrs per week.

'...it's more up to the individual to find a flexible job and to have good time management skills. After all, how can a school with say 300 yrs 10-12 students provide a timetable that works effectively with each individual's work and study schedule.' – Claire (ACT), 9-12 hrs per week.

'If someone cannot handle studying and working together then they should work less hours or not work at all.' – Rachel (ACT), 3-6 hrs per week.

'I think work isn't really a problem for students if they are dedicated. If a student wants to succeed in order to further themselves they must make sacrifices and I think that people sacrifice school work rather than social time or actual work because school really isn't of top priority to them.' – Paige (NSW), 6-9 hrs per week.

'Working is your own choice. School work should be your main priority if you are behind school work because of work it's your problem.' – Brooke (NSW), 6-9 hrs per week.

'...it's our own choice whether we wish to work or not, it's not really necessary in our final year of school if all we feel we should be doing is studying.' – Sophie (NSW), 3-6 hrs per week.

'It is primarily my fault, as I say yes to every shift they offer me at work. It is my problem.' – Samuel (WA), 9-12 hrs per week.

'I don't see how [schools providing flexibility] would be possible, considering that work is (usually) an individual's choice.' – Laura (NSW), 6-9 hrs per week.

'It's really up to the individual how he/she organises their time.' – Tara (ACT), 1-3 hrs per week.

'I think [combining school and work] is something than an individual has to work out, your school cannot be responsible for everything you do.' – Louise (ACT), 6-9 hrs per week.

3.38 Of 1,690 respondents to the committee's student survey engaged in part-time work, 21.5 per cent indicated that their school provided flexibility to enable them to work while meeting study requirements.

- 3.39 Some of the ways in which schools assist students with part-time work identified by respondents included:
- allocating set homework which could be completed in designated study periods;
 - teachers negotiating extensions on set homework and assessments where students have work commitments;
 - providing opportunities for additional tutoring; and
 - allowing students to miss classes and catch up on the work at a later stage.
- 3.40 Some excerpts from students' responses to this section of the survey are listed in Figure 3.5 below.

Figure 3.5 Committee survey responses: Flexibility provided by schools to help students who work

Q. Does your school provide any flexibility to enable you to work while meeting study requirements?

'No – Teachers believe year 12 students should not work whilst doing their HSC and try and discourage their students from it. I think this is hard as I personally need to work during this time.' – Iva (NSW), 10-12 hrs per week.

'Not really. School wants us to get the work done no matter what other things we have going on in our life.' – Bronte (Qld), 6-9 hrs per week.

'Some teachers are slightly lenient with normal homework if we give them advance warning of our work commitments.' – Jackson (Vic.) 9-12 hrs per week.

'Teachers offer help and tutor before and after school and at lunch time.' – Vanessa (WA), 6-9 hrs per week.

'They don't take 'I had to work' as a reason for not completing something.' – Janina (NSW), 9-12 hrs per week.

'No – not really, when your assignments and tests come they are all at the same time which can be quite stressful and chaotic.' – Emma (NSW), 9-12 hrs per week.

'Yes – If I have to work on a school night usually my teachers will just tell me to do as much as I can but if it's too hard to complete it's not such a drama.' – Gabe (NSW), 6-9 hrs per week.

'No – But I don't think they should either, because I made the decision to work. School is always more important.' – Laura (NSW), 6-9 hrs per week.

'Yes – having communication between me and the teacher means that we are able to negotiate and come to an agreement.' – Lauren (NSW), 9-12 hrs per week.

'No – Although the school is required by law to give 2 weeks notice of an assessment, this is not enough time when juggling with work and school and 4 or 5 other demanding subjects. The school does not care, if your assignment is late, that's too bad and you get a mark of zero.' – Briannon (NSW), 9-12 hrs per week.

'Yes. It depends on the individual teachers, most teachers are reasonable. However I don't think that it is the school's responsibility to do this, as [school] is more important than work.' – Josh (NSW), 3-6 hrs per week.

'Teachers could be more understanding towards students with jobs'

- 3.41 One of the questions on the committee's student survey asked whether there was anything that could be done to make combining work and school easier. While there were a range of practical suggestions offered in response to this question, an overwhelming number of responses simply said 'less homework!'.
- 3.42 Resentment to homework was prevalent throughout survey responses and consistent with feedback the NSW Commission for Children and Young People received in its consultations with children on the issue of combining school and work. Commissioner Ms Gillian Calvert noted:
- We found that homework was almost universally resented by children as something that they fail to see the point of and that they experienced as really undermining their quality of life in a way, and often leading to fights with parents and creating conflict with parents.³⁴
- 3.43 Feedback from students indicated that there often appeared to be little communication between teachers when setting homework (see Fig 3.6).

Figure 3.6 Committee survey responses: Making combining school and work easier

Q. Is there anything that can be done to make combining school and work easier?

'I think that schools need to realise that students have to work, not everyone's parents can give us a steady cash flow as well as pay for all the other things we need. I need money to live as well. Without money a social life and relaxing goes down the tube. But when I apologise for not completing something 100% or to a better standard because of work issues then my teacher tells me to manage my time more efficiently or quit my job because it is VCE and VCE is more important. But without money how are we supposed to get cars? pay for our phones? internet? laptops to do our work on? stationary? Everyone needs money.' – Kate (Vic.), 9-12 hrs per week.

'All the teachers think their subject is the most important, and I think they forget that there are 6 other teachers all wanting homework handed in the next day etc. We do approx. 6 hours of school a day and I don't think anyone looks forward to going home and doing another 6 hours of school work just to meet teacher demands.' – Lauren (NSW), 15-20 hrs per week.

'Teachers should be more understanding of the demands that both a heavy senior school workload and a part-time job entail. When students have part-time jobs, teachers should be able to negotiate/limit the amount of homework to allow students to keep up.' – Hannah (NSW), 9-12 hrs per week.

'...schools need to have more [of a] role in helping find the right balance of school, work and fun. Teachers are more worried about school than the other two. We need balance in our lives.' – Stephanie (Vic.), 6-9 hrs per week.

'...the work we are given in class should stay in class. Because a teacher has not planned out the class time effectively to fit in all of the course work this should not impact on the student's out of class study time. This is separate from assessment.' – Amanda (ACT), 20-25 hrs per week.

34 Ms Gillian Calvert, NSW Commission for Children and Young People, *Transcript of Evidence*, 25 June 2009, p. 5.

'Teachers shouldn't be so hard on us if we don't complete homework as we get it from every teacher, every day, which is a lot and as well as working, it is very hard.' – Natalie (NSW), 3-6hrs per week.

3.44 Students suggested that a perceived lack of communication between teachers and inconsistency and uncertainty as to the level of flexibility allowed by individual teachers contributed to the difficulty of balancing school and work:

Bianca: Sometimes I will have a shift from 4.30 in the afternoon until nine o'clock at night – I work in hospitality – and she might say, 'You have to finish all these questions by tomorrow.' And I say, 'Miss, I have to work tonight. Can I have an extra day or something.' She just pretty much says, 'No, tough luck.' Then you have to get up at, like, five in the morning and finish your homework, or you have to stay in and do it at lunch, which is pretty bad... There are some teachers who are really understanding and who will say, 'Hand it in the next day,' or, 'Do only some questions.' And there are other teachers who just make you do it and do not really care.³⁵

Katherine: I find that for some periods I do not have any homework at all, and then a week later I will get a whole load of homework that is due by the next week and it has to be done around the same time. I am thinking that maybe some communication between the teachers as to when they are going to give students homework and to figure out the basis on which they are going to give their homework... I think everyone is finding it really hard to manage with a whole load of homework at one time. If it were spread out a bit it might help.³⁶

Ben: I do not know about other schools and their assignments; they tend to give us two weeks notice for all our assignments but they come in blocks. So you will get four assignments at once, and it is within the space of a couple of days, and then you have to try to get them all done within that time. That makes it a bit harder because on some weeks you will be fine with work, and the next week you will not have any time to do work.³⁷

35 Bianca, student, St Joseph's Catholic High School, *Transcript of Evidence*, 30 April 2009, pp. 48-49.

36 Katherine, student, St Mary's Star of the Sea College, *Transcript of Evidence*, 30 April 2009, p. 49.

37 Ben, student, St Joseph's Catholic High School, *Transcript of Evidence*, 30 April 2009, p. 33.

- 3.45 However, there was also an acknowledgment that teachers are becoming more understanding with the increasing prevalence of students balancing school and work:

Torby: I think teachers are starting to get it right. I know last year in my classes I saw people who had work and school, and teachers were starting to become very understanding of it and encourage you to work because it shows you the workforce and what is out there in front of you, not just the school grounds around you. They are not going to be there to protect you all the time and to show you which way to go.³⁸

Fiona: ...I am 100 per cent confident that if I went to a teacher at my school and said, 'I've had too much stuff on and I really need more time on this,' they would be okay with it. I do not know whether that is just the way teachers are at my school or because generally I have a good track record of getting my work in on time and that kind of thing, but I think that the most important thing for a school to be is flexible. Fair enough, if a student in general never gets their work in on time and you can tell that they just do not manage their time, you may not trust them, but if you have no reason to doubt a student, I think it is really important to give them the benefit of the doubt and just be flexible and understanding with students.³⁹

- 3.46 Ms Theresa Creagh, Queensland Catholic Education Commission, noted that while schools do have a responsibility in the pastoral care of young people, their core business is to ensure that students are educated. Ms Creagh stated:

I think we are placing [an] incredible responsibility on the schools. I would really appreciate it if your inquiry could ensure that the work that is being done by schools on preparing students for work is recognised. The role of schools is to ensure that young people are educated. For some students, part of that education is in work in those latter years. I think we need to recognise that the core business of schools is the full education of young people, including transition into work through traineeships et cetera. In the fullness of life, the pastoral care of those young people is part of the schools' responsibility. The partnership with parents and with business and industry is a role that schools play, but schools

38 Torby, student, Holmesglen TAFE, *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 April 2009, pp. 69-70.

39 Fiona, student, Melba Copland Secondary School, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 August 2009, p. 25.

cannot be the answer to it. So I think we need to keep a very full picture of the responsibility. It is a societal responsibility to bring young children to adulthood. The school plays a vital role, the family plays a vital role and society plays a vital role. I completely support the statements made about the incredible pressure society puts on young people and how all of us can work together to educate them to be citizens of this country of whom we can be very proud.⁴⁰

The impact of students' part-time work on educational achievement and Year 12 completion

- 3.47 While there are a range of benefits for students undertaking some part-time work, the educational achievements of students combining school and work can also be adversely affected by work arrangements.
- 3.48 Various studies through the LSAY series have examined the impact of part-time work during high-school on educational outcomes. LSAY studies have also sought to examine the relationship between part-time work and school completion.
- 3.49 Robinson, for example, examined the effect of part-time work on school students and found that, 'in general, having a part-time job did not have an adverse affect on the likelihood of students completing secondary school or on their academic performance in Year 12.'⁴¹ The study was based on over 3000 young people who were aged 19 in 1994 and who had been surveyed annually since they were 14 years old.
- 3.50 Robinson's study found that Year 12 results were a little lower for those who worked more than 10 hours per week during their senior schooling than those who did not work. It also found that Year 11 students who worked more than 10 hours per week were slightly less likely to finish Year 12 than those who did not work.⁴² Upon releasing the findings,

40 Ms Theresa Creagh, Queensland Catholic Education Commission, *Transcript of Evidence*, 29 April 2009, p. 16.

41 L. Robinson, *The Effects of Part-Time Work on School Students*, Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth, Research Report No. 9, Australian Council for Educational Research, Melbourne, 1999, p. v.

42 L. Robinson *The Effects of Part-Time Work on School Students*, Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth, Research Report No. 9, Australian Council for Educational Research, Melbourne, 1999, p. v.

ACER suggested that concern about the impact of having a part-time job on students' schooling 'appears to be unfounded.'⁴³

- 3.51 A subsequent LSAY study by Vickers, Lamb and Hinkley in 2003 examined the effects of part-time employment on participation in education, training and work, noted that rates of part-time work among students had increased substantially since the early 1990s on which the 1999 report's findings were based.⁴⁴ Vickers, Lamb and Hinkley therefore sought to re-examine the relationship between part-time work and educational outcomes for students, by examining a cohort of students who were in Year 9 in 1995. The study found that participation in employment beyond five hours per week was associated with an increased likelihood of dropping out before the end of Year 12. Vickers, Lamb and Hinkley also found that the more hours students were engaged in work outside school, the higher the likelihood of non-completion.⁴⁵
- 3.52 The most recent body of research conducted by NCVET based on LSAY data, which has yet to be released, examined the activities of the 2003 cohort of 15 year old students. Ms Alison Anlezark from NCVET advised that the study found that combining school and work 'appears to have a negative impact on study outcomes...in terms of retention between years 10, 11 and 12, and on TER score.'⁴⁶ Ms Anlezark added:
- We also find, though, that the results are modest unless the number of hours are long, which leads us to conclude that individuals can combine school and work with minimal impact on their study if their hours are moderated.⁴⁷
- 3.53 DEET reported that international research is broadly aligned with the findings in Australia – that 'low to moderate hours of work have little negative impact on school achievement or completion, however higher hours may have a slightly negative impact on school achievement.'⁴⁸

43 Australian Council for Educational Research, *School students benefit from part-time work*, media release, 7 May 1999, <<http://www.acer.edu.au/news/990507.html>>. Accessed 14 July 2009.

44 M. Vickers, S. Lamb and J. Hinkley, *Student Workers in High School and Beyond: The effects of part-time employment on participation in education, training and work*, LSAY Research Report No. 30, February 2003, p. 3.

45 M. Vickers, S. Lamb and J. Hinkley, *Student Workers in High School and Beyond: The effects of part-time employment on participation in education, training and work*, LSAY Research Report No. 30, February 2003, p. v.

46 Ms Alison Anlezark, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, *Transcript of Evidence*, 7 April 2009, p. 3.

47 Ms Alison Anlezark, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, *Transcript of Evidence*, 7 April 2009, p. 3.

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

- 3.54 The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry submitted that there is insufficient research into the educational and employment pathways of students and the impact that engagement in part-time work or other extracurricular activities such as community or voluntary work and sports has on the quality of educational outcome.⁴⁹
- 3.55 Vickers, Lamb and Hinkley also acknowledged the possibility that the statistical associations between part-time work and non-completion are not causal or only one of an array of relationships, and that participation in part-time work may be the *result* of a decision to leave school early, rather than a *cause* of early leaving. Vickers, Lamb and Hinkley supported further research to clarify the elements at work and their relationship to one another.⁵⁰

Gender differences

- 3.56 LSAY research also identified gender differences with regards to the impact of students' part-time work on Year 12 completion. Vickers, Lamb and Hinkley, for example, found that:
- Males who work 5 to 15 hours per week during Year 9 are approximately 40 per cent less likely to complete Year 12 than those who do not, while males who work more than fifteen hours per week (up to and including full-time work) are approximately 60 per cent less likely to complete Year 12; and
 - Females who work part-time during Year 9 are much more likely to complete Year 12 than their male counterparts.⁵¹
- 3.57 After analysing LSAY data which suggests that working longer hours is more strongly associated with school non-completion for boys than for girls, Vickers Lamb and Hinkley stated:

The answer may be that the life choices open to males who leave school early are far more favourable than those open to female early leavers. Boys still greatly outnumber girls in the apprenticeship system. Girls who wish to gain a secure place in the labour market cannot rely on this avenue. Instead, their success in the labour market appears to depend on their ability to

49 Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, *Submission no. 27*, p. 11.

50 M. Vickers, S. Lamb and J. Hinkley, *Student Workers in High School and Beyond: The effects of part-time employment on participation in education, training and work*, LSAY Research Report No. 30, February 2003, p. 29.

51 M. Vickers, S. Lamb and J. Hinkley, *Student Workers in High School and Beyond: The effects of part-time employment on participation in education, training and work*, LSAY Research Report No. 30, February 2003, p. v.

demonstrate solid achievements in the formal education system
...It seems that, as a result, girls have learned to balance the
demands of schoolwork and participation in part-time work.⁵²

Committee comment

- 3.58 In the main, part-time work for students is a very positive experience. Students value the independence that comes from having a job and gain confidence from interacting with adults in the workplace. They also acquire a range of employability skills which hold them in good stead for future employment.
- 3.59 There is a point, though, at which spending too much time to work appears to translate into diminished academic achievement and a decreased likelihood of completing Year 12. The point at which participation in part-time work shifts from a positive to a negative indicator is virtually impossible to discern because some individuals cope with the demands of having a job better than others. The pressures of a job on a student's performance at school can also be influenced by other external factors such as a student's extra-curricular activities or the time they spend socialising outside school hours.
- 3.60 The responses to the committee's student survey gave some indication of the extent to which schools are accommodating students' part-time work arrangements when setting homework and assessment tasks, and negotiating extensions to deadlines. However, there was also evidence which showed that teachers may not be aware of the amount of time students are spending in part-time work outside school.
- 3.61 Students' survey responses showed that an overwhelming number of students with part-time jobs feel that their working hours impact on the amount of time available to study. But on the evidence available, the degree to which part-time work impacts on educational attainment cannot be quantified. Further detailed investigation is needed to understand and measure the relationship between part-time work and academic achievement and Year 12 completion. Specifically, research is needed to examine what role other external factors play in influencing academic achievement, including a student's extra-curricular activities outside part-

52 M. Vickers, S. Lamb and J. Hinkley, *Student Workers in High School and Beyond: The effects of part-time employment on participation in education, training and work*, LSAY Research Report No. 30, February 2003, p. 12.

time work. Where students working part-time do not go on to complete senior secondary education, it cannot be assumed that this is a direct result of their working hours, as evidence suggests that students often work longer hours because they are not engaged in their learning anyway.

- 3.62 The committee notes and commends NCVET projects currently in progress which are seeking to unlock some of these questions using data obtained through LSAY, including one project which will explore how different types of work, and work and study combinations, are related to educational and labour market outcomes.⁵³

Recommendation 1

- 3.63 **That the Australian Government ensures that further research is undertaken to examine student pathways and the impact of part-time employment and other extracurricular activities on students' academic performance and retention, including the motivations of those students who work longer hours.**

53 See NCVET, Work in Progress, *Combining VET and Employment in Youth Transitions*, commenced 30 June 2009. Available online at: <http://www.ncvet.edu.au/workinprogress/projects/10431.html>, accessed 5 October 2009.