

Students combining school and work

...it is scary that they are working the hours they are working.¹

Anecdotally, parents tell us that it is of major concern to them that their children are working late at night some nights and long hours within those late nights... it is often stated that the young people in question must choose between these long hours and late nights or give up their jobs – there is reported to be little room for compromise.²

Introduction

- 2.1 The proportion of full-time secondary school students in employment has increased substantially over the last thirty years. The growth in the ‘casualisation’ of the workforce, particularly in the retail and services industries, has enabled much greater numbers of young people to combine school and work. An increase in school participation rates has also contributed to the growth in the incidence of student-workers.³

1 Ms Helen Cridland, Bayside and Glen Eira Kingston Local Learning and Employment Network, *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 April 2009, p. 11.

2 South East Local Learning and Employment Network, *Submission no. 23*, pp. 6-7.

3 L. Robinson, *School Students and Part-Time Work*, LSAY research report No. 2, ACER, October 1996, p. 3.

- 2.2 Despite this student-worker phenomenon, there remains limited information available to schools and employers on the effect combining school and work has on young people's lives and their prospects for successful transitions.⁴ It's been argued that public policy has not kept pace with the increasing level of student participation in part-time work.⁵
- 2.3 In considering ways to assist students combine school and work, it is important to first identify their motivations for undertaking employment, the type of work they are doing and how much time they are spending at work. This chapter provides a snapshot of students' working arrangements outside school.

Characteristics of students in part-time work

Proportion of students combining school and work

- 2.4 Australia is among a small group of OECD countries with relatively high levels of students combining school and work (others include the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Denmark).⁶ Professor Marie Brennan stated:
- If I talk to my colleagues in Europe or most parts of Asia, they are absolutely horrified at the idea that young people are working instead of doing their work at school; that that is their work.⁷
- 2.5 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data indicates that the proportion of all school students in employment for one hour or more per week increased from 25 per cent in 1986 to 37 per cent in 2007.⁸
- 2.6 Females are more likely to combine school and work than males (see Table 2.1). The overall proportion of students working increases with school year level although a slightly smaller percentage of Year 12 female students work than Year 11 female students.

4 See Inquiry Terms of Reference.

5 Australian National Schools Network, *Briefing paper on an Inter-generational Youth Compact*, <http://www.nsn.net.au/files/ANSN_Youth_Compact.pdf>. Accessed 18 August 2009.

6 L. Robinson, *School Students and Part-Time Work*, LSAY research report No. 2, ACER, October 1996, p. 8.

7 Prof. Marie Brennan, *Transcript of Evidence*, 7 April 2009, p. 8.

8 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Submission no. 53*, p. 10. ABS data is based on young people aged 15 to 19 attending school.

Table 2.1 Proportion of school students aged 15 to 19 in employment by sex and year level (as a percentage of the total in each sex and year group), 2007

	Males	Females	Total
Year 10 or Below	23	31	26
Year 11	30	48	39
Year 12	43	46	45
Total	31	42	37

Source: Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Submission no. 53*, p. 9.

Why do students work?

- 2.7 The reasons secondary school students take on a part-time job have been examined in a number of research studies, which have suggested various overlapping reasons.⁹ The desire to earn money, the quest for financial independence or increased personal autonomy and the belief that such experience would be of assistance in the future – particularly in securing employment after studying, have all been identified as motivations for young people combining school and work.¹⁰
- 2.8 For a smaller proportion of students (estimated to be around 10 per cent), likely to belong to families in the lowest socioeconomic quartile, evidence suggests that combining school and work is based on the need to provide income for their family or income to support their continued study.¹¹
- 2.9 In 2007, the NSW Teachers Federation commissioned independent research which explored the knowledge, attitudes and beliefs of Years 10 to 12 students with respect to the relationship between their school and work. The findings of the study were presented in the report, *You're gold...if you're 15 years old* (the *You're gold* report).

9 L. Robinson, *School Students and Part-Time Work*, LSAY research report No. 2, ACER, October 1996, p. 4.

10 L. Robinson, *School Students and Part-Time Work*, LSAY research report No. 2, ACER, October 1996, p. 4.

11 L. Robinson, *School Students and Part-Time Work*, LSAY research report No. 2, ACER, October 1996, p. 5.

- 2.10 The study examined some of the reasons why students work part-time. One common reason was that 'teenagers perceive that life for them is more expensive than ever,'¹² whether it be the costs of technology (such as mobile phones or iPods), saving for a car, the ongoing costs associated with maintaining a car, or the various expenses associated with socialising.
- 2.11 While technological commodities like mobile phones may be considered by some to be a luxury, the *You're Gold* report emphasised that 'for many young people today, technology is the way they communicate and connect with their social network.'¹³ However, in line with Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) research, the report pointed out that money was just one of a range of motivations for students to undertake part-time employment.
- 2.12 A survey of 584 students aged 14 to 17 conducted by the Queensland Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian found that the most common reason for working was to save money (25 per cent), with 16.5 per cent of respondents indicating that they worked to support themselves, and 10.2 per cent revealing that they worked to support the family business or income.¹⁴
- 2.13 During the committee's student forums, participants provided information on their motivations for working. The majority of students reported their primary reason for working was to save money. Saving for a car appeared to be the highest priority for most students, while others were saving for an overseas holiday, or putting money away to cover some of the costs of tertiary education. Students saw having a part-time job as a means of obtaining a level of financial independence and personal responsibility. For example, Angelo, from Cheltenham Secondary College in Melbourne, stated:

I do not want to keep asking my parents all the time for money. After all these years I can fend for myself a little bit more than I could back then. They have their bills to pay too. They have a mortgage. I do not want to keep taking chunks out of their pay cheque.¹⁵

12 NSW Teachers Federation, *Submission no. 22, Attachment A*, p. 23.

13 NSW Teachers Federation, *Submission no. 22, Attachment A*, p. 23.

14 Queensland Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, *Submission no. 46, Attachment A*, p. 11.

15 Angelo, student, Cheltenham Secondary College, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 April 2009, p. 39.

- 2.14 Other students noted the benefit they gained from having financial independence to pay for those things that parents may be reluctant to pay for. Tara, from Perth's Leeming Senior High School, stated:
- ...not all parents can hand out a \$50 note every week. It is good to have financial independence and it is good not having always to ask your parents for money.¹⁶
- 2.15 Hannah from Canberra Girls' Grammar School added:
- ...I pay for my car, my registration, my insurance, clothes, food that I want when I go out, birthday presents – all those little things that your parents will not pay for. It is really good to be able to do that by yourself.¹⁷
- 2.16 Para Hills High School in Adelaide surveyed a section of its student body prior to the committee's visit and when asked their reasons for working, some students indicated that they took on work due to pressure from their parents, either to earn money to pay their own bills or to take on additional responsibility. One student, for example, had commented that 'Mum made me get a job.'¹⁸
- 2.17 In addition to making money, many students also reported that they enjoyed the opportunity of making new friends from outside school. For example, during a student forum at Illawarra Senior College in Port Kembla, participants described the supportive environment in their workplace as being 'like a second family'.¹⁹ Having a part-time job was also seen as 'a place of escape' which gave students an outlet for not having to worry about school work.²⁰
- 2.18 The feedback received during student forums is generally consistent with LSAY research. For example, LSAY research which focused on the 2003 cohort of 15 year old students found that 98 per cent of secondary students surveyed who worked part-time identified 'want spending money of their own' as one of their reasons for working, with fewer than 9 per cent of students working because their 'family needs the money'.²¹

16 Tara, student, Leeming Senior High School, *Transcript of Evidence*, 8 April 2009, p. 45.

17 Hannah, student, Canberra Girls' Grammar School, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 August 2009, p. 15.

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

19 See Tomas, student, Illawarra Sports High School; and Andrew, student, Warrawong High School, *Transcript of Evidence*, 30 April 2009, pp. 36-37.

20 Andrew, student, Warrawong High School, *Transcript of Evidence*, 30 April 2009, p. 37.

21 J. Abhayaratna, L. Andrews, H. Nuch, and T. Podbury, *Part Time Employment: the Australian Experience*, Staff Working Paper, Productivity Commission, 2008, pp. 93-94.

Students' part-time jobs: 'a big social sacrifice'

- 2.19 In any discussion on students balancing school and work, it is important not to overlook the fact that students make significant sacrifices when they make the decision to take on a part-time job. Often, the job comes at the expense of extra-curricular activities such as sports or pursuits in music or the performing arts. However, perhaps the greatest sacrifice for those students who work is that their part-time jobs mean that they have little or no time to socialise.
- 2.20 Allison, from Illawarra Senior College, emphasised the need for teenagers to find time to socialise with their friends, as this 'is a part of growing up and social development.'²²
- 2.21 The *You're gold* study found that time to socialise was a key difference between teenagers who work and those who do not. The report noted that 'ironically, workers have the money but not the time, while non-workers have the time but not the money.'²³
- 2.22 When asked how they might otherwise use the time they usually spent at work, some students indicated that they would be more likely to allocate more time to socialising than studying. For example, Maddie from Parkdale Secondary College, stated:
- I would probably use it to hang out with friends more often than anything. There would be more study time, obviously, but a lot of it would go to committing to friends.²⁴
- 2.23 Some students felt that giving up social time to balance school and work was a viable sacrifice, particularly for their final year of schooling. The following comments from students give some indication of the priority they place on having a part-time job and the sacrifices they are prepared to make to keep it:
- Owen:** Really, I have made a big social sacrifice because I just do not have any time for mates. As for my motivation, I think, 'Yeah, you can mess around with your mates but, in 10 years, where will that have got you?' In 10 years time I will look back and think, 'Well, yeah, it's been pretty hard yakka, but it's got me where I wanted to go.'²⁵

22 Allison G, student, Illawarra Senior College, *Transcript of Evidence*, 30 April 2009, p. 48.

23 NSW Teachers Federation, *Submission no. 22 Attachment A*, p. 24.

24 Maddie, student, Parkdale Secondary College, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 April 2009, p. 57.

25 Owen, student, Craigmore High School, *Transcript of Evidence*, 7 April 2009, p. 34.

Matthew: A number of my friends have given up a sport that they have played previously for eight to 10 years because they had to get a job or did not have to get a job but decided that they would get a job. When it got too tough to keep both, they kept the job.²⁶

Lena: I gave up my callisthenics classes and stuff. Because of my work, I could not keep up the homework and the class work and Rock Eisteddfod and the competitions and stuff like that. It was just all piling up too much, so I cut out my callisthenics first, and then the Rock Eisteddfod is next before my work.²⁷

James: I have already given up half of my sporting time so that I can get to work and still have time for homework.²⁸

Where do students work?

- 2.24 Data obtained from responses to the committee's student survey confirmed that while students work across a diverse range of industries, the vast majority are employed in the retail (48.4 per cent) or fast food/hospitality (29.8 per cent) industries (see Figure 2.1).
- 2.25 Outside retail/hospitality, the most common type of work undertaken by students was babysitting, child-minding or after-school care (6.8 per cent). A further 3.7 per cent of student workers had community or sport-related jobs, such as refereeing/umpiring games on weekends.
- 2.26 It was acknowledged that the types of jobs predominantly performed by students are not areas which require specialised skill or training. This led some stakeholders to consider whether such jobs should form part of a formal pathway, given that in many cases, students do not envisage a long-term career in these industries.²⁹

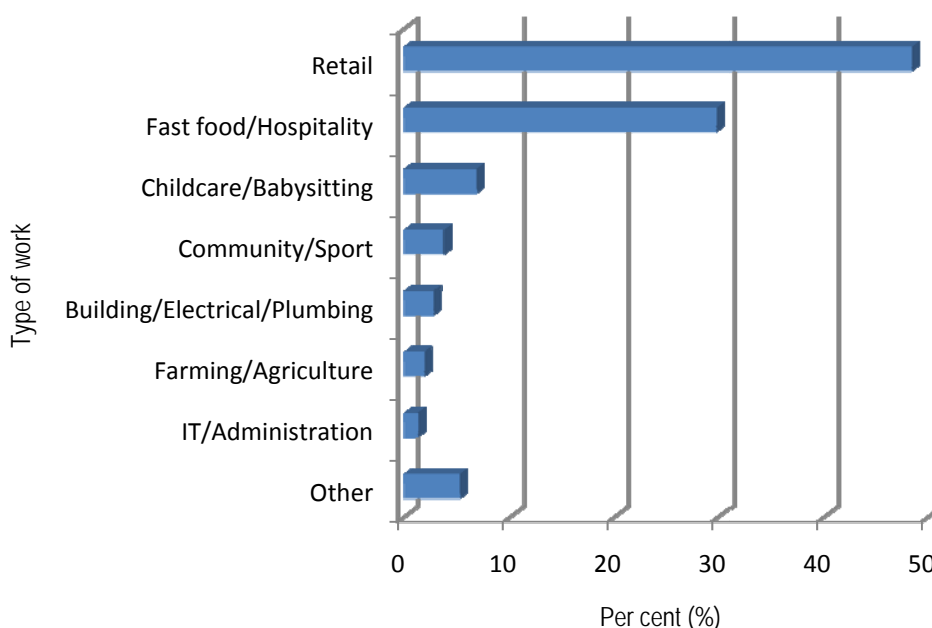
26 Matthew, student, Grace Lutheran College, *Transcript of Evidence*, 29 April 2009, p. 47.

27 Lena, student, Parkdale Secondary College, *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 April 2009, p. 57.

28 James, student, Salisbury High School, *Transcript of Evidence*, 7 April 2009, p. 34.

29 See, for example, Queensland Catholic Education Commission, *Submission no. 18*, p. 5.

Figure 2.1 Committee survey data: Industry in which students are employed



Source: Committee student survey data, 2009.

Students' working hours

2.27 ABS data indicates that of those students aged 15 to 19 who work at least one hour per week, the majority (approximately 69 per cent) are working 10 or fewer hours per week (see Table 2.2). Approximately 22 per cent of working students are working between 11 to 15 hours per week, while approximately 9 per cent are working 16 hours or more.

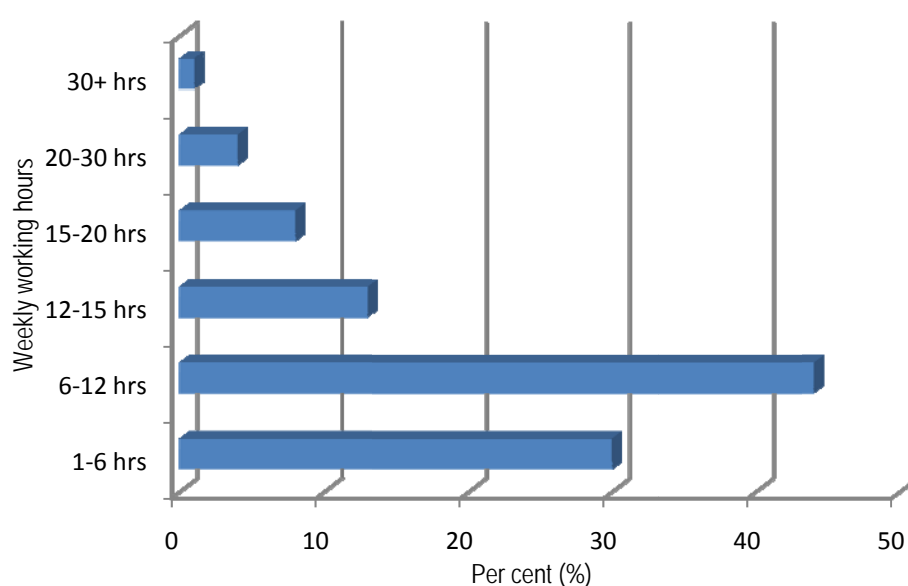
Table 2.2 School students aged 15 to 19 years – hours worked per week by year group (as a percentage of all school students in employment in each year group), 2007

Hours per week	Year 10 or below (per cent)	Year 11 (per cent)	Year 12 (per cent)	Total (per cent)
1 to 5	28	21	22	23
6 to 10	46	46	46	46
11 to 15	21	24	21	22
16 or more	5	9	11	9
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Submission no. 53*, p. 10.

2.28 The average weekly working hours of students indicated by ABS data broadly aligns with data from the committee's student survey (see Figure 2.2). The committee's student survey indicated that 30 per cent of students in employment work between 1 to 6 hours per week, 44 per cent work between 6 to 12 hours per week, 21 per cent work between 12 to 20 hours per week, while 5 per cent work in excess of 20 hours per week (this includes 1 per cent who spend over 30 hours per week at work).

Figure 2.2 Committee survey data: Students' weekly working hours



Source: Committee student survey data, 2009.

2.29 During forums with secondary students across the country, participants were asked for their views on how many hours they felt they could regularly devote to part-time work during a school week. The overwhelming majority of students suggested that 12 to 15 hours was probably the maximum they could manage before their part-time work started to significantly impact on their school work. The following comments from students reflect this view:

Luke: Fifteen hours works for me. Some weeks it has just appeared on the roster, and I have ended up working 20 or 22. Because it has only happened now and again I have managed to work everything else around it, but if it happened on a regular basis it would be too much for me.³⁰

30 Luke, student, Tasmanian Academy (Hellyer Campus), *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 April 2009, p. 23.

Theodore: Per week, I could probably try to fit in 10 or 15 hours... That would be a reasonable amount to be able get everything done, hopefully, but I am not too sure.³¹

Tomas: For normal school students, I think eight to 12 hours is probably a good number, because you are not doing too much, but you are not doing too little. So you can complete an eight-hour shift on a Saturday or you can do the extra four hours on a Thursday night, which will not impact on your schooling and education as much.³²

Heath: Probably around 15. I think that once you get over 15 it is really too much with everything else you have got, because most people our age have got things other than school and work they need to do, and they need to fit that in as well.³³

Paige: I think about 10 to 14 is reasonable for schoolchildren. Up to 12 is fine for kids up to grade 10. It is fine as long as you are not doing consecutive nights during the week and you are not spending your whole weekend at work; maybe a day at work is all right, but two days is a bit excessive.³⁴

Brett: I am doing roughly 15 hours a week, and I think that if I did more than 20 I would really not manage. I have done 22 hours in one week, and it got really hard—I did not really have enough time for sleep or to go out and hang out with friends or anything like that.³⁵

- 2.30 The Commission for Children and Young People NSW found that task-focused jobs, or jobs based around specific activities (i.e. agricultural, caring, delivery, sports-related work) are more likely to involve shorter working hours. Jobs in sales, fast-food/hospitality which are based around the operating hours of the business are more likely to involve longer hours.³⁶

31 Theodore, student, Parkdale Secondary College, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 April 2009, p. 50.

32 Tomas, student, Australian Technical College – North Brisbane, *Transcript of Evidence*, 29 April 2009, p. 46.

33 Heath, student, Tasmanian Academy (Hellyer Campus), *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 April 2009, p. 23.

34 Paige, student, Grace Lutheran College, *Transcript of Evidence*, 29 April 2009, p. 46.

35 Brett, student, Tasmanian Academy (Hellyer Campus), *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 April 2009, p. 24.

36 The Commission for Children and Young People NSW, 2005, *Ask The Children: Young people speak about their experiences at work*, June 2005, p. 4.

- 2.31 The committee's survey data showed the retail and hospitality sectors as having similar breakdowns in working hours. Students who have jobs as carers or in a community/sporting related sector were more likely to have shorter weekly working hours.
- 2.32 Identifying the lateness of the hours students spend in work is more difficult to quantify and was not addressed directly through the committee's student survey. Anecdotal evidence suggested that it was not uncommon for students to have shifts finishing at 10pm or later during the school week.
- 2.33 Some students referred to situations where shifts were scheduled to finish at a particular time, but in reality they would be required to stay back after closing and do cleaning up tasks regardless of how late that was. This scenario appears to be particularly prevalent in the fast food/hospitality industry, where trading hours tend to be later. Melissa, from the Tasmanian Academy in Burnie, stated:

A couple of my friends work after school and then after the shops close at 11 they have to ... clean for a couple of hours. So they are not getting home until one o'clock. They also live out of town, so they can be pretty stuffed the next day. Some of them also have to open the next day at six o'clock.³⁷

37 Melissa, student, Tasmanian Academy (Hellyer Campus), *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 April 2009, p. 16.

