3

Putting it in context: Labour market, social and policy change

3.1 The last 40 years have witnessed major social and economic changes which have accelerated more recently. Among many things the changes include the type and distribution of employment, social changes such as the structure of families and the status of women as well as educational policy.

3.2 Some changes in education, such as rising school retention rates and changes in curriculum and assessment, were considered in Chapter 2. This chapter considers the education of boys in the wider context of social and economic change and concurrent changes to educational policy and how these may have affected boys.

3.3 Changes to the type and distribution of available employment have relatively clear effects while the impact of social change is more subtle and impossible to quantify. It is also possible that the equity for girls education agenda over the last 20 to 25 years has helped to guide girls through some of the social and economic changes while boys have largely been left to find their own way.

The youth labour market

The shift away from full-time employment

3.4 Major structural changes in the labour market over the last 20 years have had particular significance for young people and the types of skills they need to acquire to be competitive in the labour market. This committee's predecessor, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, last examined the features of the youth labour market in its report *Youth employment: A working solution* in

1997. It established that employment for young people is highly concentrated in a few, predominantly service, industries, most notably retail. More significantly, the Committee found that teenage full-time employment had collapsed over the 15 year period to June 1997. While the growth in part-time employment for those young people 20 to 24 years of age had exceeded the decline in full-time employment, total employment over the 15 year period for young people 15 to 24 years of age declined by 3 per cent compared to overall employment growth of 31.2 per cent.[1]

Figure 3.1   School retention and teenage full-time employment compared
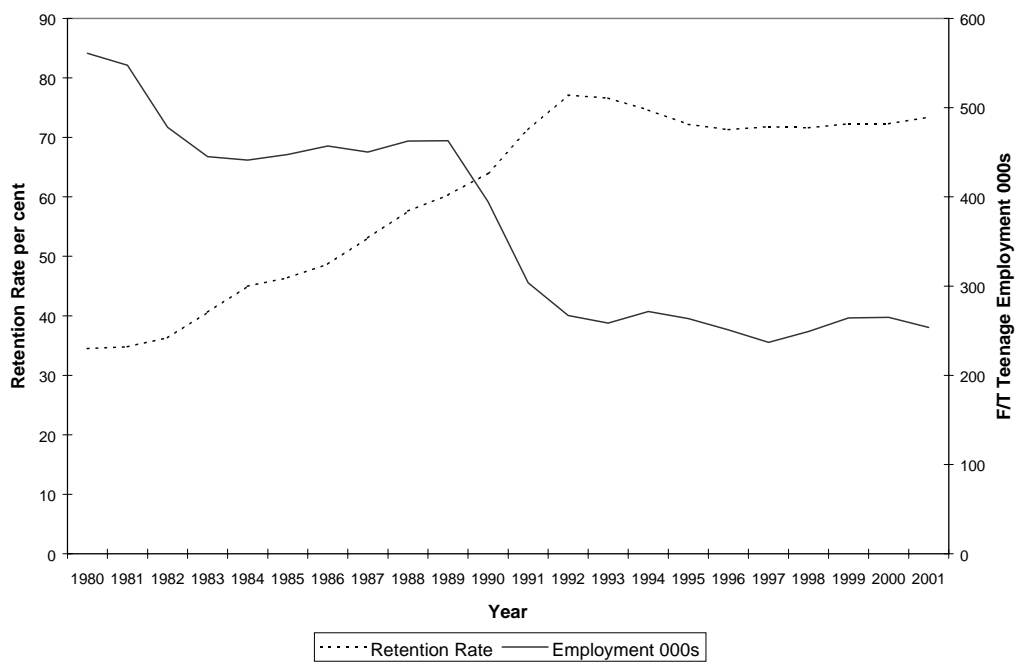
3.5   The rise in school retention over the last two decades has mirrored the decline in teenage full-time employment (*see* Figure 3.1). The Year 12 retention rate for 1981 was 34.8 per cent, and in December 1981, 547,600 teenagers were employed full-time. The 2001 Year 12 retention rate was 73.4 per cent and 253,700 teenagers were in full-time employment. If the 1981 Year 12 retention rate had applied in 2001, there would have been approximately 200,000 fewer students enrolled in Years 11 and 12. Another important change over the last 20 years is that in December 2001 just over 212,000 teenagers had part-time jobs while they attended school.

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1   House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *Youth employment: A working solution*, AGPS, 1997, pp. 2-9.

Total teenage part-time employment in December 2001 was 461,400, compared to 160,800 in December 1981. [2]

3.6   An examination of labour market trends to consider the gender dimension and the implications for educators and the education of boys is illuminating. Table 3.1 shows that full-time employment for both teenage males and females has collapsed but that males increased their relative share of teenage full-time employment from 58 per cent to 62 per cent.[3] This is probably because young males are the major beneficiaries of employment-based training opportunities, particularly in the traditional trades, and these are still predominantly full-time jobs (*see below*). Part-time employment for teenagers is now more evenly distributed between males and females than it was 20 years ago, as are both full and part-time employment for 20 to 24 year olds.

Table 3.1   Full-time and Part-time employment of 15-24 year olds by sex: 1981 to 2001

|	**Full-time**	**Part-time**	**Total**
Males 15-19 years of age - May 1981	322,100	62,500	384,600
Males 15-19 years of age - May 2001	137,600	199,700	337,300
% change over 20 years to May 2001	*-57.3*	*219.5*	*-12.3*
Females 15-19 years of age - May 1981	230,500	89,600	320,100
Females 15-19 years of age - May 2001	83,100	250,300	333,400
% change over 20 years to May 2001	*-63.9*	*179.4*	*4.2*
Males 20-24 years of age - May 1981	511,100	34,800	545,900
Males 20-24 years of age - May 2001	403,600	116,500	520,100
% change over 20 years to May 2001	*-21*	*234.8*	*-4.8*
Females 20-24 years of age - May 1981	338,700	68,400	407,100
Females 20-24 years of age - May 2001	313,200	169,300	482,500
% change over 20 years to May 2001	*-7.5*	*147.5*	*18.5*
Males - May 1981	3,854,300	222,300	4,076,600
Males - May 2001	4,374,100	721,700	5,095,800
% change over 20 years to May 2001	*13.5*	*224.7*	*25*
Females - May 1981	1,507,500	828,200	2,335,700
Females - May 2001	2,241,100	1,797,000	4,038,100
% change over 20 years to May 2001	*48.7*	*117*	*72.9*
All employment - May 1981	5,361,800	1,050,600	6,412,400
All employment - May 2001	6,615,200	2,518,800	9,134,000
% change over 20 years to May 2001	*23.4*	*139.7*	*42.4*

Source   ABS Labour Force (original data)

2   ABS Labour Force, Teenage Employment and Unemployment, Australia, Preliminary - Data Report, Cat No. 6202.0.40.001; *and* ABS Schools Australia, Cat. No. 4221; There were 411,500 students enrolled in Year 11 and 12 in Australia in 2001.

3   (1981) 322,100/(322,100+230,500)x100=58.3%; (2001) 137,600/(137,600+83,100)x100=62.3%.

3.7   Young people's overall share of the labour market has declined over the last 20 years. The decline in full-time employment for teenage females was offset by a rise in part-time employment while teenage males have suffered an absolute decline in total employment. Young adult women have improved their access to full-time employment relative to young adult men but neither group has maintained its position in relation to the overall labour market. The essential point is that there are over 330,000 fewer teenagers in full-time jobs (and nearly 185,000 fewer males in full-time jobs) today than there were 20 years ago, while the population of this age group has risen by about 72,000 over the same period.

Figure 3.1   Employment: 15 to 19 Years of Age
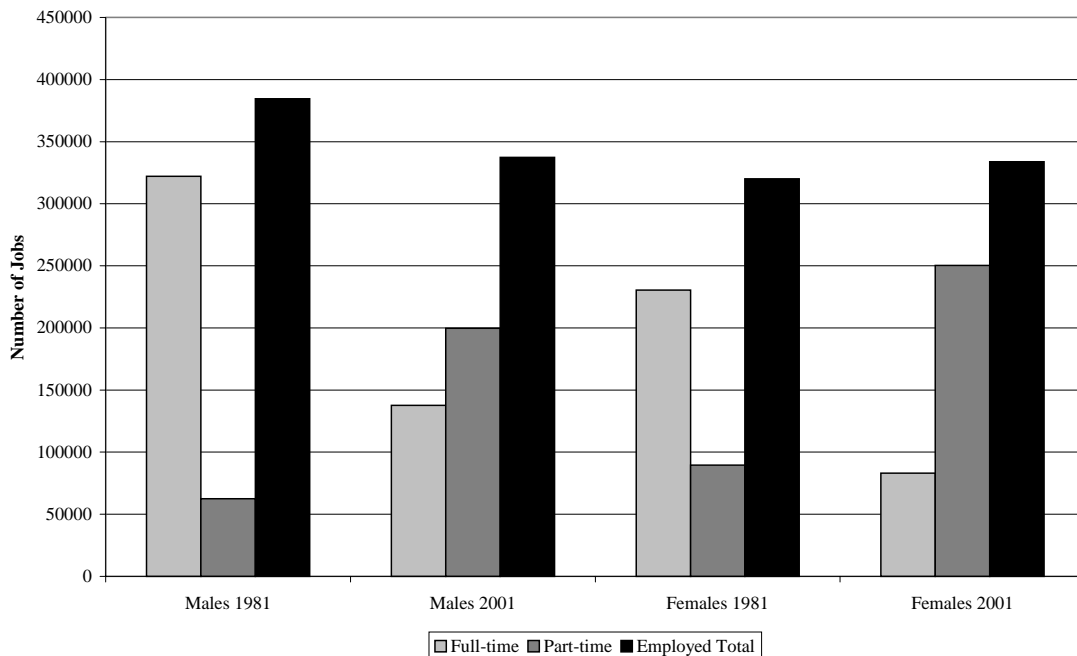
Source   ABS Labour Force (original data)

3.8   Figures 3.1 and 3.2 illustrate the extent of the decline in full-time employment for young people and show that the distribution of the available full-time and part-time employment between males and females has become more even over the last 20 years. However, the apprenticeship system still gives teenage males a marked advantage in access to full-time employment (*see below*) and the convergence in the distribution of the available full-time and part-time employment between young men and women does not necessarily imply that their incomes and access to quality career opportunities have converged to the same extent.

Figure 3.2   Employment: 20 to 24 Years of Age
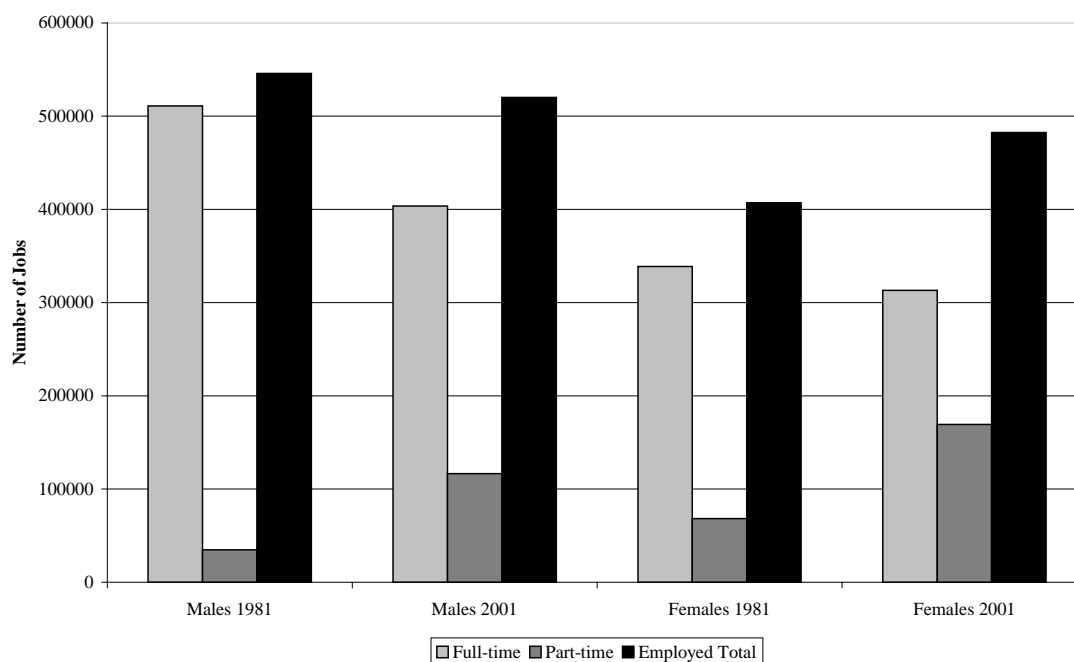
Source   ABS Labour Force (original data)

## Other trends in male youth employment

3.9   In addition to the collapse in full-time employment opportunities for
         young people there have been major occupational shifts in the labour
         market. For young males, and for teenagers in particular, the collapse in
         full-time employment has been greatest in occupations such as labouring
         and the skilled trades, which traditionally have been the destination of
         early school leavers. Table 3.2 and Figures 3.3 and 3.4 illustrate the extent
         of these employment shifts over the 15 year period to May 2001.

Table 3.2   Occupational trends in male youth employment

|	Full-time	Part-time	Total
Trades: 15-19 years of age August 1986	106,500	6,100	112,600
Trades: 15-19 years of age May 2001	64,500	8,400	72,900
% change over 15 years to May 2001	*-39.4*	*37.7*	*-35.3*
Trades: 20-24 years of age August 1986	165,600	3,900	169,400
Trades: 20-24 years of age May 2001	127,600	5,700	133,300
% change over 15 years to May 2001	*-22.9*	*46.2*	*-21.3*
Labourers: 15-19 years of age August 1986	62,600	46,700	109,300
Labourers: 15-19 years of age May 2001	28,200	60,200	88,400
% change over 15 years to May 2001	*-55*	*28.9*	*-19.1*
Labourers: 20-24 years of age August 1986	97,200	13,200	110,300
Labourers: 20-24 years of age May 2001	48,300	22,000	70,300
% change over 15 years to May 2001	*-50.3*	*66.7*	*-36.3*
Clerical, Sales and Service: 15-19 years of age August 1986	46,000	29,800	75,800
Clerical, Sales and Service: 15-19 years of age May 2001	22,700	90,500	113,500
% change over 15 years to May 2001	*-50.7*	*203.7*	*49.7*
Clerical, Sales and Service: 20-24 years of age August 1986	90,300	12,700	103,100
Clerical, Sales and Service: 20-24 years of age May 2001	75,000	57,600	132,500
% change over 15 years to May 2001	*-16.9*	*353.5*	*28.5*

Source   ABS Labour Force (original data)

Figure 3.3   Males 15 to 19 years of age: Employment in selected occupations 1986-2001[4]
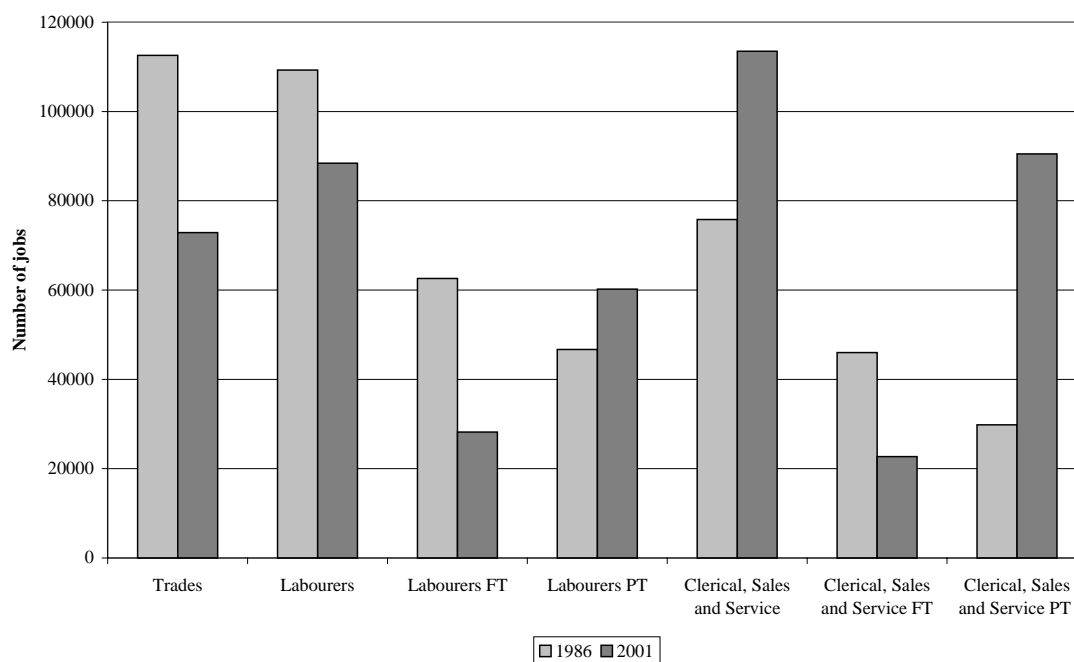
Source   ABS Labour Force (original data)

Figure 3.4   Males 20 to 24 years of age: Employment in selected occupations 1986-2001[5]
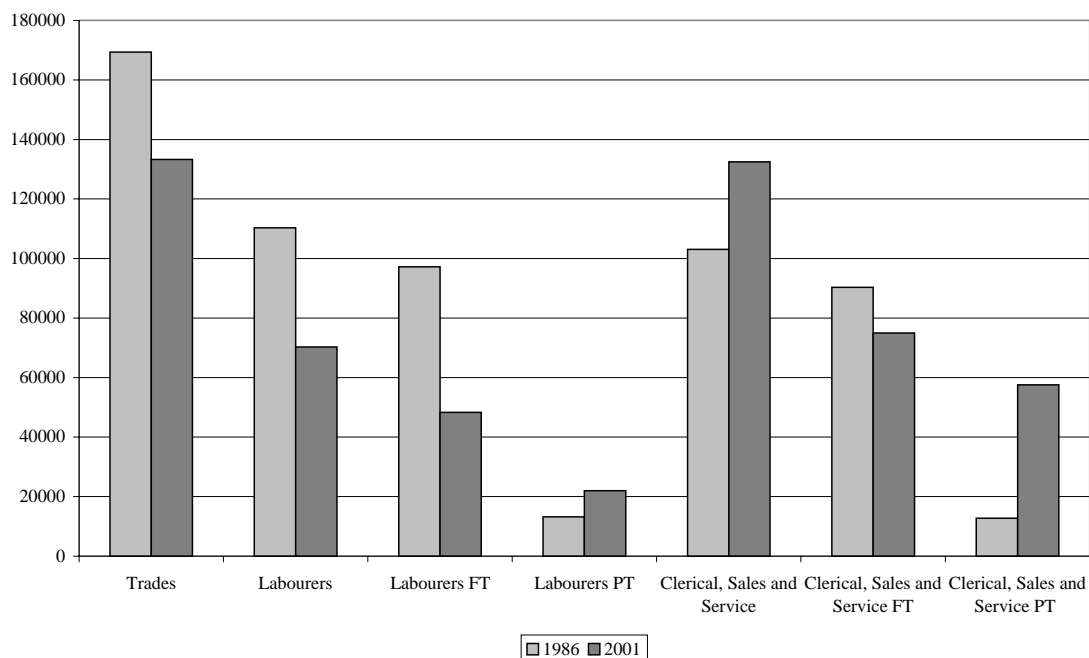
Source   ABS Labour Force (original data)

4   Employment in the trades has not been broken down into full-time and part-time because most teenage male employment in the trades is full-time (*see* Table 3.2).

5   Employment in the trades has not been broken down into full-time and part-time because most employment in the trades for males 20 to 24 years of age is full-time (*see* Table 3.2).

3.10   In May 2001, 59,800 more teenage boys worked in retail and hospitality than 15 years ago, as did 69,900 more young men 20 to 24 years of age.[6] Over the same period there has been a drop of 42,000 in the number of full-time jobs in the skilled trades and over 34,000 fewer full-time labouring jobs for teenage males. Compared to 15 years ago, there are 36,100 and 40,000 fewer jobs in trades and as labourers, respectively, for young men 20 to 24 years of age. Labouring, manufacturing and the traditional trades are providing a diminishing number of employment opportunities to young men who do not leave school equipped with the skills demanded by employers in the service sector.

> The economy no longer provides opportunities for large numbers of boys to be employed as production workers – the new jobs are in the service sector. In a service-based economy, gaining and maintaining employment are dependent on much more than academic credentials or manual skills. Good self-presentation, articulateness and an ability to focus on the needs of others – the so-called 'soft' skills – are crucial in this economy…There is currently widespread concern about youth unemployment, and the failure of young people – in particular boys – to present evidence of their development of these skills. This problem is exacerbated by a culture of masculinity in which self-presentation, social communication and service are low status concerns.[7]

3.11   The shift towards placing a higher value on 'soft skills' due to faster growth in the retail and hospitality sectors is affecting young men in other occupations. The emphasis on service, presentation and client communication is now much higher in the traditional trades and household service/maintenance occupations.

> …job seekers who do not have service or social interaction skills, strong communication skills, will either have no jobs or they will be consigned to the shrinking, less skilled sectors of the economy. I think that is a real issue for boys…What you have now is a huge shift in what constitutes valuable skills.[8]

3.12   Boys tend to have a vocationally focused approach to their school subject choice. As a result many boys place less emphasis on personal development, communication skills and interpersonal skills that they

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6   ABS Labour Force (original data).

7   Queensland University of Technology, Faculty of Education, *Submission No. 139*, p. 2.

8   Associate Professor Erica McWilliam, Assistant to the Dean (Postgraduate Programs), Faculty of Education, Queensland University of Technology, *Transcript of Evidence*, pp. 595 & 596.

might develop by engaging in a wider range of extra-curricular activities or by studying the humanities.

> …with most jobs these days…the issue is not just of the skills and knowledge people have but of a whole lot of other things about whether they will work well in teams, what sort of person they come across as. Those broader areas of schooling that boys have often seen as being fairly irrelevant—and I am talking more, I suppose, about working-class boys here—are not as irrelevant as people think, given the nature of the job changes that are going on.[9]

3.13   The perception amongst some boys that service occupations are not highly regarded is a dangerous one in today's labour market. Nearly all occupations are affected to some degree and one of the challenges for education authorities, for schools and for teachers is to find ways to raise boys' and their parents' awareness of the rising importance of communication skills and continuous learning in a changing labour market. Boys should be encouraged to broaden their awareness of the labour market and the range of skills required by males to succeed.

Apprenticeships

3.14   The traditional trade-based apprenticeships have played and continue to play an important role in providing employment opportunities for teenage males. In May 2001, over 70,000 teenage males were employed full-time in trades and trade-related occupations or six times as many teenage males as females. [10] While this is about 40,000 fewer teenage males than 15 years ago[11], access to full-time employment through the traditional trades largely accounts for the better access to full-time employment that teenage males have compared to teenage females.

3.15   While apprenticeships in the traditional trades remain an important source of employment for a diminishing number of male early school leavers, the proportion of early leavers accessing apprenticeships within one year of leaving school has declined from 37 per cent in the early 1980s to 21 per cent in the mid 1990s. Over the same period, the proportion of males completing Year 12 who entered apprenticeships remained constant. However, the number of males completing Year 12 has risen,

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9   Professor Lyn Yates, Faculty of Education, University of Technology, Sydney, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 323.

10   ABS Labour Force (original data)

11   *see* Table 3.2 above.

indicating that increasingly apprentices have entered from Year 12.[12]
National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) data support
this conclusion. During the 12 months to September 2001, just over 85 per
cent of people commencing apprenticeships and traineeships were 18
years of age or older.[13] Early school-leaving males are taking up a smaller
proportion of a declining number of traditional apprenticeships, a further
indication that the traditional employment destinations for low-achieving
and early school-leaving males are in decline.

Social change

3.16   It is necessary to consider how social change over recent decades may
        have affected boys and girls differently, even though it is difficult to state
        with certainty what effect social change has had on boys and girls. There
        have been major shifts in the participation of women in the labour market
        and in the distribution of employment, some of which are presented in the
        statistics in the section above. Like labour market change, the positive and
        negative effects of social change have not affected different groups of men
        and women and boys and girls in the same ways.

The changing status of women

3.17   Over the last three to four decades there has been major ongoing change to
        the level of women's contribution in all areas of life: government, law, arts,
        sciences, religion, politics and education. There have been corresponding
        shifts in the role of women in family life, including their financial role and
        contribution in households. While these changing social circumstances
        and aspirations have influenced the expectations parents have for their
        daughters, so have the changing educational opportunities available to
        girls reinforced social change and lifted the social and economic
        aspirations of women.

3.18   Between January 1986 and December 2001, the female labour force
        participation rate rose from 47.4 per cent to 54.9 per cent, while for men it
        dropped from 76.1 per cent to 72.3 per cent. During that period, women's

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12   Lamb, S., Dwyer, P. and Wyn, J., *Non-completion of School in Australia: The Changing Patterns of
     Participation and Outcomes*, LSAY Research Report No. 16, ACER, September 2000, p. 34.
13   NCVER, unpublished statistics, *Exhibit No. 151, and see Youth Employment: A Working Solution*,
     AGPS, 1997, p. 87.

share of total employment rose from 38.7 per cent of total employment to 43.9 per cent.[14]

3.19   Some submissions noted the significance of the improving social, political and economic status of women as important background information and essential knowledge for putting the boys' education issues in context.[15]

> The impact of girls and women claiming a right to be equal and their changing educational and work patterns is something that has affected all boys. Many different studies have shown that many boys today are much less clear about their future and their place in the world than they would have been in the past. And many studies would suggest that though most boys today formally accept girls' equality and academic success, many find this uncomfortable in terms of their own quest to have a sense of what 'boys' do, and who 'boys' are. In some cases, girls very success at school leads boys to direct their efforts elsewhere – to avoid the ignominy of coming second.[16]

3.20   It was also argued that boys have been disadvantaged by two decades of social change which has encouraged women towards economic independence and left boys confused about the role of men in modern society. The educational solutions offered included allowing gender identified subjects such as home economics and woodwork/metalwork and recognising the social significance of traditional gender roles.[17] However, the implication that boys and girls, men and women, should be consigned to particular roles in society merely by virtue of their sex is rejected by the Committee. This 'solution' also fails to confront the economic reality that the skills of many boys and men are mismatched to the modern labour market. It is more important to encourage boys to be attuned to all the requirements of contemporary labour markets.

Family structure

3.21   Another significant social shift has been the rise in the number and proportion of single parent families. Between 1989 and 2000, one parent families with children under 15 years of age, as a proportion of all families

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14   ABS Labour Force, Cat. No. 6203.

15   *see, for example,* Education Queensland, *Submission No. 168*, p. 3, and Queensland Catholic Education Commission, *Submission No. 54*, p. 2.

16   Professor Lyn Yates and the University of Technology , Sydney, Faculty of Education, *Submission No. 66*, p. 3.

17   The Institute of Men's Studies, *Submission No. 18*, pp. 15 - 19, *and see* The Endeavour Forum, *Submission No. 21.*

with dependent children under 15 years of age, increased from 14 per cent to 20.9 per cent. The actual number of single parent families with children under 15 years of age rose from 272,600 to 453,900. In 2000, 89 per cent of single parent families, or 404,000, were headed by women.[18]

3.22   The discussion about family structure often stresses the correlations between single parenthood and/or divorce, family income, parental education levels and the educational attainment of children. However, recent researchers have often placed the emphasis on single-parenthood as the significant point of difference between these families and other families.[19] Single parenthood, of itself, is not responsible for the under-achievement of children. Rather, it is other characteristics such as low parental education and low income that are more prevalent in single-parent families but have the same negative effects on children when they are present in two-parent families. Government policy is relatively ineffective at influencing such things as family structure, and better results will be obtained by providing support to mitigate characteristics, which may be present in any type of family, which inhibit student achievement.

> I have found the majority of single mothers doing well in difficult circumstances, yet the professional gaze on them is one of blaming the individual mother as if she has some deficiency in rearing a son, rather than offering the support and understanding necessary to carry out this difficult parenting task.[20]

> As a sole parent, I am concerned that women on their own are seen as inadequate or less than the full 'bit' needed by boys. Do we feel this way when we talk about girls (daughters of single mothers) or are we perpetuating gender difference in the very discourse?[21]

3.23   While there is a higher proportion of single parent families today than in the past it is important to bear in mind that they are not new.

> We need to think historically here- men have always left women – for war, for work and for many other reasons. Women have frequently been the ones who raised the children – male and

18   ABS, *Australian Families and Households, Census 86* (Cat. No. 2506.0); 1996 Census of Population and Housing basic Community Profile; *Australian Social Trends* (Cat. No. 4102.0).

19   Buckingham, J., Policy Analyst, Centre For Independent Studies, *Submission No.26*, pp. 7-8; *and see* Rich, A., "Trailing the Class: Sole Parent Families and Educational Disadvantage", *Issue Analysis*, No. 11, Centre For Independent Studies, 26 June 2000.

20   Social Worker as quoted by The Australian Association of Social Workers, *Submission No. 165*, p. 12.

21   Social Worker as quoted by The Australian Association of Social Workers, *Submission No. 165*, p. 12.

> female. Why are we worried now? What is the difference – is it the
> lack of a sense of community or extended family that we should be
> addressing. We need to avoid men being considered the victims of
> single/sole parents.[22]

3.24   The increasing number of working mothers, single parents, and single
        mothers in particular, cannot be held solely accountable for an apparent
        inability to control boys or for a decline in parenting skills generally. Their
        counterparts in earlier generations are likely to have enjoyed more
        support and assistance from friends, family and neighbours. While the
        hard evidence is not available to support the assertion, few people would
        dispute that a generation ago it was much more common for neighbours
        to assist each other in the supervision and routine discipline of each
        others' children. It is also true that a generation ago more parents had the
        support of an extended family network.

Family characteristics and educational attainment

3.25   Family characteristics such as income, socio-economic status, locality, race,
        ethnicity, educational background and so on have a bearing on the
        educational attainment of children. Disadvantageous characteristics such
        as low income and lower levels of parental educational attainment are
        more frequently found in single parent families compared to two parent
        families.[23] However, in much of the debate about family structures and
        boys' education the significance of these other characteristics has been
        down-played or overlooked. Many single parents, women and men, are
        successfully supporting their children's learning. The discussion needs to
        focus on the factors that really matter rather than a family's observable
        structural characteristics.

3.26   Recent studies looking at family background, family structure and the
        educational attainment of children question the wisdom of accepting the
        simple correlation between single parenthood, lower socio-economic
        status and the educational attainment of children. A study undertaken on
        behalf of The Smith Family, using a sample of about 3,000 financially
        disadvantaged students on its Learning for Life program examined the
        effect of a number of student characteristics upon the probability of

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22   Social Worker as quoted by The Australian Association of Social Workers, *Submission No. 165*,
     p. 13.
23   Rich, A., "Trailing the Class: Sole Parent Families and Educational Disadvantage", *Issue
     Analysis*, No. 11, Centre For Independent Studies, 26 June 2000, pp. 2-3.

attaining outstanding results.[24] The characteristics examined were: sex, school level, unexplained absences, English/non-English speaking background, location, family structure, parental source of income, parental education level, and housing type.

3.27   The study made several important conclusions relevant to this inquiry. First, when other factors were controlled, sex was a statistically significant predictor of academic performance with girls more likely to do well than boys.[25] Second, when other factors were controlled, single parenthood did not of itself have a negative effect on student achievement, irrespective of whether the student was a boy or a girl.[26] Third, when other factors were controlled, a higher number of unexplained absences (a good indicator of school engagement) was a statistically significant predictor of poorer academic performance. At higher numbers of unexplained absences, the gender differential in favour of girls achieving better academic results diminishes.[27] Fourth, when other factors were controlled (and irrespective of whether a parent's source of income was employment or social security), parental education level was a statistically significant predictor of a student's academic performance.[28]

> The finding that even within a group with considerable financial disadvantage, socio-economic status as reflected by the level of parental education, was a key predictor of student academic achievement raises several important policy implications…it supports the notion that the "social" and the "economic" components of the socio-economic status equation may have distinct and separate influences on educational outcomes. While financial assistance…is important, policies and programs that also assist low-income parent/s in providing appropriate psychological and educational support for their children should also be promoted.[29]

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24   Zappalà, G. and Considine, G.; *Educational performance among school students from financially disadvantaged backgrounds*, Working Paper No. 4, The Smith Family, 2001.

25   Zappalà, G. and Considine, G.; *Educational performance among school students from financially disadvantaged backgrounds*, Working Paper No. 4, The Smith Family, 2001, pp. 8 & 12.

26   Zappalà, G. and Considine, G.; *Educational performance among school students from financially disadvantaged backgrounds*, Working Paper No. 4, The Smith Family, 2001, p. 12.

27   Zappalà, G. and Considine, G.; *Educational performance among school students from financially disadvantaged backgrounds*, Working Paper No. 4, The Smith Family, 2001, p. 10.

28   Zappalà, G. and Considine, G.; *Educational performance among school students from financially disadvantaged backgrounds*, Working Paper No. 4, The Smith Family, 2001, p. 8.

29   Zappalà, G. and Considine, G.; *Educational performance among school students from financially disadvantaged backgrounds*, Working Paper No. 4, The Smith Family, 2001, p. 13.

3.28   While The Smith Family study concluded that English speaking/non-English speaking background was not a significant predictor of academic achievement it did not disaggregate the data for the either the English speaking or non-English speaking samples into different ethnic groups.

3.29   An ACER study of patterns of participation in Year 12 and higher education[30] has looked in detail at the educational participation rates of different groups of students from English and non-English speaking backgrounds. This study concluded that participation rates for students in Year 12 and in higher education were significantly higher for students whose fathers were born in non-English speaking countries compared to students whose fathers were Australian born.[31] This remained true for all but one group with non-English speaking origins and the effect was still strong after controlling for socio-economic background.[32]

> The strong effects for students whose fathers were born in some non-English speaking countries suggest that cultural factors are involved in leading to higher rates of participation. The higher participation rates experienced by these groups cannot be explained by socio-economic background nor school achievement.[33]

3.30   The ACER study also found that parental wealth and education were important influences in educational participation but that cultural factors, such as parental education, were more important. Parental aspirations for their children were "a reasonably strong influence" but not as strong as the students' own aspirations and academic self concept.[34] The study also

30   Marks, G. N., Fleming, N., Long, M., McMillan, J., *Patterns of participation in Year 12 and higher education in Australia: Trends and issues*, LSAY Research Report No. 17, ACER, December 2000.

31   Marks, G. N., Fleming, N., Long, M., McMillan, J., *Patterns of participation in Year 12 and higher education in Australia: Trends and issues*, LSAY Research Report No. 17, ACER, December 2000, pp. 13, 16, and 24.

32   Marks, G. N., Fleming, N., Long, M., McMillan, J., *Patterns of participation in Year 12 and higher education in Australia: Trends and issues*, LSAY Research Report No. 17, ACER, December 2000, pp. 24-25.

33   Marks, G. N., Fleming, N., Long, M., McMillan, J., *Patterns of participation in Year 12 and higher education in Australia: Trends and issues*, LSAY Research Report No. 17, ACER, December 2000, p. 28.

34   Marks, G. N., Fleming, N., Long, M., McMillan, J., *Patterns of participation in Year 12 and higher education in Australia: Trends and issues*, LSAY Research Report No. 17, ACER, December 2000, pp. 29, 37-40.

concluded that "the influence of these psychological factors is largely independent of socio-economic factors".[35]

3.31   The ACER study shows that a family's higher educational aspirations for children may mitigate lower financial resources and/or lower educational background to promote higher education participation rates. The Smith Family study shows that the presence of favourable educational background factors in parents will mitigate financial disadvantage. What both studies clearly suggest is that much more sophisticated concepts of educational disadvantage are required if governments and the community are to effectively support families to lift the educational attainment of their children. These studies imply the existence of families whose financial circumstances are not a barrier to their children's educational endeavour but whose attitudes, aspirations and educational background are severely limiting factors.

3.32   It is relatively easy for government to provide a minimum level of financial support to schools, families and young people to enable educational participation by financially disadvantaged students. However, improving the level of educational participation by students disadvantaged by the non-financial characteristics of their families requires other forms of social and psychological support to those students and their parents to promote early educational achievement, positive attitudes to learning, and higher educational aspirations in both the students and their parents. Such approaches may be the key to improving the educational performance of many boys and those girls who have not been aided by the earlier girls' education strategies.

Absent fathers

3.33   Between 1981 and 2000 the number of couple families with children under 15 years of age in which both parents worked increased from 696,000 (41 per cent of all couple families with children) to 968,100 (56.3 per cent).[36]

3.34   The absence of fathers in many families, whether resulting from single parenthood, the work commitments of men or even men's physical presence but possible disengagement from their children, has raised concerns about the under-fathering of children, which is held by some to be particularly detrimental to boys. This is a generally accepted, but not thoroughly researched, view that is supported by the anecdotal evidence.

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35   Marks, G. N., Fleming, N., Long, M., McMillan, J., *Patterns of participation in Year 12 and higher education in Australia: Trends and issues*, LSAY Research Report No. 17, ACER, December 2000, p. 41.

36   ABS, *Labour Force Status and Other Characteristics of Families* (Cat. No. 6224.0).

The following observations were made by the consultants offering a program for boys-at-risk in rural Victoria.

> Until we started working in the Catholic education system, we had not come across one young man—and we are talking 150 or perhaps 180 young men—selected for the course by their peers and by their teachers who actually had a father figure in his life. I would also be aware if there is a dad figure, whether it is dad or step-dad or an uncle, of just what input they are having into the young man's or young person's life. If dad is off working and doing a whole lot of other things, he is not really having much input.[37]

3.35   At the same time, the increasing labour market participation of women with children and the increasing propensity of older children and teenagers to spend significant periods of time unsupervised has also led to claims of under-parenting, even in two-parent families.

> Dads may well be more ineffective in this era than in any other, but more ineffective does not equal totally ineffective. Nobody disputes that single mums and single dads can do a successful job in raising their kids. Of course they can, but it's much harder… Many Australian dads grew up in the fifties and sixties when the 'generation gap' was already alive and well. They too did not relate well to their dads; now they, as dads, are living out the same image of fathers they saw in their own homes. A recent survey of all secondary boys in my school demonstrated that in the opinion of the boys themselves they do not communicate as well with their fathers as they do with their mothers.[38]

Media stereotypes and self-image

3.36   The representations of men and women and their relationships in the media are important influences over both boys and girls. There are now more boys who lack adult male role models, or whose experience of adult men has been limited to those who are uncommunicative, uncaring or violent and abusive. These boys are less likely to identify with other, more positive, male images that do not resonate with their experience than with stereotyped media images.

> The socialisation of many boys within families, schools and community life is distorted by the increasing absence of

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37   Mr Scot Gardener and Mr Peter Little, COOL Consulting, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 86.

38   Mr Andrew Mullins, Principal, Redfield College, *Submission No. 80*, p. 6.

appropriate and constructive male role models… Boys come to
rely on alternative and usually unbalanced models of masculinity
which abound in the media, peer and popular culture. These other
sources readily model such qualities as restrictive emotionality,
concern with power and status, excessive self-reliance,
homophobia, anti-authoritarian bravado, anti-intellectualism and
non-relational attitudes towards sexuality.[39]

3.37   The depiction of male action and violence in the media, particularly in
films and video games, is often exciting, 'heroic' and apparently free of
consequences. Such images need to be effectively countered. Where they
are not, boys may be attracted to peer cultures that reinforce these images.

Their exposure to the type of male images available through film,
television, magazines and popular sport are not being
compensated for by the role of real life male figures in their lives.
As they get older they will gravitate towards those negative male
mentors, peers and behaviours who are best able to duplicate the
unrealistic images they associate with a strong male identity.[40]

3.38   The media depictions of many sporting heroes and the limited range of
masculine values these public images present (strength, toughness,
winning) may affect the self-esteem of those boys who do not, or cannot,
identify with this type of masculinity.[41] These images are also one
dimensional and may conceal a more rounded man behind the image.
What is visible might not be an appropriate model.

Some boys are in situations of poverty and high unemployment in
their family situations. The dominant masculinity that might be
portrayed in media—say, in football or video game culture—may
become the dominant masculinity that they then display in their
social interactions. And they may not be the most appropriate ones
in school.[42]

3.39   Why some boys are more at risk of identifying with, and following,
negative images of masculinity and how this might be countered is
considered in Chapter 6.

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39   NSW Secondary Principals' Association, *Submission No. 52*, p. 3.

40   Mr John Fleming, Director, Boys In Focus Consultants, *Submission No. 75*, p. 2.

41   Professor Lyn Yates and the University of Technology , Sydney, Faculty of Education,
Submission No. 66, p. 3.

42   Ms Judith Gardiner, Curriculum Executive Officer, Queensland Catholic Education
Commission, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 618.

Gender equity policy

3.40   There appears to be widespread support among State and Territory
        education departments, Catholic education authorities, teachers' unions,
        principals' associations and academics for the existing gender equity
        policy framework which is enunciated in the document *Gender Equity: A
        Framework for Australian Schools.* However, there is clearly room in the
        existing framework for interpretation— the NSW Secondary Principals'
        Council advocates a separate boys' education strategy within the existing
        gender inclusive policy framework[43], Education Queensland already has
        one[44], other states and territories have not expressed the need, while most
        education unions are emphatically opposed to them being established.[45]

3.41   Most of the teachers who have contributed to the inquiry, whether male or
        female, have been eager to address boys' education issues as part of their
        commitment to achieve the best outcomes for all their students. However,
        it is difficult to avoid the impression that some gender equity units in
        education departments and education unions, generally, have been
        reluctant to openly confront boys' under-achievement and disengagement
        as an issue, perhaps for fear of undermining ongoing support for
        strategies for girls.

3.42   Opinion among academics varies from strong support of the current
        framework to the view that it is too narrowly based on the issues that
        drove reform for girls and does not adequately address boys' needs.[46]
        Many of the former have been participants in the development of girls'
        education policy and its evolution into its more inclusive, current form.

            …there are some who are not satisfied with boys' education being
            addressed within the parameters of a gender equity framework.
            They are a small but active and vocal minority who are intent not

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43   NSW Secondary Principals' Council, *Submission No. 52*, pp. 4-5.

44   Education Queensland, *Submission No. 168.*

45   *see, for example,* Australian Education Union, *Submission No. 150*, p. 9, *Transcript of Evidence*,
      p. 204, Queensland Teachers' Union, *Submission No. 160*, p. 2.

46   For examples of a range of views *see*: Professor Lyn Yates, Faculty of Education, University of
      Technology, Sydney, *Submission No. 66,* p. 1, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 321; Dr Martin Mills and
      Dr Bob Linguard, Graduate School of Education, University of Queensland, *Submission No. 84,*
      Transcript of Evidence, pp. 641-643; Dr Cherry Collins and Dr Julie McLeod, Faculty of
      Education, Deakin University, *Submission No. 107 and Transcript of Evidence,* pp. 153-155;
      Dr Lori Beckett, Faculty of Education University of Technology, Sydney, *Submission No. 122
      and Transcript of Evidence*, pp. 320-330; Mr Richard Fletcher, Manager, Men and Boys Program,
      Newcastle University, *Submission No. 166,* p. 12; Professor Faith Trent and Mr Malcolm Slade,
      Faculty of Education, Humanities, Law and Theology, Flinders University, *Transcript of
      Evidence,* pp. 877-879.

only on advocating a boys' education strategy but on exploiting populist concerns about raising boys.[47]

While there has been a genuine attempt to broaden the gender framework from one focussed exclusively on girls to one addressing the needs of both girls and boys, the current policies and supporting research have serious limitations. A number of assumptions developed during two decades of activity in girls' education have been uncritically carried forward into the renamed gender strategies.[48]

The Gender Equity Framework

History

3.43   Australian policy and research on gender equity and schooling has a long history dating back to 1975 and the Commonwealth Schools Commission's report *Girls School and Society.* In 1984 a working party of the Commonwealth Schools Commission followed up with *Girls and tomorrow: The challenge for schools,* a first attempt to establish a national policy to address the outstanding issues identified in *Girls School and Society.* In 1987 a recommendation of *Girls and tomorrow* to establish a national policy found expression in *The National Policy for the Education of Girls.* Following a review of the implementation of that policy the *National Action Plan for the Education of Girls 1993-1997* was produced.[49] The most recent, and still current, expression of Commonwealth policy is *Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools* introduced in 1997.

3.44   In 1993, early in the life of the *National Action Plan for the Education of Girls 1993-1997*, parent organisations began to press for attention to the educational needs of boys. The team briefed to report on the monitoring of the *National Action Plan for the Education of Girls 1993-1997* was asked:

"…to provide data on boys as well as girls so that the study would offer, as well as data on progress in relation to girls under the *National Action Plan*, data on the gendered experiences and

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47   Dr Lori Beckett, *Submission No. 122*, p. 1.

48   Mr Richard Fletcher, Manager, The Men and Boys Program, Family Action Centre The University of Newcastle, *Submission No. 166*, p. 4

49   *see* McInnes, S., *"Girls, schools ..... and boys: promoting gender equity through schools: twenty years of gender equity policy development"* Social Policy Group, Research Paper No 24, Department of the Parliamentary Library, Canberra, 1996, *and see* Collins, C., Kenway, J., and McLeod, J., *Factors Influencing the Educational Performance of Males and Females in School and their Initial Destinations after Leaving School*, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Canberra, July 2000, pp. 21-23.

> gendered relations of both sexes and of the actions of systems and schools in attempting to steer those experiences and relations in positive directions."[50]

3.45   The report on the monitoring of the *National Action Plan for the Education of Girls 1993-1997* was titled *Gender and School Education*, another major landmark in the development of gender equity policy. The major focus of this report was on girls' needs but the report did ask the question: Is there a need to focus on issues for boys in schooling? It concluded that the major challenge for schools was to support boys—

> …to dismantle the walls they construct around themselves and others in order to feel safely "masculine"… and expecting, pushing and supporting them to extend themselves across the whole range of human activities and learnings, including those that girls do. The alternative may be that many boys continue to redraw the boundaries in ways that are constricting of their own development as well as restricting, hurtful and dangerous for other boys and girls.[51]

The Committee questions whether this was an adequate assessment of the educational needs of boys.

3.46   *Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools* was formulated to account for these concerns and the document states clearly "that boys have needs that are not being met effectively by schools."[52] However, *Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools* is not a fundamental re-examination of the gender equity strategy intended to tackle boys' education issues from the ground up as happened for girls. In fact, a footnote to the introduction exhorts people to read the *National Action Plan for the Education of Girls 1993-1997* as a companion document.[53]

Assumptions underpinning the Gender Equity Framework

3.47   For people who were born before the mid to late 1960s, the 1975 report, *Girls School and Society*, is a trip back in time to their schooldays and an instructive reminder of how much needed to change for girls.

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50   Collins, C., Batten, M., Ainley, J., & Getty, C., *Gender and School Education*, ACER, June 1996, p. 2.

51   Collins, C., Batten, M., Ainley, J., & Getty, C., *Gender and School Education*, ACER, June 1996, p. 176-177.

52   *Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools*, MCEETYA Gender Equity Task Force, Canberra 1997, p. 6.

53   *Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools*, MCEETYA Gender Equity Task Force, Canberra 1997, p. 3.

> Although girls are increasingly adopting slacks and trousers outside school time, it seems that many schools are anxious to retain traditional female dress, even where it is impractical and out of date. This insistence often brings with it restrictive rules about what is modest activity,… For example, catherine wheels, trampolining, climbing and even sitting on the floor may be seen as immodest because dresses or skirts are prescribed.[54]

> While the formal core curriculum in Australian primary schools is the same for all students, the non-academic "interest" subjects are remnants of past assumptions about the "natural" interests of girls and boys. Girls are usually offered Sewing and Needlework, boys engage in Carpentry, Basket and Leatherwork.[55]

> The process of "choice" of electives and even examinable subjects at secondary level is often based on unnecessary and unjustifiable sex distinctions. Girls, for example, are offered Domestic Science, Typing, Shorthand, Sewing and Cooking; boys do Metal and Woodwork or Industrial Arts and Technical Drawing.[56]

3.48   *Girls School and Society* looked at demographic shifts, women's changing role in families and the labour market, and sex differences in school participation and post-school participation in education. It also considered the effect of school electives and subject choice on the ability of girls and women to achieve their educational potential and take an equal place with men in society. For women and girls, many of the barriers were, and still are, institutional[57], in addition to barriers posed by their own attitudes and parental and societal attitudes and expectations. From an understanding of this background, the *Gender Equity Framework* and its preceding documents have as clear aims, the removal of barriers and the changing of attitudes inimical to girls' interests. The *Gender Equity Framework*, built as it is on the prior work for girls, does not separately research and identify boys' needs and it sets boys' needs solely in the context of what still needs to be achieved for girls.

> Propositions which have become accepted as self evident over the years of developmental work in girls' education have been applied

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54   *Girls School and Society*, Schools Commission, 1975, p. 67.
55   *Girls School and Society*, Schools Commission, 1975, p. 79.
56   *Girls School and Society*, Schools Commission, 1975, p. 80.
57   An example of an institutional barrier for girls that once existed would be sex specific subject electives in schools such as cooking and home economics which did not have an employment pay-off, an example of one that still exists is the relatively fewer opportunities for teenage girls in full-time employment-based training compared to the opportunities in traditional trades still available to boys.

uncritically to boys' education. As a result, when boys are included, their needs are assumed, and initiatives designed on the basis that removing girls' disadvantage is the primary goal of educating boys…

During the period 1975 to 1997, while the focus of gender discussion in education was unambiguously on girls' achievement in schools, the limitations of this approach were not readily apparent. Strategies during this period did seek to value traditionally female areas of endeavour, such as raising families, however the underlying logic of these programs was that women were disadvantaged in income and status as identified by an analysis of power. This analysis is not an adequate basis for a boys' education policy. In moving to embrace boys' education under the umbrella of gender the narrowness in the policies has become more evident.[58]

The model that we used for girls' education was based on political questions. The question was different, in my view. The girls' stuff was a political question about the role of women in society, about a political way of changing the perception of women's access to education. In many ways, it was giving girls confidence to do well. To put that model on top of the boys, and think that you can do it that way and fix the boys up—this terrible desire to 'fix the boys up'—seems to be very dangerous.[59]

3.49   Surprisingly, in a number of States, witnesses, when asked, could not provide evidence of quantitative research to support the introduction of the 1997 *Gender Equity Framework*.[60]

3.50   The factors limiting boys' educational achievement do not exactly parallel those that affect girls.

Initial concerns about girls that were given a whole lot of attention were that women were invisible in the curriculum, girls were a bit invisible in schools and girls were being encouraged towards fairly restricted career outcomes. I do not think any of those things particularly apply to boys…it is not simply a matter of taking over the same solution and thinking, 'We'll just copy what was done in the girls area.' Another example, which is a quite interesting and

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58   Men and Boys Program, Family Action Centre, University of Newcastle, *Submission No. 166*, p. 12.

59   Professor Faith Trent, Faculty of Education, Flinders University, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 877.

60   *See for example, Transcript of Evidence*, pp. 830-831; 963-965; and 1135-1136.

difficult one, is their curriculum issue. There was a lot of effort put into persuading more girls to do maths for the vocational pay-off of that. In a lot of ways, that was not a hard thing to convince parents and girls to do—there was an advantage to be gained from doing maths, medicine, and so on.

In relation to boys, the issue of subject choice and where they should be going is more difficult and more subtle… I think boys could do with more personal development or humanity subjects than they get or like doing. Persuading both boys and their parents that this is a good direction is not the same sort of issue as persuading girls that doing maths and medicine is a good thing.[61]

3.51   Recent research in South Australia which examined 1,800 boys' views on declining rates of achievement and retention indicates clearly that educational policy and teaching practice needs to look far beyond current gender equity approaches to boys' education issues.[62] The research points to the need for major changes in the culture of schooling and the way it is organised to effectively address the conflicts and contradictions boys experience between their school lives and lives outside school. The boys don't see this major problem for them as a gender issue and the girls essentially feel the same way but generally are more compliant because they have fewer other options.[63]

You asked whether it is a gender equity issue. It is more an alien in the classroom issue…There is a much greater gap between life in school and life outside school than probably there has ever been before. The kinds of notions of adulthood that are portrayed in the wider society are often rejected in the school environment. Up to 80 per cent of these kids work up to 20 hours a week, they go to school and somebody gives them a lecture on how to get a job! We kept finding all these sorts of things. …All they were getting were these mixed messages. Then if they said, 'Well, we don't believe that,' they were seen to be behaving rudely, being rude, challenging authority, et cetera, with many of the teachers in many of the schools.[64]

61   Professor Lyn Yates, Faculty of Education, University of Technology, Sydney, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 322.

62   Slade, M., and Trent F., "What the boys are saying: An examination of the views of boys about declining rates of achievement and retention", *International Education Journal* Vol. 1, No. 3, 2000*, and see Transcript of Evidence,* pp. 874-888.

63   Slade, M., and Trent F., "What the boys are saying: An examination of the views of boys about declining rates of achievement and retention", *International Education Journal* Vol. 1, No. 3, 2000, pp. 216-7*, and see Transcript of Evidence,* pp. 884-5.

64   Professor Faith Trent, Faculty of Education, Flinders University, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 878.

3.52   A great deal has been achieved for girls since *Girls School and Society* was first published. For example, today the proportion of boys and girls who complete secondary schooling has more than doubled and now more girls than boys participate in senior secondary schooling. However, the greatest gains for girls have been reaped by girls from higher socio-economic backgrounds and some factors, such as subject choice, access to technical training, the concentration of female employment in traditional occupations and lower earning capacity, persist today and continue to limit girls' opportunities. Clearly, the work to achieve full equality of opportunity and access in education and employment for girls is not completed. However, while it continues to address the on-going needs of most girls, the *Gender Equity Framework* does not adequately articulate and address boys' educational needs.

3.53   The national equity agenda in education should include a range of social indicators, in addition to the employment and education indicators. Other indicators, such as rates of attempted and completed suicide and self-harm, drug and alcohol abuse, petty crime, violent crime, rates of imprisonment and homelessness tend to have distinct gender patterns suggesting gender (and, at the local level, school) specific strategies are required, along with gender specific but interconnected policy frameworks.

A boys' education strategy

3.54   Many submissions and witnesses have attested that boys respond to structure and clearly articulated purposes in learning and to easily understood methods of assessment. It makes sense to apply these principles and state publicly and explicitly in positive terms what we expect of boys in a boys' education strategy and how these expectations of boys will be measured in terms of what they know, what their physical and interpersonal skills are and where they end up after leaving school.

3.55   *The Adelaide Declaration on the National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century* sets broad directions for schooling with the intention that each citizen has "the necessary knowledge, skills and values for a productive and rewarding life in an educated, just and open society."[65] *The National Goals for Schooling* imply that it is appropriate to use a much wider range of indicators of the effectiveness of education than are employed in the existing gender equity policy documents. For example:

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65   http://www.dest.gov.au/schools/adelaide/adelaide.htm.

> 1. …In particular, when students leave school, they should:…
>
> 1.2   have qualities of self-confidence, optimism, high self-esteem, and a commitment to personal excellence as a basis for their potential roles as family, community and workforce members.
>
> 1.3   have the capacity to exercise judgment and responsibility in matters of morality, ethics and social justice, and the capacity to make sense of their world, to think about how things came to be the way they are, to make rational and informed decisions about their own lives , and to accept responsibility for their own actions.
>
> 1.4   be active and informed citizens with an understanding and appreciation of Australia's system of government and civic life….
>
> 3. Schooling should be socially just,…[66]

3.56   In addition to essential knowledge and skills, the *National Goals for Schooling* embody a long list of implicit values, of which a respect for democracy and human rights, equality of opportunity, the essential dignity of each individual and equality before the law are just a few examples. Australia should be less reticent about teaching and promoting these civic and human values. Teaching them more explicitly and comprehensively in our schools would promote the strength and unity of our society and democracy and help diminish intolerance and inequality of opportunity.

3.57   Within the parameters set by the *National Goals for Schooling* the *Gender Equity Framework* needs to be recast as an overarching framework for parallel boys' and girls' education strategies. The overarching gender equity strategy would guard against the adoption of approaches that undermine the achievement of boys or girls.

3.58   This approach casts the educational objectives positively for boys and girls as opposed to the negative approach for boys implied in most of the current policy material — for example, about boys not being violent, not monopolising space and equipment and not harassing girls and other boys.

3.59   The *National Action Plan for the Education of Girls 1993-1997* should be revised to include positive goals and values to be promoted by education which will be evaluated against a range of social as well as employment and educational indicators. Similarly, a new boys' education strategy should include positive goals and values to be promoted by education and

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66   *see The Adelaide Declaration on the Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century,* http://www.dest.gov.au/schools/adelaide/adelaide.htm, the full text is at Appendix F.

also evaluated against a range of social, employment and educational indicators. Australia would then have clear and positive educational objectives for both boys and girls which allow for the differing educational and social needs of boys and girls (and different sub-groups of boys and girls) to be addressed without dismantling or discarding current gender equity goals.

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the Minister for Education, Science and Training act to have MCEETYA revise and recast *Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools* into a new policy framework which is consistent with *The Adelaide Declaration on the National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century* and reflects the positive values expressed in that document:

- **the framework should provide an overarching policy structure for joint and distinctive boys' and girls' education strategies which—**
  - ⇒ **address boys' and girls' social and educational needs in positive terms;**
  - ⇒ **allow for school and community input to address local circumstances;**
- **the achievement of the goals and values expressed in the framework and the boys' and girls' education strategies should be evaluated against a range of social, employment and educational indicators; and**
- **these indicators should be used by MCEETYA to inform changes in policy and practice to ensure the social and educational needs of boys and girls are being met.**

Implications

3.60   Some of the most obvious changes in Australian society over recent decades are those relating to the role and status of women and technological change. Shifts in the employment share of industries and the types of jobs in the labour market show up clearly in statistical measures but are less visible to school students and job seekers who have to negotiate a labour market with a different balance of opportunities to those their parents or teachers experienced.

3.61   For both boys and girls employment conditions and social relationships
        have changed dramatically from those that prevailed only two or three
        decades ago. The gender equity strategies and programs have, as a by-
        product of their original purpose, affirmed and guided girls through these
        changes while little has been done to help boys understand and negotiate
        the same changes. We need to rethink our approach in line with
        Recommendation 1.