
The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

Adolescent overload?

**Report of the inquiry into combining school and work:
supporting successful youth transitions**

House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Education and Training

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Canberra

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Foreword

Australian secondary students are facing more pressure than ever as they attempt to excel in their studies, participate in sporting and recreational activities and maintain an active social life. For an increasing number of young people there is an added dimension which is placing further pressure on their lives: the part-time job.

The proportion of school students in employment has increased significantly in the past two decades and today there are over 260,000 young Australians combining school and work. Despite the rise in student workers, the impact of competing demands on young people's lives is not well known. We were therefore tasked with examining the impact of combined study and work on successful youth transitions.

Above all else, the fundamental purpose of schools is to provide an education for their students. This view was shared by many students who were adamant that it should not fall to schools to accommodate their part-time work commitments. Nevertheless, the inquiry confirmed that achieving the right balance can be highly problematic for some young people.

There are considerable positive benefits for students who combine school and work. Those who find the right balance are not only rewarded with a range of social and economic benefits, but their chances of a successful transition into further education, training or work are significantly enhanced.

However, the nature of part-time work for school students has changed significantly. The extended trading hours in the retail sector and late night trading in the fast-food industry which prevail today have contributed to students working longer hours and later hours than ever before. Student workers can be susceptible to exploitative working conditions because their part-time jobs are often their first experience of the workforce and they lack awareness about their rights and obligations, including pay and conditions. The vulnerability of students in the workplace highlights the need for adequate protections and a shared community responsibility by parents, employers and schools to ensure they are protected against working excessively long, and often very late or early, hours.

While students' part-time jobs do not necessarily reflect their career aspirations, young workers acquire a range of generic skills from their jobs that are beneficial to their future employment. For many students, the acquisition of these skills is not formally documented anywhere. In considering mechanisms for students to record their employability skills, we were cautious not to place too much burden on employers with respect to additional reporting requirements which would particularly affect smaller businesses. Nonetheless, it is important that young people are provided with opportunities to attain formal recognition of the skills attained not only through their part-time jobs, but through the full range of activities undertaken beyond the classroom, including both paid and unpaid work, community or volunteer activities, and sporting and recreational activities.

Senior secondary certificates have been revised to incorporate increasing flexibility to accommodate greater numbers of students who may not be suited to traditional schooling models. The inquiry was also presented with a broad range of programs and initiatives at the state and local levels which seek to provide flexibility to assist students to combine school and work, including targeted programs for those students at risk of disengaging with their education. Given the high priority that the Australian Government and state and territory governments have accorded to lifting Year 12 or equivalent attainment rates, broadening the options available to senior secondary students is important.

It is important to acknowledge that not all young people have equal access to the opportunity to participate in part-time work while they are at school. There is also a small but significant proportion of students who are working out of financial necessity rather than for discretionary spending. There are a wide range of programs targeting students at risk of not making a successful transition. There would appear to be scope for greater information-sharing about the outcomes of these programs, in order to identify aspects of successful programs which could be implemented more broadly.

I thank my committee colleagues for their dedication to the inquiry and also wish to thank those Senators and Members who encouraged students in their electorates to participate in the inquiry by completing our online student survey. I would also like to thank those secondary schools who allowed the committee to conduct public hearings on their premises. Finally, I thank the many people and organisations who gave their time to prepare submissions and appear as witnesses before the committee, including students and staff from secondary schools across the country who participated in our public forums.

Sharon Bird MP
Chair



Membership of the Committee

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Deputy Chair Dr Dennis Jensen MP

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Ms Julie Collins MP

Mrs Yvette D' Ath MP

Mr Steve Irons MP

Mr Robert Oakeshott MP (from 10/11/08)

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Terms of reference

Managing the demands of study and part-time or casual employment is part of everyday life for the majority of Australian school students. The impact of potentially competing demands is not well known, and there is little provision of information or guidance to schools or employers on the effect this has on the lives of young people generally, and more specifically on their career development and prospects for successful transitions. The committee's review of the impact of combined study and work on the success of youth transitions and Year 12 attainment will focus on:

- providing opportunities to recognise and accredit the employability and career development skills gained through students' part time or casual work;
- identifying more flexible, innovative and/or alternative approaches to attaining a senior secondary certificate which support students to combine work and study;
- support that may be required to assist young people combining work and study to stay engaged in their learning, especially where work and study intersects with income support;
- the potential impact on educational attainment (including the prospects for post-compulsory qualifications and workforce productivity); and
- the effectiveness of school-based training pathways and their impact on successful transitions, including opportunities for improvement (particularly in relation to pathways to employment for disadvantaged young people).



List of abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACCI	Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry
ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
ACPET	Australian Council for Private Education and Training
ACTU	Australian Council of Trade Unions
ANSN	Australian National Schools Network
ANTA	Australian National Training Authority
AQF	Australian Qualifications Framework
BCA	Business Council of Australia
BSSC	Bendigo Senior Secondary College
CIT	Canberra Institute of Technology
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
EOWA	Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency
FMP	Frankston and Mornington Peninsula
FWA	Fair Work Australia

GLR	Gwydir Learning Region
GRVEC	Geelong Regional Vocational Education Council
HSC	Higher School Certificate
HYPAF	How Young People Are Faring
IYC	Intergenerational Youth Compact
LCP	Local Community Partnership
LLEN	Local Learning and Employment Network
LSAY	Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth
NCVER	National Centre for Vocational Education Research
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
QCE	Queensland Certificate of Education
QCEC	Queensland Catholic Education Commission
RTO	Registered Training Organisation
SACE	South Australian Certificate of Education
SBAT	School-based Apprenticeships and Traineeships
SET	Senior Education and Training
TCE	Tasmanian Certificate of Education
TDA	TAFE Directors Australia
TER	Tertiary Entrance Rank
TWU	Transport Workers Union
VCAL	Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning
VCE	Victorian Certificate of Education
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VETiS	Vocational Education and Training in Schools



List of recommendations

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Students combining school and work
- 3 School and work: a delicate balance

Recommendation 1 (para 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.

- 4 Employability skills and opportunities for accreditation of part-time work

Recommendation 2 (para 4.55)

That the Australian Government develop and implement a national generic skills passport for secondary students to document the employability skills they develop through activities undertaken outside school. These activities should encompass paid and unpaid work (including community/volunteer activities and work for the family business), sporting and recreational activities and other life experiences.

Recommendation 3 (para 4.56)

That the Australian Government, in consultation with stakeholders, develop a Code of Practice for employers, supervisors, and workplace mentors to outline their responsibilities in assisting students to document their acquired employability skills.

5 Protections for students in the workplace

Recommendation 4 (para 5.94)

That the Australian Government establishes a national Employer of Choice for Youth program to recognise the contribution of model employers of young workers.

Recommendation 5 (para 5.98)

That the Australian Government ensures the proposed National Toolkit for Young Workers is made available to students through circulation to all secondary schools in Australia.

Recommendation 6 (para 5.107)

That, through the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs, the Minister for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, as a matter of priority, encourages collaboration between jurisdictions with a view to achieving harmonisation of existing state-based legislation regarding the employment of young people and national consistency of regulatory measures.

Recommendation 7 (para 5.108)

That the Australian Government progresses the establishment of a National Commissioner for Children and Young People as a matter of priority.

6 Flexible senior secondary education settings and the effectiveness of school-based training pathways

Recommendation 8 (para 6.57)

That the Australian Government evaluate recent initiatives in senior secondary provision across the states and territories, including secondary schools, specialist colleges, vocational colleges and polytechnics, in order to identify key areas of success and best practice models, and possible limitations.

Recommendation 9 (para 6.59)

That the Australian Government, in consultation with the states and territories, establish a consistent national definition for what constitutes engagement in part-time senior secondary study and part-time work for statistical and reporting purposes.

Recommendation 10 (para 6.60)

That the Australian Government undertake research to quantify the number of students engaged in senior secondary schooling as part-time students, and to assess their experiences and outcomes from part-time study. Research should focus on arrangements in schools which support positive outcomes and successful completion for part-time students and identify any limitations.

Recommendation 11 (para 6.106)

That the Australian Government work with state and territory governments to develop a plan to ensure that structured workplace opportunities are available to all students participating in school-based vocational education and training.

7 Support for students at risk

Recommendation 12 (para 7.56)

That the Minister for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, through the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs, encourage evaluation and reporting on outcomes from local programs targeting disadvantaged students with a view to highlighting positive aspects of programs which could potentially be replicated.

Recommendation 13 (para 7.58)

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

