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**Parliament of Australia  
House of Representatives  
Standing Committee on Education and Training**

*Inquiry into combining school and work: supporting successful youth transitions*

*January 2009*

## **Introduction**

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) there are two main groups of people combining study and work:

- full-time students undertaking part-time work (42% in 2000)
- full-time workers undertaking part-time study (44% in 2000) <sup>1</sup>

This inquiry is concerned with the first group and considers current school students who participate in part-time employment. The proportion of young people participating in these arrangements has increased from 34% in 1990 to 42% in 2000 according to the latest available ABS data. This amounts to over 542,000 young people. Some 64% of these are aged 15 – 19 years. In addition, the average hours worked per week has increased from 10 hours in 1995 to 11 hours in 2000.

## **Benefits of Part-Time Work**

Given this level of participation in combinations of school and employment consideration needs to be given to the benefits of these arrangements. These include:

- The available research indicates that students perceive part-time jobs as useful for developing general employment skills. They believe that part-time work provides personal independence, they enjoy the work and believed it would help them to gain employment later in life.
- Related to this is the notion that part-time work is a much more authentic experience of the workplace for a young person than work experience programs. Part-time work provides young people with direct experience of employer-employee relations which is likely to be an enduring benefit.
- Students who hold part-time jobs during Years 11 and 12 are less likely to be unemployed at age 19 than those who did not work part-time while at secondary

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australian Social Trends: Education and Work. Cat 4102.0, 2005

school. Having a part-time job can help young people achieve smoother transitions from education to full-time employment.

## **Disadvantages of Part-Time Work**

There are a number of disadvantages of undertaking part-time work while a secondary student. These include:

- Part-time jobs are generally held in fields where students do not intend to make their careers. ACER research has found that more than half were employed in sales jobs and a third were working as manual workers.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly the benefits of part-time work are likely to be more generic and also assist students to make career decisions.
- Part-time work, as well as occurring in a relatively narrow range of industries for this age group, is generally not associated with any form of training. Vocational education programs conducted at senior secondary school, including those with work placements, do include training and have much more effective transition outcomes to further education, training and employment.
- High volumes of part-time employment while at secondary school increases the likelihood of early school leaving. The data clearly indicates that students who leave school early have much less effective transitions to education, training and employment.<sup>3</sup>

*Ai Group believes that combinations of school and work are a valuable component of the senior secondary schooling landscape provided that young people remain engaged with education and training.*

## **Specific Terms of Reference**

### **1. Providing opportunities to recognise and accredit the employability and career development skills gained through students' part time or casual work**

Given the extent of part-time work being undertaken by school students it is appropriate to consider ways that the resulting skills from part-time work can be recognised and accredited. The recognition of employability skills gained from part-time employment is likely to provide the best opportunity.

Whatever recognition arrangements are considered they need to be consistent with the proposed new Commonwealth initiative of the Job Ready Certificate. The initial draft indicates that recognition of employability skills could be provided on a voluntary basis for those students participating in work placements as a component of VET in Schools

<sup>2</sup> Lyn Robinson, The Effects of Part-Time Work on School Students, LSAY research report No. 9, ACER, March 1999.

<sup>3</sup> How young people are faring 08, Foundation for Young Australians.

programs. Subsequently other groups, including those combining school and work, could be considered for eligibility.

NCVER has suggested that integrating students' paid work into the school curriculum could provide a vehicle for recognising and acknowledging workplace competence for vocational education courses within schools more readily than does the conventional work experience model of work placements.<sup>4</sup> These experiences are considered to be more authentic because of the establishment of an employer-employee set of relationships and because these work experiences are longer than school-organised placements.<sup>5</sup> Opportunities provided to students to reflect about part-time work has the potential to contribute to valuable career education about the nature of work and also assist students in making informed decisions about post-school pathways.

*Ai Group supports the principle that ways of recognising the contribution of the skills derived from part-time employment, especially employability skills, should be explored.*

## **2. Identifying more flexible, innovative and/or alternative approaches to attaining a senior secondary certificate which supports students to combine work and study**

Secondary schooling arrangements need to be more flexible to take into account the changing senior secondary landscape including the nature of extent of part-time work undertaken by school students. The most obvious means of addressing this is a review of timetabling arrangements to facilitate the combination of school and work. There are many instructive examples of this including:

- Split timetables to assist those participating in part-time work
- On-line delivery of some program elements
- After traditional school hours mentoring/tutoring support
- Schools responding to the special needs of students

An illustration of flexible delivery is the approach provided at Marden Senior College in Adelaide, South Australia. The school has considered a range of ways of keeping students engaged including those committed to earn an income to achieve independent status. A number of strategies are in place to support over 2,200 students (800 FTE). These include:

- **Individualised Curriculum and Timetabling:** The school curriculum is organised around attendance at three different time periods: day-time, night-time and twilight-time. There are also holiday programs provided and opportunities for flexible delivery. Under these arrangements it is possible for a student to package a Year 11 or Year 12 South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) and VET programs over two days per week.

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<sup>4</sup> Informing post-school pathways: Investigating school students' authentic work experiences, NCVER project 4007.

<sup>5</sup> Informing post-school pathways: Investigating school students' authentic work experiences, NCVER 4007.

- Student Support. Mentoring programs are provided for students including for those at risk of non-completion. The college provides on-site transition services as a part of a culture of support.

*Ai Group supports the identification and implementation of flexible schooling arrangements to more effectively accommodate combinations of school and part-time employment.*

### **3. 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 research indicates that most young people do not work simply for financial reasons. A small proportion of student-workers however, estimated at 10%, have more of a financial imperative to work.<sup>6</sup>

In one student sample 77% of the students agreed with the statement that they needed money to support themselves.<sup>7</sup> The researcher questioned whether such high proportions of students were literally dependent on the income from their jobs. It is perhaps noteworthy that 13% of surveyed student-workers indicated that their family needed the money from their job and 14% indicated that the money they earned enable them to remain a student.<sup>8</sup>

There has been a comparison of this data with students receiving income support payments. Not surprisingly considerably higher percentages of the students receiving such support indicated that the money they earned was an important reason for working.

There is a need to review income support arrangements for secondary school students with a view to ensuring that the participation of young people in secondary schooling should not be dependent on income derived from part-time employment.

*Ai Group supports a review of income support arrangements for secondary students.*

### **4. The potential impact on educational attainment (including the prospects for post-compulsory qualifications and workforce productivity)**

The research indicates that part-time jobs of less than 10 hours a week do not interfere in the academic performance of students in Years 11 and 12 and having a part-time job does not of itself reduce the likelihood of completing secondary school – indeed, part-

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<sup>6</sup> Lyn Robinson, The Effects of Part-Time Work on School Students, LSAY research report No. 9, ACER, March 1999, page v.

<sup>7</sup> Lyn Robinson, The Effects of Part-Time Work on School Students, LSAY research report No. 9, ACER, March 1999, page 7.

<sup>8</sup> Lyn Robinson, The Effects of Part-Time Work on School Students, LSAY research report No. 9, ACER, March 1999, page 7.

time work during Year 11 can have a positive effect on Year 12 participation.<sup>9</sup> Nor did part-time work affect academic performance in Year 12 – or only where students worked for more than 10 hours a week. The ACER research concluded:

“Concern about the adverse impact of part-time work on students’ schooling appears, therefore, to be largely unfounded.”<sup>10</sup>

However, further ACER research has considered the possible effects of working during Year 9 on the likelihood of completion of Year 12. The findings indicate that there is no difference to the likelihood of Year 12 completion where a Year 9 students works for one to five hours per week.

The situation alters when longer periods of work are undertaken. Working beyond five hours per week is associated with an increased likelihood of dropping out of school before the end of Year 12, especially for males. The overall situation is the more hours per week students work, the more likely they are to drop out. Specifically, males who work 5 – 15 hours per week during Year 9 are 40% less likely to complete Year 12 than those who do not. This figure increases to 60% for those students working more than 15 hours per week.<sup>11</sup> Despite this strong association there is no claim that this is a causal link.

This data is of concern given that the average number of hours worked per week is now 11 hours.

The consequent concern is that the prospects for early school leavers to make effective transitions to further education, training and employment are significantly diminished compared to Year 12 completers. This will make them less effective contributors to workforce productivity over time and indeed they will receive a lifetime of lower economic rewards compared to their peers who complete Year 12.

The most effective response to this is to ensure that students are not in danger of non-completion due to their participation in part-time employment. It may be necessary to introduce measures so that students do not work beyond the ‘tipping point’ of about 10 hours per week. Income support arrangements are likely to be among the measures considered.

*Ai Group supports the exploration of measures that discourage excessive hours of part-time employment undertaken by secondary students.*

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<sup>9</sup> *Work Experience, Work Placements and part-time work among Australian secondary school students*, LSAY Briefing Number 3, ACER, October 2001, page 3.

<sup>10</sup> *Work Experience, Work Placements and part-time work among Australian secondary school students*, LSAY Briefing Number 3, ACER, October 2001, page 3

<sup>11</sup> Margaret Vickers, Stephen Lamb and John Hinkley: *Student Workers in High School and Beyond: The effects of part-time employment on participation in education, training and work*, LSAY Research Report No 30, Executive Summary, February 2003.

**5. 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).**

The data and anecdotal evidence suggests that the increasing range of school-based pathways provide successful transitions to further education, training and employment. These pathways include:

- VET in Schools programs of which about half include structured work placements
- School-based apprenticeships and traineeships

These pathways have the advantage of guaranteed training which is not the case with part-time employment. Although the precise nature of the relationship is disputed, it is claimed that the provision of vocational education and training programs in schools contributes to school retention. This is significant due to the bleak situation faced by early school leavers.<sup>12</sup> School-based pathways accordingly have a greater impact on the transition of young people to employment and while participation by school students in part-time employment has definite benefit it should not detract from engagement in these pathways.

### **Summary**

In summary Ai Group believes that combinations of school and work are a valuable component of the senior secondary schooling landscape provided that young people remain engaged with education and training.

Ai Group supports the following measures in relation to combinations of school and work:

- the exploration of ways of recognising the contribution of the skills derived from part-time employment, especially employability skills.
- the identification and implementation of flexible schooling arrangements to more effectively accommodate combinations of school and part-time employment.
- a review of income support arrangements for secondary students.
- the exploration of measures that discourage excessive hours of part-time employment undertaken by secondary students.

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<sup>12</sup> This is well documented in a number of sources including *It's Crunch Time: Raising Youth Engagement and Attainment, A Discussion Paper*, August 2007, Australian Industry Group and Dusseldorp Skills Forum and *How young people are faring 08*, Foundation for Young Australians, 2008.

## References

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