

Chapter 3: Educational factors

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

3.1 There is a clear relationship between educational attainment and employment. Young people without adequate education or skills are much less likely to make successfully the transition from school to work and there is no doubt that these young people are more likely to be unemployed.

In May 1996, the unemployment rate for young people 20 to 24 years who did not complete the highest level of schooling was 21.3 per cent compared with 11.5 per cent for those who completed Year 12, and 6.3 per cent for those with a Bachelor degree. The labour market advantage of educated people is sustained throughout life. The unemployment rate for all people with post-school qualifications was 5.3 per cent compared with 10.9 per cent for those who did not complete school. The unemployment rate for those with higher educational qualifications was 4.6 per cent.¹ [DEETYA Submission]

3.2 Employment growth in unskilled occupations is unlikely to keep pace with employment growth overall, particularly for young people. This raises the importance of several educational issues related to the competitiveness of young people in the labour market and their capacity to adapt to a continually changing labour market. These issues range from the adequacy of basic education in literacy and numeracy in primary schools through the quality and availability of vocational education and careers advice in the secondary system to the relevance and value of technical and tertiary education.

3.3 Educational factors cannot be considered in isolation because social and other factors have a bearing on a young person's outlook and ability to maximise his or her educational and employment opportunities. While it may be an ideal which is difficult to realise in practice, the Committee believes it must be the stated goal of educational policy, of all Australian governments, to ensure that every young Australian leaves school literate, numerate and equipped to participate in the social and economic life of the nation.

LITERACY AND NUMERACY

3.4 Any effort intended to enhance the employability of young people must address the poor levels of proficiency in literacy and numeracy many of them suffer. Somehow it seems to be possible in Australia for a significant proportion of young people to exit the years of compulsory education without adequate literacy and numeracy skills. The Department of Defence submitted that between five and seven per cent of applicants to the Australian Defence Force do not meet its basic literacy

1 *Submission No. 71.2, p. 4.*

requirements for entry.² Typically the operators of employment and training programs have told the Committee that people whose literacy and numeracy skills are deficient are grossly over represented in their programs, sometimes comprising up to 75 per cent of participants.³

3.5 The cost to individuals and to society of poor literacy and numeracy are very high. Young people whose literacy and numeracy skills are deficient are much less likely to complete school and much more likely to be unemployed and to be long term unemployed.⁴ If employed, a person without sound basic skills is likely to earn less money⁵ and is less able to undertake vocational training and adapt to change in the workplace.

3.6 Today even ‘unskilled’ jobs require a minimum basic standard of literacy, at least enough to enable workers to read and understand basic occupational health and safety notices in the workplace.

3.7 Literacy and numeracy, but particularly literacy, were raised as important issues by employers at every public hearing which the Committee conducted for the inquiry. Employers want young people to be competent in basic skills — writing a note, reading instructions, mental arithmetic. The Committee raised the issue with students at each school forum and found many articulate young people ready to acknowledge deficiencies in basics such as grammar and mental arithmetic.

*I cannot do any sort of division without a calculator.
[Qld]*

*I am not proud of that, but it is true that I do not know my
times table. [Tas]*

*I went on an exchange, too — I was in Germany. I was in
an English class and their grammar was a lot better than
mine because that was what they were taught. [Vic]*

3.8 The Committee has examined literacy more thoroughly on two previous occasions. Its 1991 report, *Words at Work*, examined the level and consequences of illiteracy in the workplace. In its 1993 report, *The Literacy Challenge*, the Committee found that between 10 and 20 per cent of students finished primary school with literacy problems and made substantial recommendations to improve the situation. It is crucial that the foundations of adult literacy be properly laid at the primary school level and that the resources to achieve this are made available in all primary schools. The literacy problem is not yet beaten.

2 Department of Defence, *Submission No. 67*, p. 5. In a further submission to the inquiry the Department of Defence stated that over 30 per cent of males applying to join the Army in the late 1980s failed to meet the Army’s literacy standard although since 1992 this has fallen to range from about 8 to 14 per cent. *Submission 67.1*, p. 2.

3 Ross Jones, Central Western Sydney Area Consultative Committee, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 556.

4 Australian Council for Educational Research, *Reading and Numeracy in Junior Secondary School: Trends, Patterns and Consequences*, March 1997, pp. 5-8.

5 *ibid*, p. 9.

3.9 The Committee believes that a long term improvement in the employment prospects of some young people must start with improving their literacy and numeracy skills in primary school. Evidence supports the statement that the earlier young people start to acquire skills in reading, writing and maths the better. In addition to reading and writing, literacy is also about speaking and listening. School completion rates correlate closely to competency in literacy and numeracy and many young people will continue to miss out on the opportunities offered by the broadening vocational curricula if they have already left school, discouraged and marginalised because they were let down in primary school.

*We have problems in our primary schools in terms of what we call the overcrowded curriculum. Too much is expected of younger students there. Far too much is being foisted on primary schools. If you look at the amount of literacy and numeracy skilling that happens in primary schools now, it is something like three hours per week, which is totally insufficient.*⁶ [Mr Ian Wallis, Principal, Sale College]

3.10 Accordingly, the Committee endorses the Commonwealth Government's intention to develop a National Literacy Strategy and applauds the agreement reached through the Ministerial Council of Employment Education, Training and Youth Affairs between the Commonwealth and State and Territory Education Ministers to:

- a new national goal: that every child leaving primary school should be able to read, write, spell and communicate at an appropriate level; and
- develop common literacy benchmarks at Years 3 and 5.⁷

3.11 Recommendation 3.1

The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Minister for Schools, Vocational Education and Training ensure through the Ministerial Council that:

- **there is comprehensive teaching of literacy and numeracy in every primary school in Australia, preferably in the mornings and, if necessary, at the expense of other parts of the curriculum;**
- **the standard of literacy and numeracy is regularly tested; and**
- **those students who fall below the standard are given special attention to raise their literacy and numeracy skills.**

⁶ Transcript of Evidence, p. 1214.

⁷ DEETYA, Submission No. 71, p. 25.

SCHOOL COMPLETION AND RETENTION RATES⁸

3.12 The school retention rate to Year 12 rose strongly throughout the 1980s to peak at 77.1 per cent in 1992. Since then there has been a marked decline to 71.3 per cent in 1996. Retention to Years 10 and 11 also peaked in 1992 and has declined from 99.1 per cent to 96.7 per cent and 87.8 per cent to 83.4 per cent respectively⁹. The significance of this decline to youth employment arises from the relationship between educational attainment and employment described above.

3.13 Recent research suggests that the decline in school completion has been greater for some of the groups of young people that experienced the highest growth during the 1980s. The groups most affected appear to be: rural boys, boys from both skilled and unskilled manual backgrounds and girls from unskilled manual backgrounds.¹⁰ The decline is highly likely to be related to curriculum content.

[W]e have that dramatic increase in school retention rates to Year 12, but we basically have done nothing about either the curriculum or the modes of delivery. So what had been essentially designed for those tracking into higher education, was basically served up for the additional inflow. That was quite inappropriate.¹¹

[Professor Judith Sloan, Director, National Institute of Labour Studies, Flinders University]

It would be extremely unfortunate if declining school retention and completion rates heralded a corresponding increase in inter-generational economic and social disadvantage.

3.14 The recent decline in school retention rates would not necessarily be a major concern if there were significant growth in low skilled job opportunities for young people and/or the early school leavers clearly were pursuing other worthwhile education and training opportunities. However the jobs are not there in sufficient numbers and it is difficult to definitely conclude from the published ABS education participation rates that young people, particularly 15 and 16 year olds, are undertaking education outside of school. For these reasons the Committee strongly supports the development and wider availability of quality vocational education and other reforms to curricula which are likely to arrest or reverse the decline in school retention rates by encouraging young people to stay at school.

8 The Completion Rate is the percentage of young people in a given year who have completed year 12 whereas the Retention Rate is the percentage of an age cohort at year 7 which completes year 12.

9 Australian Bureau of Statistics (1996) *Schools, Australia 1996*, Catalogue No. 4221.0

10 see Stephen Lamb, *Completing School in Australia: Trends in the 1990s*, Australian Council for Educational Research, August 1996.

11 *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 304.

YOUTH GUARANTEE

3.15 There is an indisputable correlation between an individual's level of educational attainment and his or her social wellbeing and economic security. A well educated population is also a more adaptable and more socially productive population within a more efficient economy.

3.16 In recognition of the national and individual importance of education the Committee is proposing a National Youth Guarantee whereby every Australian, as a minimum, is entitled to education from Year 1 through to Year 12. If, for whatever reason, an individual under 21 years of age has not attained Year 12 at school, the Committee proposes that he or she be entitled to a Government funded place at a high school, TAFE or a recognised training provider to complete a Year 12 education or its equivalent.

3.17 Recommendation 3.2

The Committee recommends that the Government institute a National Youth Guarantee which entitles every Australian under 21 years of age, who has not attained Year 12 at school, to a funded place at a high school, TAFE or a recognised training provider to complete a Year 12 education or its equivalent.

THE TERTIARY ENTRANCE RANK (TER)

3.18 The Committee notes with interest the emerging public debate about the Tertiary Entrance Rank and its suitability as a selection tool for universities and as a general reporting mechanism for the senior years of education. The Committee has not inquired deeply into the issue but it is inclined to the view, based on the reactions of the students it has spoken to, that far too much emphasis is placed on the TER.

3.19 One of the major problems with the current system, which is apparent from the Committee's discussions with students in most States, is that it distorts young people's education choices. Many feel they are forced to study high level maths and science subjects, which scale well against other subjects, when these may bear little relevance to the tertiary course they wish to undertake.

I want to do law. The only thing I need is English...It is not so much, 'Is this relevant to me?' Rather, it is, 'Do I like doing it? Will I get a good mark in it? Does it scale well? Will I get the TER I need to get to university?' I think that is the problem.¹² [Mr Mathew Zadow, Student, Koorinal High School, Wagga Wagga, NSW]

Other students, pursuing their interests in languages or arts, very often felt disadvantaged by a system which they strongly feel does not treat them fairly.

I want to go to NIDA (National Institute of Dramatic Arts), so I am doing a lot of arts courses. What will happen in grade 12 is that, if I get a 20 in art, it is not

12 *ibid*, p.1291.

*going to come up on my final score as a 20. They are going to mark me down because it is an arts subject. That is totally unfair. It is like a devaluation of the arts. You only get top marks if you are doing maths or chemistry or biology or something.*¹³ [Ms Elizabeth Moore, Student, Casuarina Senior College, Darwin, NT]

3.20 The Committee supports public debate on the value and relevance of the TER particularly in the context of a broader role than university preparation for the senior years of high school.

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND WORKPLACE LEARNING

3.21 The rapid rise of the high school retention rate from around 35 per cent 15 years ago should have resulted in schools responding with a wider range of courses to cater to a wider range of students' learning requirements. To date the response by most schools has been inadequate. In 1989, in its report on Year 12 retention rates, *The Restless Years*, the Committee observed:

*The traditional purpose of the senior secondary years has been to prepare young people for higher education. This has meant that schools have provided courses in subject areas considered appropriate for young people proceeding to further study. It has also influenced teaching methods and encouraged particular forms of assessment aimed at helping universities...select those most likely to succeed in further studies.*¹⁴

3.22 The Committee went on to recommend that:

*the States encourage the development of a broader range of courses to provide more appropriately for the majority of students, who are not bound for higher education, and as a way of encouraging more young people to stay on to Year 12. In particular, the States should...facilitate the development of integrated school and industry link programs.*¹⁵

Eight years later Australia is just beginning to provide school and industry link education programs which include a proportion of workplace learning.

13 *ibid.*, p. 1366.

14 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *The Restless Years: An inquiry into Year 12 retention rates*, October 1989, p. 71.

15 *ibid.* p. 81.

Structured workplace learning — Years 11 and 12

3.23 Structured workplace learning programs require schools to develop effective links with local industry as the students are required to spend a significant proportion of their school time undertaking structured learning and assessment in the workplace. The Australian Student Traineeship Foundation (ASTF) has specified basic criteria for structured workplace learning programs. Ideally programs should:

- form part of the curriculum for Years 11 and 12;
- include substantial learning and assessment to occur in the workplace;
- reflect industry and local community requirements;
- receive school accreditation and industry recognition; and
- share the management of the program through a joint industry-education group.

Schools offering structured workplace learning programs are not bound to adhere to these criteria. At least 18 per cent of the school-industry programs identified in the 1996 ACER survey do not meet the ASTF criteria.¹⁶

3.24 A recent study of six schools which are leaders in workplace learning has identified the central issues and success factors emerging in the schools studied.¹⁷ The following factors, extracted from the report, were generally common to all schools and identified as important to the success of the programs:

- dedicated school leadership and teachers;
- adequate program support such as a dedicated full-time coordinator;
- effective school-industry links;
- equality of esteem between general and vocational education;
- parental and community support for programs; and
- networks enabling access to other schools' experience and expertise.

3.25 In addition, the report identified a number of emerging issues for schools operating workplace learning programs. Some major issues were common to all schools in the study of which the most pressing were the funding and staffing of programs.

A key issue for all schools was the securing of adequate human and physical resources to establish and maintain structured workplace learning. Most garnered support from a variety of sources to initiate programs but found that sustaining them became more difficult as the number of participating students increased.¹⁸ [J Cumming & B Carbines]

16 Ainley J and Fleming M, Australian Council for Educational Research, *School-Industry Programs: National Survey Summary Report 1996*, ASTF, 1997, p. 11.

17 Cumming J and Carbines B, *Reforming Schools Through Workplace Learning*, March 1997.

18 *ibid.* p. 16.

Other important issues for schools include:

- the organisation of work placements;
- integrating work placements into school timetables; and
- training of work supervisors and school personnel.¹⁹

Emerging issues for workplace education, in general, include:

- employer concern at the wide range of vocational education models;
- consistency and complexity of workplace assessment regimes; and
- need for greater consistency in what is being taught to students to prepare them for work placements.²⁰

3.26 Equality of esteem between vocational and academic options and appropriate careers guidance are important issues. Young people should be encouraged to choose the path that most suits their interests and abilities rather than the 'easiest' or 'highest status' option. Education and careers guidance should be assisting students to achieve an individually rewarding and satisfying educational and occupational outcome. There are still barriers in the education system preventing this being achieved.

In a lot of places the teachers do not seem to have the right attitude to vocational education as yet in that they tend to try to steer the weaker students towards vocational education, forgetting that the students who are more academically minded might not necessarily want to go to university but they are steered in that direction.²¹

[Ms Tressna Martin, Coordinator, Darwin TRAC Association]

An ideal system would enable students to maximise their options by electing to combine workplace education with the pursuit of a TER. In many existing programs this is not possible.

3.27 The outcomes for students achieved by quality workplace education programs certainly justify their wider availability. For example in 1996, 2,000 students Australia wide were participating in TRAC programs (Training for Retail and Commerce programs developed by the Dusseldorp Skills Forum). Research conducted by the Dusseldorp Skills Forum established that in 1993 and 1994 the unemployment rate for TRAC graduates was 16 and 14 per cent respectively against a national average for school leavers of 32 per cent in 1993 — that is about half. Also, of the 1993 and 1994 TRAC graduates 53 per cent were participating in further non-university education and training compared to an average of 36 per cent for all 1993 Australian school leavers.²²

19 Ainley J and Fleming M, Australian Council for Educational Research, *School-Industry Programs: National Survey 1996*, ASTF, 1997, p. 69.

20 Cumming J and Carbines B, *Reforming Schools Through Workplace Learning*, March 1997.

21 *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 1407.

22 *Right on TRAC: Workplace Learning*, National TRAC Network, *Exhibit No. 55*.

3.28 A major benefit of workplace education is that it prepares young people for work and can lead them into real jobs.

One advantage by having the kids out in the workplace is that the employers in a lot of cases have actually created jobs in their own industry and taken on employees that they would not normally have taken on...whilst there may not be a lot of employment opportunity in the typical small country town — because the blinkers have been removed they have been able to look further afield. We have students who have left the Junee [NSW] situation and are working as far away as Hobart, Perth and Darwin.²³ [Mr Robert Barrett, Chairperson, Junee Vocational Education Management Committee]

Recently we got an AVTS [Australian Vocational Training System] program in the senior secondary education system at Rosny College [Hobart]...They did a lot of their training in TAFE and through the college. They went out and did their work experience...with employers on site. Two of those students were...given apprenticeships straightaway because of their ability to be able to do the work...it was because those apprentices or the trainees, had a relationship with the employer because they could see they were competent and they had some skills and they had ability.²⁴ [Mr Peter Coad, Executive Director, Tasmanian Building and Construction Industry Training Board]

So the students are at Mt Isa High. They do their trade work in our workshops under our supervision with their teachers. Eighteen went for experience. A number applied. Twelve are now apprentices [at Mt Isa Mines].²⁵ [Mr Scott Roberts, General Manager, Human Resources, Mt Isa Mines Ltd]

3.29 Employers also benefit from quality workplace education programs. Some programs, such as TRAC, provide some staff development for the employer through the supervisor and mentor training that TRAC provides to support the workplacement. They are also exposed to a number of potential employees who have demonstrated real skills at work.²⁶ A more general benefit of workplace education programs is that they forge links between employers, group training companies and schools where before such links were poor or non-existent.²⁷

23 *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 553.

24 *ibid*, p.712-3.

25 *ibid*, p. 947.

26 Ms Tressna Martin, Coordinator, Darwin TRAC Association, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 1410.

27 Mr Kevin Jarick, Manager, Golden West Group Training Scheme Inc., *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 811, and Mr Rodney Wilkinson, Managing Director, Mt Isa Group Apprenticeship, Traineeship and Employment, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 969.

*The INSTEP program [Carnarvon, WA] is providing that opportunity for students to get out and get the skills in the workplace. The spin-off from that is that the employers get a chance to know who is available and who they would like to choose from. Often the outcome is that they know the worker has done good work and they often get a job out of it.*²⁸ [Mr Noel Cuttiford, Coordinator, INSTEP Program]

3.30 Despite rapid growth in recent years and the fact that nationally 62 per cent of schools offer workplace education,²⁹ student participation rates in workplace education are still far too low. In 1996, an estimated 12.1 per cent of secondary students were participating in workplace education which was up from an estimated 7 per cent in 1995. According to the ACER, 44 per cent of schools responding to its survey which do not currently offer workplace education programs intend to in the future.³⁰

3.31 The majority of workplace education students in 1996, an estimated 7.5 per cent of students overall, were participating in programs with work placements of short duration, that is, the students spent 10 days or fewer in the workplace.³¹ The apparent prevalence of programs with shorter periods of workplace learning is, in the Committee's view, not ideal as programs of longer duration appear to better meet the needs of students and schools.

*Programs which involve more than 20 days in the workplace tended to be better integrated into the school curriculum and involve work placements with characteristics more in line with Australian Student Traineeship Foundation criteria for "best practice" ...extended programs were more likely to involve work placements involving more than one work site, and less likely to require students to miss classes to attend work placements. Structured learning in the workplace was more likely to feature in these programs, and supervisors were more likely to be present at work sites...Students in these programs were more likely to have their results recorded on their senior secondary certificate and to receive a certificate from a local or regional body.*³² [J Ainley and M Fleming]

3.32 At the school forums, the Committee heard from a number of students participating in workplace education programs. They universally considered workplace education to be a positive experience which encouraged them to continue at school. Where it is available young people can clearly see that workplace education can provide real benefits when they leave school and seek work.

28 *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 1566.

29 Ainley J and Fleming M, Australian Council for Educational Research, *School-Industry Programs: National Survey 1996*, ASTF, 1997, p. 12.

30 *ibid*, p. 66.

31 *ibid*, p. 28.

32 *ibid*, p. 68.

*Chris and I are currently doing a VET course [in Darwin]. One day a week — on Tuesdays — throughout the whole year we attend this VET course...Since we do the course one day a week, we get used to the job and prepare ourselves for the work force for when we leave school. It does help us. We get to know people. When we leave school we can get out there and try our best.*³³
[Mr Paull Hart, Student, Driver High School, Darwin, NT]

3.33 The Committee is in no doubt that workplace education will be a major benefit to young people and particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds where their parents are unemployed, do not speak English or, for whatever reason, are not well equipped to help them enter the labour force. Quality workplace education clearly can broaden the horizons of these young people, build skills, interest and self-esteem and help them to establish workplace contacts and other relationships useful in seeking employment.

3.34 The Committee is excited by the rapid growth in workplace education programs and is encouraged by the high proportion of schools offering and intending to offer these programs to students but more needs to be done. The Committee firmly believes that quality workplace education has a great deal to offer secondary students including many of those with aspirations towards tertiary education. By building confidence and the skills which are directly relevant to working environments, and by helping to align the attitudes and expectations of young people with those of employers, workplace education has enormous potential to enhance the employability of the young people who participate.

3.35 Individual energy and creativity and the flexibility to innovate at the local level are vital to establishing and developing high quality workplace education programs with strong links to local enterprises. Unfortunately many programs are labouring under 'pilot' status and operating without funding or on ad-hoc financial grants. Many survive and succeed solely on the energy and commitment of the instigators. The Committee believes that workplace education in individual schools needs to be properly recognised and supported by federal and state education authorities with the objective of encouraging the further adoption and expansion, by schools, of workplace education programs so that they become available to a much higher proportion of Year 11 and 12 students.

33 *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 1374.

3.36 Recommendation 3.3

The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Minister for Schools, Vocational Education and Training, in consultation with State and Territory Ministers:

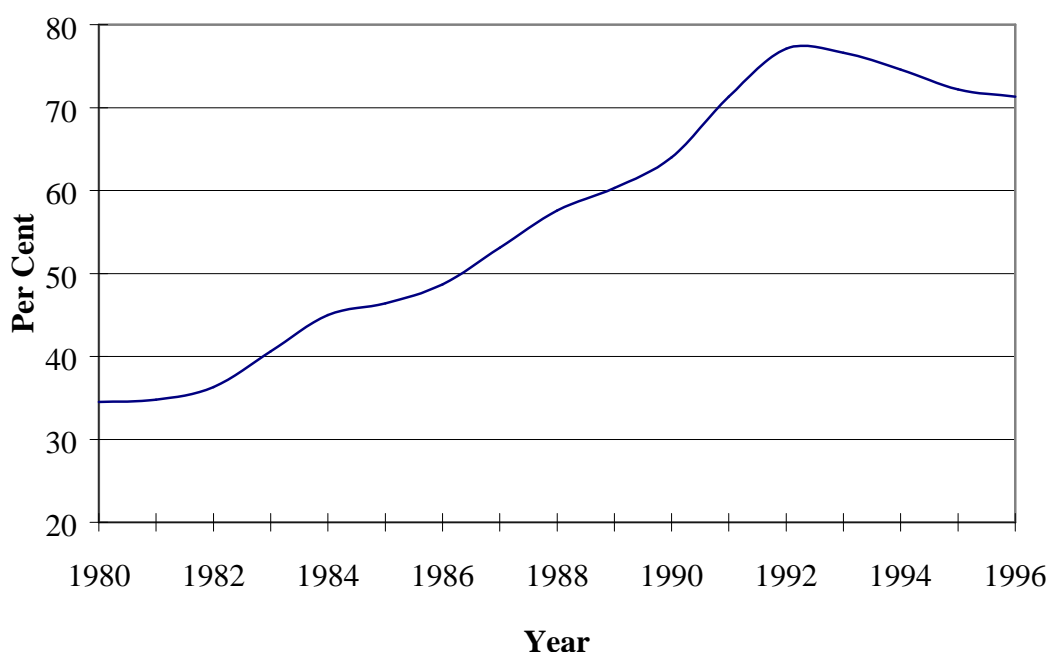
- **more vigorously promote the Australian Student Traineeship Foundation (ASTF) criteria as the desirable national standard for all workplace education programs;**
- **implement national guidelines and, as far as practicable, a uniform student workplace assessment method for workplace education programs;**
- **devise measures to further encourage the adoption of high quality workplace education programs so that they become available to a much higher proportion of upper secondary students; and**
- **implement medium to longer term funding arrangements, perhaps through the ASTF, which recognise the higher costs and more onerous administrative burden for schools offering workplace education programs.**

Vocational Education — Years 7 to 10

3.37 The Committee welcomes the Commonwealth Government's provision of \$50 million in the 1997-98 budget for vocational education in secondary schools and its recent announcement to provide for 18,000 vocational education places in Years 9 and 10.³⁴ Until very recently, quality vocational and workplace education in Years 7 to 10 does not appear to have received any significant support or encouragement from any level of government. The Committee firmly endorses the further development and expansion of workplace education in Years 11 and 12. It also is strongly of the view that this should be supported by workplace learning and careers education and guidance for students in Years 7 to 10.

34 Minister for Schools, Vocational Education and Training, Press Releases, *Funding for New Apprenticeships*, 13 May 1997 and *Industry Training for 18,000 Students*, 10 August 1997.

Figure 3.1: Year 12 Apparent Retention Rates³⁵



3.38 It is abundantly clear that many young people are leaving school before completing the senior years and, in too many cases, before completing Year 10. The proportion of young people leaving school early is growing, diminishing the major gains in high school retention and completion made during the 1980s and early 1990s. The early leavers do not leave school with good prospects while the school-industry workplace education programs which are becoming more widely available in Years 11 and 12 have no value to students who have already dropped out.

3.39 There are many reasons why young people leave school early. Social problems such as abuse and homelessness are high among them but some young people are alienated by an academic curriculum which for many is too abstract and irrelevant and which does not recognise, encourage and value other pathways and outcomes.

The fact that the kids have lost interest at the age of 15 is not given the consideration that it should be. We have got kids that have a lot of manual skills who are not being given the opportunity to use those skills. By the time they reach the point where they can, we have lost them because the time frame has not allowed for it.³⁶

[Mr Laurie Cremin, Chief Executive Officer, Central Western Queensland Remote Area Planning and Development Board]

3.40 The Committee took evidence on a vocational education program offered by Berwick Secondary College in Victoria to students in Years 9 and 10 who the school had identified as at risk of leaving school early. About 36 students are involved in a

³⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Schools, Australia*, Catalogue No. 4221.0.

³⁶ *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 923.

school of 1,300 although student interest in the program suggests demand is almost double this level.³⁷ The need for the program was pressing:

*The problem...is...that vocational education has been linked directly with Years 11 and 12. I think that is a disaster for several reasons...students have already vanished before Years 11 and 12. Also, the students who are going on to do vocational subjects in 11 and 12 are not well prepared to go into that.*³⁸ [Mr Terry Trevena, Assistant Principal, Berwick Secondary College]

3.41 The Berwick Secondary College vocational education program is a fine example of a local initiative in response to a real need. It received no development funding, no curriculum development support and has attracted no additional administrative resources to support students in their work placements. Nor did the school have access to additional resources to help address some of the personal difficulties that students at risk of leaving school early often face. Largely due to the commitment of the school's leadership the program has achieved outstanding results.

3.42 Essentially the program is an elective subject. It devotes two periods per week to job and life skills with a substantial block of work placement one day per week. Victorian legislation limits work experience to 12 days per half year per placement which prevents a full day work placement each week. Students generally find their own work placements. The vocational education students participate in other subjects just as any other student in the school. The course admits students covering a range of intellectual ability and it allows them to keep their options open. Participants are eligible to enter dual recognition and other VCE courses in Years 11 and 12.³⁹

3.43 The outcomes which have been achieved by this program mirror those attained by workplace education programs developed for Years 11 and 12. Significantly, most of the participants in last year's program who, before joining the program, reported that they were going to leave school early are still at school. The self-confidence of the participating students has risen and their other class work has improved. Some students have obtained full-time employment through the program.⁴⁰

3.44 There are other vocational and workplace education programs being developed by schools for students in Years 7 to 10. These include programs in some Victorian schools⁴¹ and a proposal by Golden West Group Training to include Year 10 students in a school to industry link program which would continue into Years 11 and 12.⁴² These programs, like the program at Berwick Secondary College,

37 Mr Terry Trevena, Assistant Principal, Berwick Secondary College, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 1657.

38 *ibid*, p. 1663.

39 *ibid*, pp. 1656, 1657, 1658.

40 *ibid*, pp. 1656, 1658, 1663.

41 *ibid*, p 1664.

42 Mr Kevin Jarick, Manager, Golden West Group Training Scheme Inc., *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 810-11.

are being developed in response to urgent local needs, often without any external support.

3.45 Until recently, schools developing programs for Years 7 to 10 have not had access to the funding for school-industry link programs in Years 11 and 12 available through the ASTF. However, funding should now be available following the allocation of funding in the 1997-98 Budget for vocational education programs in Years 9 and 10. The Minister for Schools, Vocational Education and Training has also told the Parliament that the charter of the ASTF will be re-written to include vocational education programs in Years 9 and 10.⁴³ Developments in vocational education in high school need to be properly supported by all levels of government and integrated with quality careers education and counselling.

*The school to work transition issue must be addressed forthwith and done in such a way that students commencing Year 7 are aware of avenues and pathways available to them from the beginning of their secondary education.*⁴⁴ [Central West Area Consultative Committee]

3.46 The Committee is strongly in favour of extending workplace education into the early years of high school. Programs should be structured so that they do not preclude students from entering dual recognition or TER courses in Years 11 and 12. It has immense potential to restore school as a relevant and attractive option for young people who do not presently see it that way.

3.47 Recommendation 3.4

The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Minister for Schools, Vocational Education and Training, in consultation with State and Territory Ministers:

- **develop and promote a national standard for all workplace education programs in the lower years of high school that encourages programs which will still prepare students to enter dual recognition or Tertiary Entrance Rank (TER) courses in Years 11 and 12;**
- **implement national guidelines and, as far as practicable, a uniform student workplace assessment method for workplace education programs;**
- **devise measures to further encourage the adoption of high quality workplace education programs so that they become available to a much higher proportion of lower secondary students; and**
- **implement medium to longer term funding arrangements for schools offering workplace education programs, perhaps through the Australian Student Traineeship Foundation, which recognise the higher costs, the more onerous administrative burden, and the additional counselling/welfare support required by students at risk of leaving school early.**

43 House of Representatives, *Hansard*, 15 May 1997, p. 3781.

44 *Submission No. 66*, p. 3.

CAREERS GUIDANCE

The current situation

3.48 An ANTA commissioned study into attitudes towards VET was conducted from September 1995 through to February 1996.⁴⁵ It provides some telling evidence of the imbalance and inadequacies which exist in careers guidance, education and counselling for young people and their parents.

A key finding to emerge concerned the lack of information and promotional emphasis in secondary schools upon VET options in comparison with the university option. It was a consistent finding of the Report that university options contained the lion's share of attention. As a consequence:

- *University presents the most favourable image.. with the perception existing that better qualifications are achieved at university and thus a better job/career can be accessed.*
- *Although there is a growing acceptance and interest in VET, most students and their parents exhibit poor or vague knowledge about VET options. This is especially true in regard to apprenticeships and traineeships.*
- *The image of apprenticeships among students is out of date and suffers from being far too blue collar. Apprenticeships and traineeships are recognised by parents as sound options although knowledge about the distinction between them is not always clear nor accurate.⁴⁶ [ANTA submission]*

3.49 The problem extends beyond the image of particular occupations to whole industries. An example is manufacturing, which has difficulty attracting young people to training positions because it is suffering from outdated and inaccurate perceptions of working conditions and the career opportunities it has available.⁴⁷

Teachers, those people who have a significant influence on the career choices of young people, do not have the desire or sufficient information to adequately promote careers in manufacturing.⁴⁸ [Diecraft Australia submission]

3.50 It is the Committee's view that the quality of careers guidance available to students is highly dependent on the experience and commitment of the teacher

45 Worthington Di Marzio, *A Research Report on the Effectiveness of Promotional Activities Associated with the 1995 Australian Training Awards*, March 1996, Exhibit No. 42.

46 *Submission No. 87*, p. 22.

47 Metal Trades Industry Association of Australia, *Submission No. 124*, p. 16.

48 *Submission No. 37*, p. 3.

assigned to the role. That this random factor has an enormous bearing in individual schools is amply supported by the evidence from employers and students.

In one of those colleges the teacher was very positive and keen and focused...I think he had a genuine interest in trying to orient the students towards a career...In the other school the teacher did not have those stronger qualities and I think that he — this is going to sound fairly harsh — was probably doing more of a disservice to his students than a service...it comes down to the support that these poor teachers are given in being able to provide reasonable advice to their students about careers.⁴⁹
[Mr David Barker, Diecraft Australia]

3.51 The first major problem with careers guidance for young people is that many teachers are ill equipped for the careers guidance role. Teachers, careers guidance officers and students who the Committee spoke with all agreed. It is a systemic problem and not the fault of individual teachers who may, without any specific training, find themselves the careers teacher simply because their teaching load allows time for it. Most are left to draw on their own life experiences, which in many cases is school to university and back to school, when advising students.⁵⁰ Typically, there will be one careers teacher, who may or may not be full-time, for as many as 1,000 to 1,200 students.

3.52 The level of demand and the fact that many have other teaching responsibilities, severely limits students' access to careers guidance teachers.

I think basically with our careers program we need to spend more time with the careers adviser. I think in the whole time at school I have spoken to my careers adviser twice.⁵¹ [Ms Melanie Roach, Student, Vincentia High School, Vincentia, NSW]

In one school the Committee visited the level of commitment to the role was so low that most students were not sure which teacher was responsible for careers guidance.

3.53 The students and teachers present in Kalgoorlie, at the last school forum the Committee conducted, encapsulated the impression the Committee was forming after talking to students all over Australia. This example is presented, not because it is the worst, **but because it is so absolutely typical of the situation in Australian schools.**

I think that one of the problems with the vocational education program is that the teachers that are doing it are just like other teachers, such as physical education and social studies teachers. They do not really know what is going on at all...It is just like the blind leading the

49 Transcript of Evidence, p. 202.

50 Ms Karyn Hart, President, Queensland Secondary Principals' Association, Transcript of Evidence, p. 346.

51 Transcript of Evidence, p. 1046.

*blind.*⁵² [Ms Claire Roberts, Student, Eastern Goldfields Senior High School, Kalgoorlie, WA]

*I have just finished university and this is my first year of teaching. I have been given the vocational education program for the Year 10s. I admit that I have no idea, so it is like one of the kids said: the blind leading the blind....That is what it is. Here I am and I am supposed to be able to teach it. I have gone straight through school and straight through uni, I had none of that given to me and now I have to go and give it to the kids. I am finding that really tough.*⁵³ [Ms Debbie Ralston, Teacher, Kambalda Senior High School, Kambalda, WA]

3.54 The second problem is that there is a gross imbalance between the emphasis, and the information available, on tertiary education and that available on other post-school career and education options. The quantity of material on the options available to young people is inversely proportional to destinations of the students.

*Our careers office is a really big thing. But, once again, it is all pushing towards university. If you ever want to know anything about university, it is always there, readily available, and people know everything about it. But, if you want to get into a trade as a fitter, a turner or a chef and you go to your careers officer and say, 'Are there any jobs around? Where can I go?', they will not know as much as they know about university.*⁵⁴ [Mr Josh Pearce, Student, Catholic Regional College, Traralgon, Vic]

*No-one gets told, 'You can get apprenticeships here. There are jobs you can do that don't need a university degree.' We get extensive programs on how to choose subjects to help you get the degree you want at uni but we have no programs to help people who do not want to go to uni, and I think that is what you need.*⁵⁵
[Ms Karla Levings, Student, Bribie Island State High School, Bribie Island, Qld]

3.55 The third problem is that careers counsellors do not appear to have at their fingertips comprehensive and up to date information on the age profiles of workers in industries, employment trends and known or anticipated skill shortages as well as information on training and qualifications requirements, career paths and salaries pertaining to various occupations. While they may have the latter for some occupations they do not have much information on employment trends, skills shortages and emerging opportunities.

52 *ibid.*, p. 1598 (emphasis added).

53 *ibid.*, p. 1601.

54 *ibid.*, p. 1156.

55 *ibid.*, p. 448.

3.56 Finally, and perhaps most significantly, careers guidance and education in schools does very little to develop, in young people, the personal qualities, attitudes, social skills and key competencies which employers value. It appears that students participating in the new workplace education programs are being well catered for in this respect but, ideally, the development of these attributes should be integral to the teaching of the entire curriculum.

The consequences of poor guidance

3.57 For Australia, one serious consequence of poor career guidance for young people is that serious skill shortages persist despite high unemployment and even higher youth unemployment. The systemic imbalance in favour of academic secondary and tertiary education contributes to a surplus of university graduates in some disciplines while good jobs in trades remain unfilled, or skilled migrants are sought, because insufficient young people are aware of the opportunities on offer and do not consider them attractive.

3.58 For individuals, the end result of poor career guidance is that some young people miss opportunities well suited to their interests and aptitudes or pursue unrealistic goals. Gender imbalances are perpetuated and some young people simply do not get jobs. When a young person lacks knowledge of the requirements of a position employers often, quite reasonably, interpret that as a lack of interest or commitment.

*The problem we have with young people coming and applying for jobs, and this probably harks back to the guidance officer, is that they do not really know what vocation they want to go into. We have a section on the application form and they will put down 'any apprenticeship' or 'any traineeship'. They will not stipulate exactly what they want. When the employer looks at that they say, 'This kid does not want a trade; he just wants a job.'*⁵⁶ [Mr Rodney Wilkinson, Managing Director, Mt Isa Group Apprenticeship, Traineeship and Employment]

One good example

John Paul College

3.59 Careers education and guidance programs in schools can be very successful. The Committee took evidence from John Paul College, a co-educational, ecumenical school in Logan City on the outskirts of Brisbane which has a comprehensive careers education program. The school claims to have consistently placed 98 to 100 per cent

56 ibid, p. 971.

of its students into employment or further education within two months of graduation.⁵⁷

3.60 John Paul College claims that its success is based on four elements which comprise its education strategy. The elements are: students are immersed in modern technology across the entire curriculum; students (and teachers) are expected to conform to high standards of self-discipline and social courtesy; careers education begins in pre-school and links students abilities and interest to the realities of the job market; and meaningful links with industry which are employed to meet the individual interests and needs of students.⁵⁸

3.61 The advantage to students of a program which delivers their education through entirely modern media is self-evident. These young people leave school computer literate and adaptive to changing circumstances.

3.62 The advantage to students of being taught to conform to a high standard of self-discipline and social courtesy is also quite obvious. John Paul College graduates, armed with self-confidence and good manners, exhibit the positive attitudes and presentability that employers are seeking. Unfortunately, this element of the John Paul College approach is often thought to be old fashioned and has all but disappeared from most Australian public schools. This is effectively reinforcing social disadvantage. Young people who do not learn appropriate manners at home are not likely to learn them at school and consequently they are less likely to get a job.

3.63 Careers education which begins in pre-school is something the Committee has not encountered before. The program at John Paul College is relatively well resourced with a full-time Director of Careers Education, who is responsible for developing the careers education program, and another full-time counsellor for about 2,300 students. However, every pastoral care teacher within the school is responsible to the Director for implementing the careers education program and, outside the program, every student in Years 10, 11 and 12 is timetabled to see the careers officers.⁵⁹ The system is supported by a significant battery of aptitude tests which, together with a student's demonstrated interests, aptitudes and academic results are used to determine whether a student's aspirations and performance accord with his or her potential.

3.64 The school does not enforce a regular program of work experience but arranges work placements to meet the needs of individual students. The school operates a job placement service for its graduates which is also available to all former students.⁶⁰

57 Mr Cecil Munns, Principal, John Paul College, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 1700.

58 *ibid.*, pp. 1700 and 1701.

59 *ibid.*, p. 1706.

60 *ibid.*, p. 1710.

Whose responsibility?

3.65 There is no doubt that schools have a major role to play in careers guidance. However they cannot improve until governments provide them with enough appropriately trained teachers who are equipped with comprehensive and up to date information. Schools need links with local employers so that they can inform their students about the jobs which exist in their area, who the employers are, the attitudes and aspects of personal presentation which are important to those employers and what skills, training and qualifications are involved.

3.66 The Committee believes that industry, perhaps through industry associations and ITABs, also has a major role to play in promoting career and training opportunities within their industry to young people, their parents and the community generally. In part this might be achieved by preparing and distributing information to careers guidance counsellors in schools. Some industry associations have already recognised this need.

I doubt that retail would have got much of a run as a career, because of the perception that it is the job you have until you get a proper job or it is income before you go on to uni is still a very big perception of retail. That is why we have put together this kit for the school counsellors — to show them the opportunities within retail so that they have a tool they can utilise. It shows what it is, salaries, job positions, case studies — the whole thing.⁶¹ [Miss Debra Templar, Training and Development Manager, Retail Training Victoria, Retail Traders Association of Victoria]

3.67 Other industry organisations have made little or no effort to promote opportunities to secondary students. The Australian Hotels Association is a case in point. The industry is experiencing extreme skills shortages in some occupations and locations. Despite significant involvement with the provision of hospitality programs at TAFE and university level, the Association does not have any strategy designed to inform secondary school students, or their careers counsellors, of the significant opportunities that exist now in the industry.⁶²

3.68 Mt Isa Mines is an example of a firm which is directly involved. Every year it visits schools to talk to students and teachers and it participates in career markets and workplace learning programs. It also takes all teachers new to the region through a program to familiarise them with the operations of the company and the opportunities it offers so that they are in a position to respond to inquiries from their students.⁶³ Mt Isa Mines has the advantage of being a major employer in an isolated community making coverage of the schools and other sources of recruitment

61 *Transcript of Evidence*, p.773.

62 Mr Richard Mulcahey, National Executive Director, Australian Hotels Association, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 784.

63 Mr Scott Roberts, General Manager, Human Resources, Mt Isa Mines Ltd, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 941.

relatively easy and inexpensive. Employers and industry associations in other small communities could, but typically do not, do likewise.

3.69 Careers education and guidance in schools should make young people aware of the medium to long term gains to be reaped by undertaking high quality training leading to recognised qualifications. It is well understood by students attending university who are willing to defer earning income and incur a HECS liability in the expectation of higher income and job satisfaction later. However, the deferred benefit arising from trade, technical and other training is not widely appreciated in competition with ‘the attractiveness of alternative vocations which involve less study, less commitment and are perceived as being more attractive financially’.⁶⁴

The way ahead

3.70 It will soon be possible for students to commence paid apprenticeships in Years 9 and 10;⁶⁵ commence apprenticeship training or other non-trade workplace education, perhaps as part of a dual recognition course, in Years 11 and 12; pursue an exclusively academic course through to Year 12 in preparation for university or perhaps some combination of tertiary preparation and vocational education. For students in some schools some of these options are already available.

3.71 Comprehensive and timely careers guidance is more important to young people than it has ever been. The present system is manifestly inadequate for the task for it offers too little guidance too late. There are no first, second and third best career options overall. Success is a young person making the most appropriate, the most satisfying, the most rewarding choice for himself or herself. Young people need early information and guidance to develop an awareness of their capabilities and interests so that they may make the most appropriate choice from the widening range of options.

3.72 The Committee strongly believes that all young people should be entitled to high quality careers guidance. Careers guidance needs to be much more sophisticated than a gate directing the academically capable towards university and the remainder to trades, retail and hospitality. Bright young people are needed desperately in today’s trades. Retail and hospitality employ young people in a full range of roles up and down the qualification spectrum. Young people do not know these things because careers guidance in Australia’s schools has failed them.

3.73 Careers education and guidance should start early, certainly not later than Year 7 if young people are going to have the option to choose trade training in school at Year 9. An Australian Defence Force survey of new recruits found that the mean age at which most had first thought of joining the ADF was 13.1 years,⁶⁶ or about Year 8. Children are receptive to careers information at an early age and late

64 Metal Trades Industry Association of Australia, *Submission No. 124*, p. 17.

65 Minister for Schools, Vocational Education and Training, Press Release, *Industry Training for 18,000 Students*, 10 August 1997.

66 Brigadier O’Brien, Director General, Defence Force Recruiting, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 322.

primary school is an appropriate time to start presenting careers information to children.

3.74 Identifying appropriate individuals who are available to promote industries and occupations to young people presents difficulties. Clearly, because in most cases their experience does not enable them, teachers cannot do it. A few public spirited companies and employers cannot be expected to carry an expense and responsibility which appropriately belongs to entire industries and the community generally.

*Our industry is continually downsizing. Attempting to get a person who can go out to a school and say, 'It's the greatest thing since sliced bread,' is going to be very difficult. I think that is where government has a role to play.*⁶⁷ [Mr Antonio Palladino, Chief Executive Officer, ElectroSkills Australia]

3.75 Most Group Training Companies understand the deficiencies in careers guidance and education and are well placed to be a part of the solution. Group Training Companies know their regional employment markets and local skills deficiencies. They have strong existing links with local employers and understand employers' requirements. Importantly, they also know how to find and communicate with the young people who want employment and training.

*One change that I would like to bring about, if I could resource it, would be a greater involvement with all of the Year 11s and 12s and even Year 10s. We could become part of the training program so that they understand the world of work that they are going into and we understand more about the people who may be coming in.*⁶⁸
[Mr Peter Derkley, Chief Executive, Tasmanian Hospitality Group Apprenticeship Scheme Inc.]

3.76 Some group training companies, particularly in regional areas, have assumed a promotional role and visit students in Years 10 to 12 as part of their recruitment activity. Generally they find that their efforts to promote trades and other non-university training opportunities have already been countered by the other elements of the system which place most emphasis on the university options.

3.77 Unfortunately, few Group Training Companies have the resources to address the deficiencies in careers guidance in a significant way. They must be enabled to get into the schools, TAFEs and labour market programs to make their knowledge available to more young people.

67 *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 78.

68 *ibid*, p. 692.

3.78 Recommendation 3.5

The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Minister for Schools, Vocational Education and Training, through the Ministerial Council:

- **establish comprehensive careers guidance, appropriately resourced, as an entitlement for all secondary students;**
- **ensure all careers guidance teachers have reliable access to data on workforce trends, anticipated skill shortages and the employment outlook for occupations, nationally and by region;**
- **encourage secondary schools to exploit school-industry links established through workplace learning programs to enhance careers guidance services to all students;**
- **provide for the enhancement of careers education and guidance in secondary schools by providing funding to develop more teachers for the role; and**
- **fund group training companies to promote traineeships and apprenticeships, and to participate generally in careers education and guidance, in secondary schools.**

University graduates

3.79 Students seeking guidance on tertiary education opportunities are generally catered for well. If there is a deficiency it is that young people are guided into courses while little effort is made to ensure they are informed about the market demand for the resulting qualification. While the Committee recognises that pursuing an education has valuable intrinsic rewards for individuals and the community it also believes the young people have a right to reliable guidance on the present and projected demand for the resulting qualifications. As a consequence of not receiving this guidance, some young people graduate from university with unrealistic expectations.

Having a qualification these days does not guarantee a job at all — and that leads to frustration. We have some young people on our books who have graduated from ANU in disciplines that employers regard as fairly esoteric. Anthropology is one, for example. Employers say to them, ‘That is fine, but how does this help me run my business?’ Those young people feel frustrated... They have come through the system, they have put in four years at university and find that, on the surface, their qualification is of little assistance in getting a job.⁶⁹

[Mr Graeme Trompf, ACT Youth Joblink]

3.80 The lack of careers information and guidance also ensures that some young people lack awareness of where the job opportunities for graduates may exist.

69 *ibid.*, p. 23.

*One thing the recession was kind to us about is enabling a lot of people to realign their attitudes to working in retailing, especially graduates. We have taken a lot of university graduates into our traineeship schemes in the last three to four years, which is quite unique in the history of retailing... these are the future senior managers of the company.*⁷⁰ [Mr Stephen Young, National Personnel Planning Manager, Woolworths Ltd]

3.81 It is also quite possible for young people who have not been in employment while studying at school and university to graduate without the skills needed to find a job. A university degree is not necessarily complete or adequate preparation for employment. The skills required of university graduates by employers are communication, ability to learn, cooperation and team work.

*Several employers have reported frustration at having to direct resources to develop young employees' generic skills.*⁷¹ [University of Ballarat submission]

3.82 Recommendation 3.6

The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Minister for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs require universities to include in faculty handbooks and other promotional material information on the employment outlook for graduates of courses offered by the university.

70 *ibid*, p. 71.

71 *Submission No. 48*.

