

Submission Number: 24
Date Received: 16/01/09



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Australian Education Union

Submission

to the

House of Representatives Standing Committee

On

Education and Training Inquiry into

Combining Schools and Work:

Supporting Successful Transitions

January 2009

Angelo Gavrielatos
Federal President

Australian Education Union
Ground Floor
120 Clarendon Street
Southbank VIC 3006

Susan Hopgood
Federal Secretary

Telephone: 61 3 9693 1800
Facsimile: 61 3 9693 1805
E-mail: aeu@aeufederal.org.au

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The Australian Education Union represents 175,000 teachers and educators in the primary, secondary, TAFE and early childhood sectors throughout Australia. As such, it is uniquely placed to represent the views of teachers to the Standing Committee of Education and Training Inquiry into Combining School and Work: Supporting Effective Transitions.

1. Introduction

Managing the demands of study and part-time work or casual employment can have a significant impact on the educational outcomes of the students involved, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds or those forced to work for economic reasons. In this context the “overarching principles” identified in AEU Curriculum Policy are relevant. They are also relevant to the development of programs designed to improve youth transitions from school to further education, training or employment and expanding the variety of pathways by which this transition occurs.

- 1.2 The principles include a recognition that the role of schools is to develop students to be active citizens in a democratic global society, and that in this context:
 - schooling should assist in overcoming inequalities between social groups, seeking to produce equal and high educational outcomes for all social groups;
 - it should provide students with a basis for full participation in the social, cultural, political and economic life of the community;
 - it should develop in students a capacity for critical thought, informed opinion and the skills and knowledge to be socially responsible contributors to Australian society interested in the creation of a better global future;
 - in the national interest it should ensure there are highly educated and qualified people across all areas of the economy and society.
- 1.3 The key rationale that should inform policy related to youth transitions, pathways and education overall, should be to create a society where all young people receive the opportunity and support to achieve satisfying and full adult lives, socially, culturally and economically. Fundamental to this is the principle that all young people have the right to access a complete secondary education and its equivalent in training or employment. The education, training and employment accessed must be relevant to each young person’s circumstances, but all students, regardless of background, should have equal access and opportunities to educational pathways, and to all pathways from school to work or further study. When students miss out on educational opportunities, or have their level of achievement affected because they are forced to work for economic reasons or reasons related to their social background it negates this principle.
- 1.4 The AEU accordingly believes that it is necessary to ensure that all students, regardless of background, are not disadvantaged through being forced into excessive part time

work due to financial considerations during their school years, and that pro-active measures should be put into place by the Commonwealth Government to ensure that this does not happen.

- 1.5 The AEU supports the establishment of a National Commissioner for Children and Young People to provide national leadership, research, education and advocacy in relation to the welfare, interests and wellbeing of children and young people, to monitor and report on their welfare and status, and encourage the participation of children and young people in decision-making that affects their lives.

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

- 2.1 The AEU supports the provision of a variety of educational options for young people. These options should not impede students in accessing a range of educational and other pathways. It is important that the skills gained through students' part-time or casual work are recognised and accredited.

3. Identifying more flexible, innovative and/or alternative approaches to attaining a senior secondary certificate which support students to combine work and study

- 3.1 Flexibility of curriculum and delivery to provide a variety of options for young peoples' situations and learning styles must be encouraged. The development of alternative pathways should lead to rewarding educational and vocational outcomes.
- 3.2 Programs must be supported by adequate resourcing to ensure quality and accessibility for young people.
- 3.3 "Flexibility" should not be a code for efficiency enforcement, cost-cutting or the imposition of ideological agendas such as privatisation. Nor should it be arbitrarily linked to unrelated matters such as the imposition of industrial conditions on education and training staff. Workload demands and the degree to which educational institutions and educators should and can take responsibility for activities conducted off-site should be appropriately defined and supported.

- 3.4 Areas of responsibility between educational providers must be clearly defined and clear arrangements put in place to address issues such as duty of care, supervision of student work, quality assurance, and safety.
- 3.5 A well resourced TAFE system can play an important role in the development of alternative approaches to secondary education, and may facilitate smoother transitions between school, work and further education, including courses involving the accreditation of skills obtained through part-time work. Cooperation between secondary schools and the TAFE sector is an important way to enhance student options and encouraging higher retention to Year 12. A well resourced and supported TAFE sector is accordingly central to these goals. The present moves towards contestability and competition within the VET sector are of considerable concern in this regard. Schools are far better positioned to establish effective links with a stable and resourced TAFE system than with a fragmented network of private providers.
- 3.6 Access to education and training should not depend on the capacity to pay. The AEU continues to oppose student fees for school, TAFE and university courses.

4. 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

- 4.1 Government policy must take into account and, where appropriate, address issues such as the effects of social, demographic, regional, and economic factors on participation and attainment.
- 4.2 All students should have the full range of educational opportunities available to them, and no student should be forced into any particular pathway due to financial pressures or social or economic disadvantage.
- 4.3 Financial assistance is required to allow and encourage students from disadvantaged backgrounds to remain in full time study until completion of secondary school, or equivalent.
- 4.4 Adequate support should be provided at the school level to ensure that disadvantaged students are supplied with appropriate information and counselling services concerning the options available to them, including information about working conditions, status and vulnerability within career paths, as well as the impact of factors such as gender stereotyping, class segregation and ethnicity. Schools should be provided with the resources to provide such services.

- 4.5 Careers advisors and teachers in schools and TAFE should receive the time, resources, training and qualifications to allow them to adequately attend to the greater demands relating to the provision of careers advice that are being placed on them.

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

- 5.1 Educational settings must acknowledge that many young people are combining work and study. Research shows that where this is properly managed it does not necessarily adversely affect the chances of educational attainment and may be associated with better long-term employment outcomes. Educational provision should be sufficiently flexible to accommodate study and work where appropriate in matters such as course scheduling and homework. This will require appropriate resourcing.
- 5.2 Part-time and casual employment needs to be appropriately managed, involve an appropriate number of hours, and involve appropriate working conditions for students studying full-time.
- 5.3 When students are forced to take up excessive part-time work due to financial considerations it impacts most on students from disadvantaged, thus magnifying their disadvantage. Support mechanisms, as previously discussed, need to be in place to ensure that no student is forced into excessive part time work due to financial considerations during their school years.

6. 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)

- 6.1 The AEU supports programs and initiatives aimed at increasing retention rates to the end of Year 12, or equivalent, as there is strong evidence that doing so maximises an individual's chances of a high standard of living and an opportunity to participate in society. School based training pathways and VET are one way in which to facilitate this goal.
- 6.2 Issues of resourcing and equity are central to building schools capable of achieving this, particularly in the public education sector which teaches the majority of students at risk of early leaving. A well resourced school with good facilities and small class sizes, able

to give attention to individual students and put programs into place to address their particular needs is far more likely to be able to encourage students to continue than one that is poorly resourced.

- 6.3 All vocational education and training programs need to be underpinned by a comprehensive curriculum approach. VET should teach broad-based skills and knowledge not just a set of narrow skills.
- 6.4 Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments should support the expansion of structured work placements as a part of VET in Schools. Co-ordination of these should be centrally funded with dedicated co-ordinators with experience (wherever possible) in industry, training and schools.
- 6.5 State and territory governments should develop and fund methods of educating employers about the importance and nature of work placements, their role in ensuring successful training of VET in school students, and the expectations they can reasonably have about the students.
- 6.6 A representative national body — including representatives of government, industry, unions (including education unions) and public VET providers (both TAFE and schools) — should be established with the responsibility of developing a coherent national policy position that clarifies and prioritises the objectives and expectations for school-based VET.