



AUSTRALIAN CHAMBER OF  
COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY

# Learning to work

A helping hand for young Australians





## Learning to work – a helping hand for young Australians



**Industry Career development**

**Work ready graduates**

**Apprenticeships and  
traineeships**

**Employer-facing employment  
services**

**Workplace regulations**



## Message from the ACCI President



The business community is concerned about the future of our young people. There are too many falling through the gaps of an employment and skills framework that hasn't worked in their best interests for some time.

Nearly a decade ago the Intergenerational Report outlined the issues facing Australia around our ageing population and the need to increase the participation of the many Australians not engaged in the workforce, and still we are not maximising our pool of young people to their full potential.

It is concerning, even disheartening, to see large numbers of young people without a job, not in full-time education or not actively looking for work. Even during Australia's economic boom young people experienced higher levels of unemployment than the rest of the population, and now with the labour market tightening further,

the prospects of seeing improvement without further intervention is minimal.

Even though there is a tight fiscal situation and the Australian Government is rightly reviewing existing programmes and their effectiveness, it is imperative that support is maintained to help young Australians learn to work. Simply stated, the youth unemployment rates and low levels of participation by young people in the work force are unacceptable and require urgent attention. The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) seeks that the 2014/15 Federal Budget specifically addresses this issue. ACCI also calls on both state and federal governments to take a holistic approach to policies and programmes in the medium to long term that will ensure that a whole cohort of young people do not miss the opportunity to successfully transition from education into work. This broader approach draws together five key elements to support young Australians facing the challenge of transitioning from 'Learning to work':

- **Industry Career development** - Young people need professional career guidance informed by industry needs.
- **Work ready graduates** – School leavers and graduates need to be equipped with the right tools to adapt to the workplace. A partnership between education and industry is needed, and all school leavers should meet minimum literacy and numeracy requirements.
- **Apprenticeships and traineeships** – restore funding support and employer incentives in a targeted way to those entry level traineeships that give young people a good start.
- **Employment Services** that are equally focused on the job seeker and the employer. The journey for our young people doesn't end after education; finding the right job is just as hard as learning the skills.
- **Workplace regulation that encourages employers to give young people a job.**

*We offer our assistance to governments both state and federal to work together to overcome the existing obstacles for young people. Securing the future employment of young Australians should be a priority for all. Learning to work is about lending a helping hand to young people.*

**Peter Hood**

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Peter Hood', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**President**

**Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry**

**April 2014**

## Setting the scene

The Global Financial Crisis (GFC) plunged most wealthy nations into recession. Australia escaped a 'technical recession' but unemployment rose by one third and young people were among the worst affected by the crisis. Five years on and young Australians (aged 15-24 years) continue to have a much higher rate of unemployment (14.9 per cent or 313,400 people) than the rest of the Australian workforce (six per cent).<sup>1</sup> However, this disparity is only part of the story.

As at June 2013, there were 3.1 million young Australians aged 15 to 24. Of those, over 500,000<sup>2</sup> do not have a job nor are they in full-time or part time education. This is a staggering number revealing that in addition to those officially classified as unemployed; around 194,000 have disengaged from the system entirely, with an additional 16,000 undertaking part time education with no work.

In the current economic climate one in six young people will not be fully contributing to Australia's economic prosperity, and are not getting the start they need to maximise the contribution in the future. This low rate of participation contrasts with the economic need to increase workforce participation. Our population is ageing and to maintain our standard of living we need to both prolong the working life of mature age people and draw as many new entrants into the workforce as possible. At the moment, for every worker who is younger than 25, there are around 2.6 workers aged 45 years or older.<sup>3</sup>

It is widely recognised that there is a need to focus on the successful transition of young people from education to work. In 2009, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) signed a National Education Agreement, where a key objective was 'that young people make a successful transition from school to work and further study'.<sup>4</sup> When reviewing the success of this key objective the COAG Reform Council in its most recent report raises concerns indicating that progress needs to be faster. From 2006 to 2011, the proportion of 17-24 year olds engaged in full-time study increased nationally from 28.6 per cent to 32.0 per cent. This increase was not enough to offset the falls in the proportion engaged in full-time employment, from 41.2 per cent to 36.3 per cent.

A successful move from education to work is important for full economic participation in later years of life. Young people who are not engaged in work or full-time education are more likely to become disengaged for longer periods and instead of contributing to Australia's prosperity too many of them will become a drain on the social support system. This disadvantage is often intergenerational or can lead to a cycle of disadvantage.

ACCI agrees that attaining Year 12 or a vocational training equivalent assists young people to successfully move from school to work, or into further education and training which in turn leads to work. Targets are a useful measure but should not be the only focus for educators. There should be greater emphasis on high quality, national qualifications and productivity-enhancing skill sets delivered that are developed cooperatively with industry and education providers.

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1. ABS: *Labour Force Statistics, February 2014* In February 2014, the workforce participation rate increased for all Australians but declined for young people (falling from 68.2% to 67.6%)
  2. ABS: *Survey of Education and Work, Australia, Catalogue no. 6227.0 (May 2013)*
  3. Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Australian Jobs 2013*
  4. Council of Australian Governments 2009, 'National Education Agreement', COAG, Canberra, page 5. Viewed 15 August 2012.

## Learning to Work

Often when we talk about youth transitions it is focused on school to work, but there is a broader imperative to ensure that whether young people are at school or are graduating from other educational institutions, it is important that we focus on ensuring young people are able to obtain a job and commence successfully their future career.

In this document, *Learning to Work* not only focuses on this successful transition but also on how young people can acquire the skills they need to prepare them to work. It is not a new concept. Learning to work has been used in the past for a number of different concepts and policies. It is appropriate to give the term a “refresh” in these times when the future of today’s youth is a subject of widespread attention.

## The challenges

### Early school leavers

Early school leavers are amongst the most vulnerable job seekers. In 2012, there were 319,800 school leavers aged 15-24 years old, of which 25 per cent had left before completing year 12.<sup>5</sup> Young people who leave school early take longer to find employment,<sup>6</sup> and will face the difficult challenge of finding work with little or no skills. But yet returning to school, in many cases, is not an option. They are relatively more likely to have low literacy and numeracy skills and possibly other personal issues that prevent them returning to an environment that hasn’t worked for them. The challenge for governments and the community is how best to engage with these people before they become totally discouraged and fall further through the cracks. A substantial proportion, around 25 per cent, of those who have not completed school, obtained a certificate III or higher qualification do not get a job at all. This group fails to make the transition from student to worker.<sup>7</sup>

### Improve the outcomes of vocational training at schools

Vocational Education Training (VET) at schools has been one avenue offered to encourage school retention. However, policies that emphasise engagement over vocational outcomes have led to concerns by industry and other educational providers that the quality of VET delivered at schools is often not to the standard required for employment. These policies can also reinforce the view that exists that vocational training is primarily for those with a poor academic record and/or at risk of dropping out of school.

Students with a disability face even greater challenges, and suitable qualifications combined with work experience while they are still in school may deliver better work outcomes for them. There is a strong body of evidence that demonstrates that students that undertake work experience as part of their study have a greater success rate of achieving an employment outcome post-school.

Australia needs to maximise the investment made in VET in schools, and ACCI supports moves by the federal government to update the VET in schools national framework. These discussions have already identified that there is a difference between VET programs delivered as part of the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF), and other vocationally-related learning programs. In relation to AQF VET qualifications, industry is keen to work with federal and state/territory

5. ABS, *Education and Work Australia – May 2013, catalogue no.6227.0*

6. NCVER, *From education to employment: how long does it take? This report examines the experiences of young Australians during the transition from full-time student to worker using data from the 1995 cohort of the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY95). The authors focus on two aspects of the transition to employment: the time taken to find any job and the time taken to find a full-time permanent job. The type of job obtained is not the focus.*

7. *Ibid.*

governments as well as schools to ensure that the vocational training at schools is delivered at a level that is appropriate for industry needs, and suitable for the facilities and teaching experience of the staff. Employers need to be part of the discussion with the school system so that the system can become more effective in building work skills. Stronger links need to be forged to ensure the quality of the VET qualifications in schools. Barriers to increasing the number of school based apprenticeships should be addressed, including:

- ensuring that parents as well as students have a better understanding of the benefits of apprenticeships;
- reducing the mismatch between industry skill needs and training offered; and,
- a need for greater flexibility in school timetabling to enable students undertaking an apprenticeship to be released at times that better suit employers, including block release.

### Reading, writing, arithmetic – the basics for work

In relation to the second category of vocational learning, there is a wide range of courses currently called VET in schools that include literacy, numeracy and employability courses that are preparatory rather than specifically focused on occupational outcomes. More attention should be given in raising the standards of literacy and numeracy by addressing these issues through the national school curriculum via high quality teaching and by States and Territories ensuring that there are minimum requirements for school leavers for literacy and numeracy, rather than relying so heavily on the VET system. In this way improvements to literacy and numeracy will take place in schools rather than in the VET sector.

There is a disconnect between the minimum standards of NAPLAN testing, where over 90 per cent achieve the minimum standard compared to international benchmarks for literacy and numeracy where 60 per cent of Australians do not meet the benchmark relating to functional workplace literacy and numeracy. The increasing evidence that Australia is losing ground against other countries in relative terms in the areas of literacy and numeracy even further reinforces the urgency of improving the school outcomes in these core skill areas.

However, this action at school level does not address the young people who have already left school, nor those currently nearing the completion of their schooling. These young people need stronger foundation skills including literacy, numeracy and employability skills, which are best embedded in vocational qualifications that are occupational specific rather than delivered as stand-alone qualifications. The VET sector has a reputation for delivering national qualifications courses that successfully combine theory and practice, including traineeships and apprenticeships, which are more likely to lead to work outcomes. At present there are many courses delivered, including qualifications accredited by the States and Territories, which are counted as "VET" which are preparatory rather than national VET qualifications. The role of these courses and whether they should be seen as VET qualifications at all should be open for debate.

### The changing workforce and young people

Another barrier facing marginalised young people is the changing workplace and structure of the economy. Like most advanced economies, the Australian workforce is becoming more highly skilled with a diminishing number of unskilled and semi-skilled entry level jobs. The need to be a more highly educated worker has mainly been driven through the introduction of technological advances, greater workforce flexibility and economic reforms. The lack of skills is one factor impacting on the nearly 500,000 young people without a job.

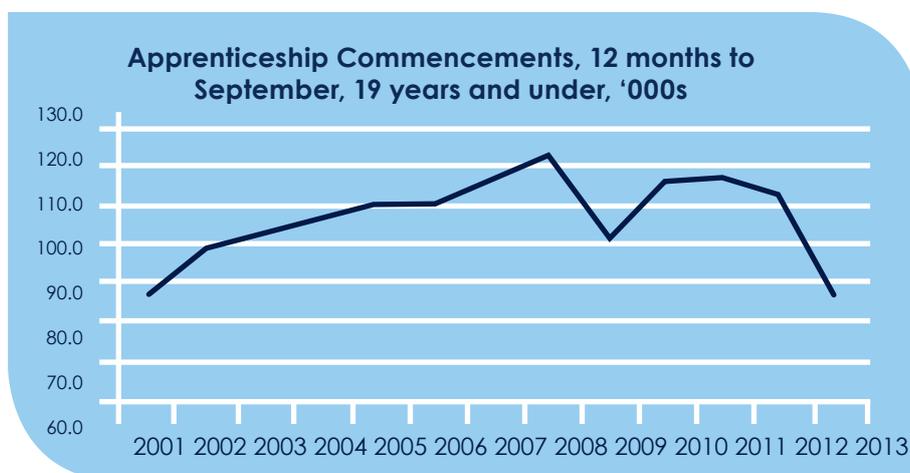
There should be more opportunities for training and qualification attainment integrated with work and employment experience, and we need to encourage employers to offer these opportunities. This includes the maintenance of realistic wage rates for junior employees having regard to their work readiness and inexperience, and continued support for apprenticeships and traineeships which offer structured and on-the-job training and most importantly work experience. Employment costs must be commensurate with individuals' workforce experience and productive capacity.

### Building skills through apprenticeships and traineeships

Another significant issue for young people is access to apprenticeship opportunities. Strong evidence of the value of work-integrated learning saw the expansion 20 years ago of apprenticeships, which had worked so successfully in the trade occupations, into the non-trades areas, providing opportunities for all Australians, but particularly those transitioning from school to work, and young unemployed people.

Employment outcomes achieved through apprenticeships and traineeships are strong. In 2010, 91 per cent of trade apprenticeship graduates and 89.8 per cent of non-trades apprenticeship graduates were employed after training. The fundamental principle of work integrated learning embodied in apprenticeships and traineeships is strongly supported. Yet apprenticeships and traineeships have been undermined by policy decisions of the previous federal government in the last few years including employer incentive cuts and support for union-driven wage rate increases that are expected to see a continued drop-off in the number of commencements of apprenticeships since July 2012. Figure 1 indicates the dramatic impact this has had on the opportunities for young people aged 19 years and under. The number of commencements in the year to September 2013 in both trades and non-trades apprenticeships for young people is now at their lowest level since 2001. In some trades a further decline in junior apprentice numbers can be expected following increases awarded in the two year review of modern awards.

Figure 1.



The Minister for Industry in the new Abbott Government has initiated a review of vocational training, including a look at how Australia's apprenticeship system can be improved. ACCI welcomes this review and hopes that there will be a halt to the ad hoc removal of employer incentives for apprenticeships that was characteristic of the last two years of the previous Government; instead, there should be a look at reinstating targeted incentives to deliver the best job outcomes.

## Career development

Career advisors play an important role in providing guidance to young people. They are first point of call for many young people and can often influence the skills a young person learns. Career advisors, not just at schools but in other education institutions and in employment services, guide young people to determine the skills and course of study they will undertake to ultimately end up in the workforce. Too often the career advisors are far removed from the industry and not fully aware of the skill requirements. It would be unrealistic to think that a career advisor would be knowledgeable in all industries; therefore, a better approach needs to be considered where industry can efficiently inform the network of careers advisors regarding opportunities and employer needs.

## Employability skills

In addition to appropriate vocational skills, employers are interested in a range of 'other' work skills when recruiting. They are looking for employability qualities such as working as a team member, motivation, strong client services (if the job required those skills), communication skills, problem solving and reliability.<sup>8</sup> How do young people 'learn to work' if they are not gaining these skills while in education and they can't get a job because they don't have the right skills – it is catch 22. Without the necessary employability skills young people will experience prolonged unemployment.

Preparing job-ready graduates is not just an imperative for schools but also for tertiary education. In early 2014, ACCI partnered with Universities Australia to focus attention on removing the barriers to work integrated learning opportunities such as internships for university students. The importance of these initiatives highlights the imperative for young people to not just have technical skills, but the knowledge and experience in how to apply them.

In 2002, ACCI worked with the Business Council of Australia to produce a report on the employability skills identified by employers as important for work. The skills identified have changed little over the years, and have formed the basis for further work in the foundation skills package and Core Skills for Work. It is imperative that work continues on incorporating these skills across the education system.

Young people also need to be well prepared to safely undertake work, so an appropriate understanding of work health and safety issues and approaches to deal with challenges and pressures of work should continue to be embedded within education programs.

## Employment services

Young people who don't transition smoothly from school to work and become unemployed will need a helping hand to get a job. The federal government funds employment service providers to help young people find work. Even though there are programmes within the employment service model that are specifically designed to assist young people, the outcomes are lower than for other job seekers.

Job Services Australia is strongly incentivised towards helping those unemployed who are most disadvantaged, but is offered little incentive to assist those who have not been unemployed for long or not among the most disadvantaged. This may sound reasonable but ignores the reality that the most disadvantaged will be better served with a broader pool of job seekers to offer employers. If a placement is made before a person becomes long term unemployed that is a better outcome for all. Also, policies that prevent early school leavers from being assisted to obtain a job need to be revisited. Offering endless training programmes with no job outcomes does not appear to be serving the person well.

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8. In August 2013, the Australian Government released the Core Skills for Work Developmental Framework (CSfW). The CSfW can be used by trainers, educators and those who work with students or job seekers to help them more explicitly address the development of these 'other' skills.

When looking at the employment services model it is also important to consider how the incentives are skewed towards the supply of job seekers and provides little to no incentives for the providers to work with employers. Job Services Australia providers have a large pool of job seekers on their caseload but only 5 per cent of employers lodge any vacancies with them. Service providers need to work in partnership with industry organisations to improve the profile and scope of the service offered to employers.

It's not just a matter of jobs on the register; of course, the jobs have to be there in the first place. ACCI recognises that employment growth is fundamentally driven through business vitality and not through short term government programmes and initiatives. However, the regulatory environment affects the full or true cost of employment and impacts on business growth, and the policy environment shapes the relative attractiveness of the options available to business.

## Learning to work – a helping hand for young Australians

The business community strongly supports the federal government returning the budget to surplus. Heightened budget discipline and control on expenditure is imperative, and the National Commission of Audit undertaking a comprehensive review of government spending is welcome. However, sometimes programmes can be reviewed and removed at a micro level without taking into account the long term productivity and economic gains that can be made in keeping successful programmes working.

Therefore, even in this difficult fiscal climate, ACCI believes that there is merit in continuing to have a programme that supports young people transition from learning to work that has a more holistic approach. This approach brings into consideration the substantial savings that can be achieved through lower unemployment levels, including welfare savings, as well as the contributions to a productive economy and increases in taxation revenue from higher employment

### Short term - Budget 2014/15

In the short term, ACCI recommends that the Australian Government incorporates a Learning to Work programme in the May 2014 Budget to ensure the momentum created by the individual programmes and training systems such as apprenticeships are not completely lost. This programme should include the best of existing programs as well as elements of the broader medium to long term approach outlined below that ACCI believes will achieve strong outcomes for young people.

The Learning to Work package should include:

- Funding for youth transitions support and assisting schools develop stronger links with industry to improve connections between the vocational training programmes in schools and local employers.
- Commitment of the Commonwealth and encouragement for State/Territory governments to work with industry to identify key entry level occupations and traineeships and apprenticeships that can kick-start employment combined with structured training for young people. These specific apprenticeship pathways can ensure that funding for employer incentives and state support for training is targeted on training that industry directly identifies as most suitable to young job seekers.

- Specific funding support to ensure that within the traineeships, additional foundation skill competency units are incorporated, including literacy and numeracy and employability skills, so as to better prepare those young people that are assessed as not being job ready due to a lack of these skills.
- Expansion of the school based initiatives for young people with disability to obtain work experience which will hopefully lead to productive work on leaving school.
- Conversion of part or all of the Work for the Dole programme to incorporate work and training for work, built around a traineeship model, which effectively subsidises the trainee wages of those young people that have been so long without work so as to enable them to find a suitable position in industry. Work for the Dole will be more successful if combined with structured training to provide the skills needed to stay in the workforce longer.

In addition, the machinery of government decision that moved disability employment services to the Department of Social Services should be reversed. It is inefficient to split the employment services roles between two portfolio responsibilities. It is imperative that the Government recognises the critical need to have 'one point of contact for the employer' approach, which can commence with this move, and be consolidated by a revised employment services approach commencing in July 2015.

These immediate changes should create the foundations needed to transition into the medium and long term five pronged approach proposed by ACCI.

### Medium to longer term five-pronged approach

The ACCI *Learn to Work* five pronged approach covers the areas that need attention while providing a holistic approach to helping young people transition from school to work. They are:

1. Industry career development;
2. Work ready graduates ;
3. Apprenticeships and traineeships ;
4. Employer-facing employment services; and
5. Workplace regulations that encourage employers to give young people a job.

ACCI recommends a holistic approach to helping young people transition from learning (across the education system) to work. What is needed is a programme that takes into consideration the challenges currently facing young people transitioning from education to work, with programme components that complement each other.

### Industry career development

Industry should have a stronger voice outlining the opportunities available to young people. Given that parents also play a critical role in assisting young people making career choices it would seem a natural step forward to incorporate parents in activities outlining industry opportunities. The federal government along with industry representatives worked to develop a National Careers Development Strategy that would see the guidance given to young people for their careers become more focused and better informed yet it has not been taken forward. ACCI would like to see career advisors having stronger links with industry so that they have a clearer understanding of industry needs.

Career advice is not just relevant to schools but is a lifelong need for job seekers. More leadership in this area is required, and implementation of the ideas generated through the National Career Development Strategy need to be funded.



**Industry Career development**

**Work ready graduates**

**Apprenticeships and  
traineeships**

**Employer-facing employment  
services**

**Workplace regulations**

### Work ready graduates

We need to better address the foundation skills of literacy, numeracy and employability skills. ACCI firmly believes that minimum literacy and numeracy requirements for school leavers should be implemented. Early intervention is important before young people seek to move to another education stream or try to enter the workforce.

Having minimum requirement for literacy and numeracy and then testing student levels prior to them leaving school can allow the school an opportunity to proactively address the deficiency rather than those students moving to another educational institution. Western Australia is leading the way with the West Australian Minister for Education The Hon. Peter Collier MLC, announcing in 2013 that students exiting year 12 would need to reach a minimum standard of literacy and numeracy to achieve their Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE) from 2016. The minimum standard students are required to achieve is Level 3 of the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF).

Schools are fundamentally about education that covers the foundation needed for people to operate in our society. These skills include literacy and numeracy; however there are an increasing number of a young people undertaking vocational training at schools. To ensure young people are work ready graduates when they leave school, there needs to be improvements in the quality and standards of both the foundation skills and vocational training delivered in schools.

In relation to vocational education, there needs to be a much stronger focus on improving quality and better recognising the credit for vocational training at schools in the post-school training systems. Quality starts with the teachers, trainers and academics supporting our young people. There should be consistent national standards across State/Territory borders to provide for a flexible national workforce with improved capacity for cross-border migration to allow our workforce to meet labour/skills demands more easily. Industry should be represented to guide the quality and standards to ensure there is an industry voice in the setting of teaching and learning standards for all levels of education.

ACCI supports an emphasis on quality across the education and training system for both educators as well as graduates. For too long the Higher Education system has focused on theoretical learning with an insufficient number of courses incorporating practical elements before a student commences work. Work Integrated Learning (WIL) provides opportunities for higher education students to apply the theory and skills they learn at university in workplaces, and ACCI is committed to working with Universities Australia and other key stakeholders on implementing a national WIL strategy to improve the job readiness of university graduates in line with the Statement of Intent released in February 2014.



## Apprenticeships and traineeships

There should be more opportunities for qualifications to be earned with embedded work and employment experience, not fewer, and we need to encourage employers to offer these opportunities. This includes the maintenance of realistic wage rates for first-year junior apprentices and trainees, and a better understanding of the barriers facing employers in engaging with the current complex regulatory and support arrangements.

Government policy needs to rebalance the emphasis of apprenticeships to be about commencements as well as completions, and re-establish the role that both trades and non-trades apprenticeships play in transitioning young people from school to work. This includes effective incentives for employers to offer opportunities for this valuable work-integrated learning. It also includes working with state governments to appropriately fund the training of suitable entry-level apprenticeships. It is essential that we achieve a significant increase in apprenticeship commencements in both trade and non-trades areas if we are going to best serve young Australians and this can be attained through industry helping both state and federal governments effectively target funding support.

ACCI continues to support the work on national harmonisation that is expected to reduce barriers to apprentice labour mobility and increase consistency of pathways into apprenticeships across states and territories. Harmonisation, coupled with the move towards Apprenticeship Centres becoming more an industry driven one-stop-shop that is delivering advice, mentoring and support will see an improvement in both commencements and completions of apprenticeships.

## Employer-facing employment services

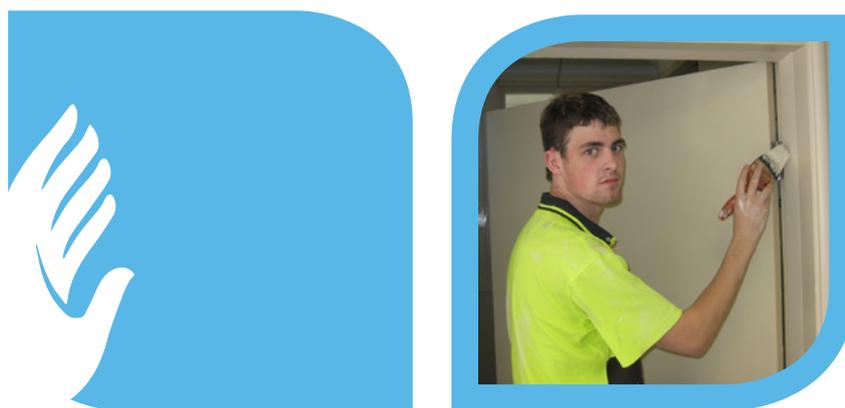
The level of assistance for young people who have not transitioned smoothly is mainly provided by government funded employment service providers. It is critically important to get right the forthcoming review of employment services. Employment services provided by the federal government through Job Services Australia and disability services networks need to be more employer/demand focused. There is merit in looking at how other countries provide employment assistance to young unemployed people.<sup>9</sup> Policies relating to services for young people, including early school leavers, need to be revisited to ensure that there are incentives for earlier placement rather than allow a young person to drift into long term unemployment or disengagement.

Service providers need to work in partnership with industry organisations to improve the profile and scope of the service to employers. The employment service provider needs to better acknowledge that they have two clients, the job seeker and the employer as this will benefit the job seeker as well as the employer. The delivery of a single industry facing employment service model is more likely to achieve better outcomes where Job Services Australian and Disability Employment Service policy and administration are managed within the same portfolio responsibility.

## Workplace regulations that encourage employers to give young people a job

There has been a range of new labour costs and red-tape imposts, especially for small to medium sized employers in service based sectors, which has sapped the competitiveness, confidence and productivity of these firms. These include increased costs and inflexibilities arising under the 'modern awards' which came into effect in January 2010 as well as further claims to increase junior rates of pay.

Australia is a part of the global economy and it needs to be competitive in traded, indirectly traded and non-traded sectors. It is recognised that minimum wages for low-skilled workers in Australia are higher than other developed countries. Wage rates should be commensurate with actual work skill levels. Young people need to build their skills and minimum junior wage rates shall be set in recognition of their limited learned experience and lack of competitiveness in the job market.



9. Sweet, R. (2012) *Unemployed and inactive youth: What works? Countries with low levels of youth unemployment tend to have strong youth-focused job placement and support services that cater differently to youth and adult unemployment.*

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