

Submission to the House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Employment, Education
and Training

**National Inquiry into the
Employment of Young People**

Prepared by
the Youth Affairs Network of Queensland

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INTRODUCTION

The Youth Affairs Network of Queensland (YANQ) is the independent non-government umbrella organisation of groups and individuals from Queensland's youth sector. YANQ acts to promote the interests and well-being of young people in Queensland, advocates for them to government and the community, and encourages the development of policies and programs responsive to the needs of young people.

YANQ consists of over 400 individual and organisational members throughout the State, including youth services, advocacy groups, church groups and community organisations with interests in areas as diverse as juvenile justice, housing, health, rural issues, young people with disabilities, young women's issues and young people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-English speaking backgrounds. Associate members are drawn from federal, state and local government bodies.

DECLINE OF THE YOUTH LABOUR MARKET

The issue of a declining youth labour market is a major factor effecting the levels of youth unemployment and has many spin off effects including loss of self esteem and motivation. These are commented on later in this paper.

Rising levels of unemployment have been accompanied by even higher growth in the unemployment rate of young people. By 1990 there were around 90 000 fewer male jobs and 127 000 fewer female full-time jobs for young people than in 1966. Over that period the proportion of the 15-19 year old population in full time employment fell from 58% to 28%.

The current high levels of youth unemployment, relative to general unemployment, are primarily caused by structural changes in the labour market.

Young workers have been displaced by global competition and new technology. The widespread introduction of new technology has resulted in the disappearance of many entry level jobs which were traditionally filled by young people.

The availability of unskilled and low-skilled work has also been effected by the shift of large-scale manufacturing to the newly-industrialised economies in Asia, where labour costs are significantly lower. Every developed country has experienced a collapse in demand for unskilled male labour (Balls, 1992, p.15). The internationalisation of capital has effectively undermined the bargaining power of organised labour in the developed world, as First World workers have been forced to compete with those in the Third World who have a significantly lower standard of living.

Young people have been locked out of some professions through "credentials creep," the steady increase in the formal entry requirements for certain jobs, such as nursing. Higher levels of qualifications are even being required by employers for those positions which do not involve complex training or high levels of skills. Wilson (1989, p 11) found there is no necessary relationship between the credentials required to obtain a position and the actual tasks to be undertaken in that position.

The public sector, traditionally a large employer of young people, has gradually reduced its youth intake. While the Australian public sector grew by 58% between 1971 and 1980, the employment of 15-20 year olds fell by 33% in the Federal Public Service, and by around 40% in most state public services (Read, 1985).

Finally, young people are confronted by increasing competition from a growing pool of older, more experienced workers. Many employers, particularly in the growing service industries, are hiring people with existing skills, rather than taking on apprentices and trainees.

Failure to generate more jobs overall whilst seeking to redress youth unemployment, will merely shift the burden of unemployment from one disadvantaged group to another. Job creation and intervention in the youth labour market must be a focus of government alongside support for those who face disadvantage in accessing the labour market. These programs must operate hand in hand.

CUTS TO LABOUR MARKET PROGRAMS

Of alarming note is the direction of both the Federal and State governments. The position to which they are moving seems to say that some people are too expensive to support into the labour market. Of great concern within both the recent Federal and State budget were the severe cuts to labour market programs.

One the State level, approximately half of the \$15 million dollars of cuts to labour market programs were to programs which targeted young people. The most significant cuts was \$5.4 million to the Youth Employment Service (YES) and the attached funded training. The YES offered individualised support to disadvantaged 15-20 year olds and through the funded training element was able to buy appropriate training places for young people. Other programs cut offered funding to community groups to develop pre-employment programs for young people, including self-esteem and confidence building. A further program offered funds to organisations to investigate and develop local job creation programs to increase the jobs available locally.

These cuts have been made in the context of high and apparently rising levels of youth unemployment. The unemployment figures from October 1996 indicate 29.6% unemployment for 15-19 year olds. The programs are vital and as previously stated, must take a two-pronged approach; to create stimulate the youth labour market and create more jobs and to support the disadvantaged into the labour market.

Compounded Disadvantage

Without support for particular groups to compete in the labour market some young people will continue to miss out of securing a place for themselves. The Senate Standing Committee on Education Employment and Training report, 'Wanted: Our future' (1996) stated, "unemployment is disproportionately concentrated among already disadvantaged individuals and groups. Unemployment is a major consequence of disadvantage, and one of its most significant and damaging effects is to reinforce the disadvantaged position of those who suffer it' (p81). What this means, for example is the homeless, Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander young people, young people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, those with disabilities and early school leavers are significantly more at risk of being unable to enter the labour market. Early school leavers in the same report were identified as being four times more likely to be unemployed. The cycle of disadvantage that many of the unemployed young people come from perpetuates itself without structured intervention to support those young people.

In YANQ's view, current proposals by the Queensland government in the area of education will further compound the disadvantage of some young people. The proposal devolves greater powers to school principals to suspend and exclude students and introduces long term (5-20 school days) suspensions as an option for school principals. Many students are likely to fall out of the system with such long term suspensions and those students who do make it back to the mainstream system will have difficulty in reintegrating after having missed such a long period of time in their classroom.

Early intervention pastoral care programs, in YANQ's view, would be more effective in diffusing difficult behaviours before they emerge and in retaining children throughout their schooling. The establishment of the alternative programs to cater for students on long term suspensions has been allocated a large amount of resources which would better be utilised to establish pastoral such care programs.

A number of recent reports have strongly supported the need for the establishment of pastoral care in schools and yet strong resistance to this issue remains. This resistance amounts to 'buck passing' between government departments in regard to the young people disaffected. The Report on Aspects of Youth Homelessness (1995), Truancy and Exclusion from Schools Report 1996 and Unemployment, a cause or consequence of delinquency (1996) all advocate for the development of early intervention social assistance programs. The Report on Youth Homelessness advocates very strongly for the establishment of pastoral care in schools.

Nash (1996) states, 'In lieu of economic measures aimed at reducing unemployment, our politicians and policy makers should be looking at the types of general social assistance that will improve, to a significant and long term degree, the socio-economic situation of at risk families.....Furthermore, the measures should increase the services available to youth to either stay within the education system (for instance through special counselling or classes) or to improve their potential employment skill sand marketability within the employment arena' (p. 46/7).

The proposals by the Queensland government seem in contradiction to the recommendations of the above reports. Concern have been raised by advocates of disabled students and students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in regard the specific effect the changes will have on these students.

Limited amount of English as a second language tuition for students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds leaves these students less able to participate and vulnerable to dropping out of the school system early. Once again their disadvantage is compounded and they receive less benefits from schooling than other students. This concern is currently heightened by the Queensland Education Department's recent amalgamation of the Gender Equity and Cultural Equity Units. This amalgamation has occurred within the context of funding cuts to both units and will result in less support for schools to address these issues.

Young people from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds are also vulnerable to low self esteem and often perceive that their lack of language skills will mean they won't gain employment. The lack of recognition of overseas skill and qualifications limits some people's access to the labour market and in instances where these skills are recognised, they lack local experience.

The whole process of written application and interview may be alien to some young people from these backgrounds and some cultural backgrounds are not used to the 'selling oneself' attitude in interviews.

For refugees the issues are further complicated. Many refugees are apart from family with little support, may have experienced torture and/or trauma, are likely to have had interrupted schooling and no local references if they have had experience.

CONSEQUENTIAL ISSUES RELATED TO THE LACK OF JOBS

Loss Of Self Esteem/Confidence

Due to the lack of jobs for young people and subsequent high youth unemployment rate, some young people suffer loss of self esteem, confidence and motivation. In YANQ's view, these issues arise because of the lack of opportunities for these young people and the job rejection they suffer. They are secondary to and as a consequence of the lack of jobs for young people.

These issues do however necessitate labour market programs which support those disadvantaged young people into employment. Funding for programs need to be flexible enough to incorporate self esteem and other pre-employment programs.

As well as the cuts to the funding of these programs a further issues with them has been the way in which constitute a 'success' for the organisation receiving funding. The outcome driven nature of the programs have been problematic for funded organisations.

CONCLUSION

Employment is a central form of social participation in Australia. Being unable to find work can undermine a person's perception of their value to society. People unable to access work can become isolated, both through their being denied contact with people in a workplace, and through their inability to participate in social activities, due to limited income and the stigma associated with unemployment.

Long-term unemployment can place strain on family relationships. Young unemployed people experience prolonged dependence on their families for financial support and accommodation. They may experience hostility from family members who are required to subsidise them, or who are unable to understand why the young person cannot find work. In many families, both parents and children are unemployed. Pressures resulting from frustration, low self-esteem, and prolonged poverty can contribute to family conflict and in some cases violence (Maas, 1986, p.12).

Bibliography

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