



Unpacking Youth Unemployment

Final report

Never Stand Still

Arts & Social Sciences

Social Policy Research Centre

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List of Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ADFA	Australia Defence Force Academy
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
ATAR	Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank
BSL	Brotherhood of St Laurence
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CBD	Central Business District
Census	Census of Population and Housing
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CV	Curriculum Vitae
ELGPN	European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network
EU	European Union
Eurofound	European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions
FYA	Foundation for Young Australians
GFC	Global Financial Crisis
LGA	Local Government Area
ILO	International Labour Organisation
KLA	Key Learning Areas
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
NEET	Not in employment, education or training
NGO	Non-Government Organisations
NPYAT	National Partnership Agreement on Youth Attainment and Transitions
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PDHPE	Personal Development, Health and Physical Education
RTO	Registered Training Organization
SES	Socio-economic status
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
UNSW	University of New South Wales
VET	Vocational Education and Training

Executive summary

The opportunity for meaningful work, which promotes dignity, wellbeing and social inclusion, should be a fundamental right of all individuals in each generation.

Unemployment, particularly over the long-term, has been described as an **'unexpected tax on the current generation of youth'** (ILO, 2013:2). While context, culture and national policies matter for young people's outcomes, well designed programs support young people in their transitions.

This project identifies key principles for good practice that support successful transitions for disadvantaged young people (aged 15-24 years) into secure and meaningful employment or 'decent work'. It focuses on supports for young people who are unemployed or not in employment, education or training (NEET).

Project aims:

- Identify elements of good practice in promoting transitions to, and retention in, education, training and employment.
- Identify gaps in policy and support systems and which program and policy levers can be effective in improving young people's participation in employment, education, and training.
- Contribute to knowledge about the diversity of pathways and issues that young people face when engaging with employment, education and training.

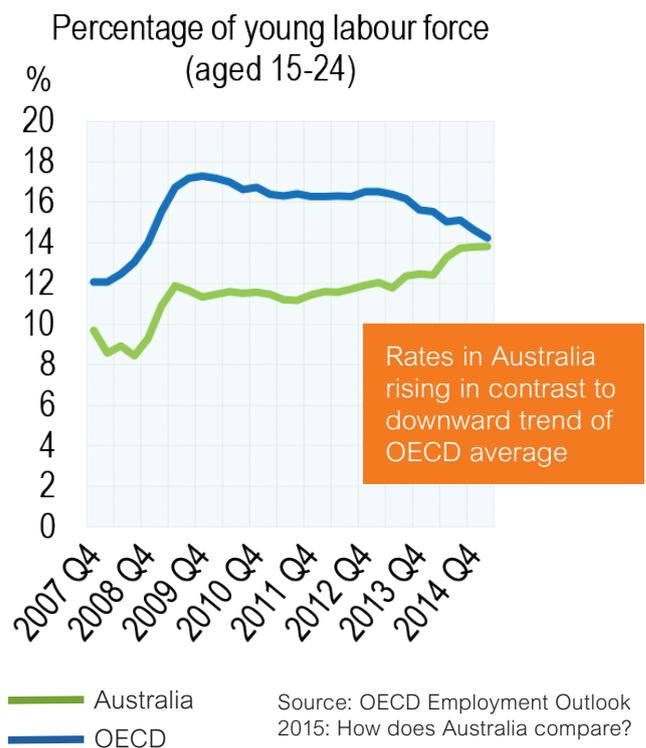
To explore these questions the project involved three complementary methodologies, specifically selected to cover many aspects of approaches to promote positive transitions for young people at risk of becoming NEET:

1. A review of national and international data on youth unemployment and young people who are in the category of NEET.
2. A review of Australian and international research, meta-analyses and external evaluations.
3. A local study on young people's experiences of youth unemployment and NEET status based on analysis of local area employment statistics of a labour market characterised by a strong business sector, cultural diversity and relatively high youth unemployment.

The plethora of meta-reviews, research projects, and policy and program evaluations reviewed for this report are underpinned by a variety of approaches to conceptually framing the problem of youth unemployment. Some focus on young people as individuals and what they need to bring to labour markets, others focus on the structural features of labour markets and others still on dynamic processes between young people educational institutions and the labour market. This shapes the focus of policies, programs and interventions.

Since the Global Financial Crisis (GFC), young people generally have fared worse than the older population in the labour market. Youth unemployment and NEET rates in Australia have tended to be below many Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries and the OECD average, and showed less immediate impact from the GFC. Yet recent data suggest that youth unemployment rates in Australia have risen since 2011, in contrast to the OECD average trend of falling youth unemployment (see Figure 1). The review of international data highlights the issue that policies and context matter for young people.

Figure 1: Youth unemployment rate



Unemployment and NEET

Definitions of unemployment and NEET may vary according to the context in which they are used: for the purposes of statistical definitions for comparisons across countries or over time; for defining eligibility for programs; or when framing theoretical concepts around young people's experiences. (see *Technical Report: Defining Terms*)

In this report, '**unemployed**' young people are defined as those who are looking for either full-time or part-time employment and available to start work, but unable to find a suitable job. They may or may not currently be studying.

Statistically, the youth unemployment rate is calculated as the number of unemployed young people as a proportion of young people in the labour force (including the employed and the unemployed).

Young people who are **not in employment, education or training (NEET)** are:

- Young people who have left education as they are disengaged from their study or have experienced barriers to maintaining or accessing education and not in employment
- Unemployed young people not in education or training
- Young people discouraged from seeking work and not in education or training
- Young people not available for work in the labour market for reasons of health, disability, caring responsibilities or other factors and not in education or training.

Statistically, the NEET rate is based on the number of young people who are not in employment, education or training as a proportion of the whole youth population. So the number of young people who are NEET may be higher than the number of unemployed young people, but the NEET rate may be lower than the unemployment rate.

Unemployed young people and NEET young people are not mutually exclusive groups. In addition, both groups contain young people of diverse characteristics and strategies that might assist unemployed young people may differ from those that might assist NEET young people.

The education to employment system

Internationally, a wide array of policies and programs operate at national, state and local levels to strengthen youth employment. They can be classified loosely into three broad categories:

1. **Education focussed programs:** develop non-cognitive skills and dispositions valued in workplaces, broaden young people's understandings of labour market possibilities and processes, and strengthen their capacities to navigate towards secure employment. This navigational capacity often strengthens young people's engagement with learning at school. Some programs engage parents as key partners in shaping young people's aspirations and some focus on reintegrating young people who have found education and employment systems difficult to fully engage with. Education focussed programs centre on raising aspirations, mentoring, career development, alternative education programs and professional development for teachers about 21st century career development. This needs to begin early as there is evidence that young people's sense of themselves as learners and what is possible for them to achieve is developing in the primary and secondary years.
2. **Employment focussed programs:** focus on work experience and work for the dole; youth guarantees (Europe); employer engagement and incentivising.
3. **Hybrid education/employment focussed programs:** contain elements across both categories. They may begin with mentoring programs that connect young people with workplaces and that broaden their understandings of labour market possibilities and processes and end with offering these young people priority for available jobs.

System coordination is consistently identified as key to addressing rising youth unemployment. Schools, students and parents navigate the 'crowded market' of training and support options. In Australia, service system coordination is required across tiers of government and on the variety of services offered in various policy siloes.

Good practice principles

Education for work

- Education about work, cognitive and non-cognitive skills needed and how to navigate to decent jobs is universally delivered from the primary years
- Work, employment and careers information is integrated into everyday curriculum
- Career development and information, and education for non-cognitive skills are delivered incrementally
- Classroom teachers are supported to develop their knowledge about 21st Century employment futures and pathways
- Parents and families have access to information and careers information through a range of communication strategies (information sessions through schools, banks of case studies available on the web)
- Schools embed work oriented information and goals in strategic planning and communication systems
- Education for work programs are accessible from wherever young people are seeking support services (including non-conventional schools and youth-specific services)

Quality in targeted programs

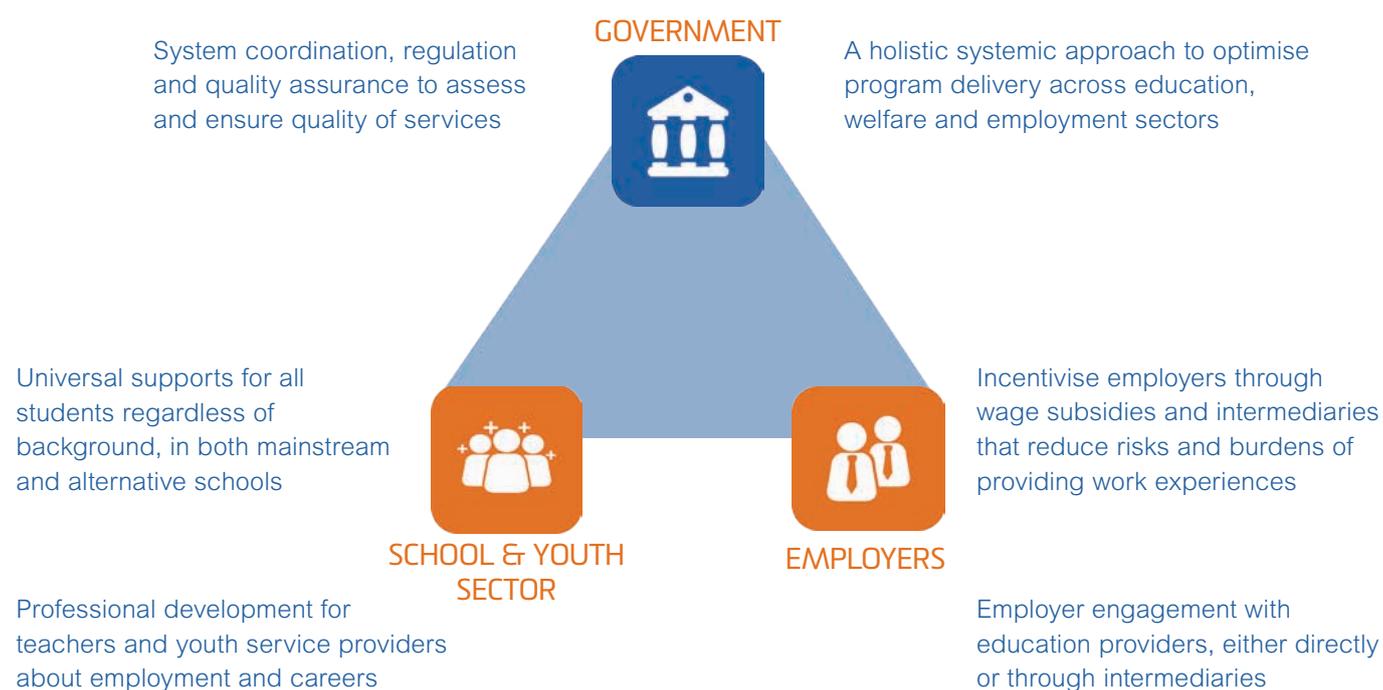
- Programs are tailored to the particular needs of student populations and schools
- Programs build genuine caring relationships
- Relationships between schools, youth services and employers are facilitated by trusted intermediaries to minimise burden and broaden students' labour market experience
- Professional support for third parties involved in programs (mentors, people in work experience destinations) ensures they are well matched to young people, have clear realistic expectations, accurate pathways information and provided with effective follow-up
- Intervention programs run for over 3 months and include integrated follow up for students post intervention
- Systematic post placement or participation support for young people who have participated in programs
- Investment and partnerships with organisations that offer services beyond the remit of education and employment services to close the service gaps for young people who do not use formal education services

Evidence, data & monitoring

- Destinations of students who participate in programs are consistently tracked for both program and meta-evaluation purposes
- Programs are systematically evaluated
- Effective data and monitoring systems at local, state and national government levels to inform strategic government and business investment

The question of 'What works?' has been consistently identified by researchers as a very difficult question to answer. The factors that contribute to youth employment are multidimensional, enduring and compounding. There is a lack of reliable evidence from evaluations and most programs only address one dimension and often only in a limited way (Bowman, Borlagdan & Bond, 2015). This review explored evidence for good practice in programs promoting transitions for disadvantaged youth people.

What's needed in policy and support systems



Universal supports: programs that build employment capital, non-cognitive skills and knowledge of pathways are not universally available or even available on request. The selection of young people for programmatic supports is often driven by needs other than those of young people who need additional supports. Young people with complex needs or those who might have presented challenges for mentors or partner employer groups are missing out.

These programs need to be delivered to all students including young people out of conventional schooling. Alternative learning programs redress this gap to some extent in so far as they deliver services to young people who have disengaged from formal schooling but employment related supports in this sector are often less systematically available than in disadvantaged mainstream schools.

Professional development: there is a lack of knowledge about labour market demand and career and job information among teachers and youth workers who are in direct contact with young people who need this information. There is a need for centralised resources with genuine experts available - who can resource teachers, parents, service providers and the mentors who work with them.

A holistic systemic approach: programs located within a mutual obligation framework that take a holistic systemic approach, (as in the implementation of a Youth Guarantee in some European countries) have the advantage of delivering timely services that connect young people to jobs. However, Youth Guarantees may not be the most appropriate mechanism to address structural problems, such as lack of skills.

Employer engagement and incentives: employers have a crucial role in engaging with education providers and fostering job opportunities for young people. Labour market intermediaries also have a key role in brokering relationships between young people, schools, communities and employers. Policy levers such as well regulated, targeted, monitored and supported wages subsidies are needed to generate job opportunities for young people.

System coordination, regulation and quality assurance: there is a crowded market of training organisations, education and special programs providers. There is currently no systematic way of assessing the quality of services. The current training market creates strong incentives for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) to place more focus on attracting students than on providing them with skills to help them achieve sustainable employment. There should be further analysis of the functioning of this market.

Elements of good practice in system coordination that have been identified by the OECD (2013) include:

- Mechanisms to tackle fragmentation and duplication, such as shared targets for local areas, promotion of information sharing and joint service commissioning, embedding schools in the partnerships, service level agreements to outline roles and responsibilities of local stakeholders, and external groups to monitor progress.
- Developing the right incentives and success measurement structures, for example: removing perverse incentives for organisations to focus on young people most likely to succeed within an outcomes-based incentives structure by rewarding progress points rather than outcomes.
- Encouraging appropriate local referrals by adequately resourcing local level referral agencies and mechanisms.
- Improving data availability - a starting point in local youth employment strategy processes should be understanding the nature of local skills supply and demand and whether mismatches are due to a lack of skills or local job design and quality,
- Promoting employer ownership and ensure that firms invest in their future workforce,
- Supporting cross-sectoral approaches to bring together educational institutions, industry organisations, employment agencies and other government departments to develop career pathways, articulating skills requirements and connecting youth to the local economy,
- Adapting funding arrangements in the context of reduced public spending, for example through social enterprises, and
- Monitoring the implementation of programs and evaluating successes.

1. Recommendations for governments

Coordination

- Effective systems of coordination to address issues underpinning youth unemployment across tiers and portfolios of government.
- Greater clarity about federal, state and local government responsibilities.
- A national framework with flexible policy structures to support local area initiatives and innovations.
- Improved service system collaboration through longer-term funding, quality assurance systems and less local competition.

Addressing gaps in universality

- Policy initiatives that respond to differing concentrations of socio-economic and employment disadvantage and service the 81 per cent of disadvantaged young people living outside of areas of concentrated disadvantage.
- Better resourcing for schools to integrate employment information holistically in curriculum.
- Improved access to information.
- Quality assurance systems for training organisations.
- Removal of incentive structures with negative impacts on young people.
- Systems of regulated, targeted, monitored and supported wage subsidies to generate job opportunities for young people.
- Internships and job opportunities for young people with complex needs with an evidence bank of processes that supports employers to offer such positions.

2. Recommendations for services

Education for work

- Integrate career development and non-cognitive skills and employability skills in all areas of curriculum.
- Develop whole of school approaches that raise the profile and value of career development and employability skills.
- Provide information for families and carers to enable them to effectively guide their children to develop realistic career aspirations and employment navigation skills.
- Ensure that programs are relationship-based and that program timelines facilitate relationship development.
- Provide adequate orientation and ongoing training for all staff and volunteers who work with disadvantage young people.
- Continue with programs based on good practice cohort learning.

Collaboration

- Develop strong communication networks and follow up mechanisms that allow for all providers to be informed of the capacities and needs of the young people involved.
- Develop mechanisms throughout the schooling and youth specific system which deliver effective referral mechanisms for young people to ensure holistic supports.
- Work to develop collaborative structures with other service providers.
- Strengthen links between schools/youth specific services and employers.

3. Recommendations for philanthropic sector

Building awareness and community and business activism

- Promote community and business awareness of the need to support the current generation of disadvantaged young people into decent work through information and data sharing and social marketing.

Thought leadership

- Provide support and resources for thought leadership on innovative models which encapsulate the principles of good practice, but which are yet to be evaluated.
- Ensure such programs build in high quality external evaluation from conception.

Local initiatives

- Provide support and resources for local coordinated system initiatives built on collaborations between schools, universities, employer peak organisations, local businesses, non-profits, and other stakeholders, and aligned to local labour market needs with a strong evidence base of good practice principals.
- Develop strategies for replicability for other areas.

Scope of this report

This report accompanies a more detailed technical report which contains background detail from the policy and program reviews and a full account of the local study. Snapshots and case studies from the local area mixed method study are used in this report to illustrate how policy and program features play out in the everyday lives of young people.

This report aims to:

- Identify elements of good practice approaches in promoting transitions to, and retention in, education, training and employment (to address the question of 'what works?') and to also inform the other research components.
- Identify gaps in policy and community support systems for young people; and identify which policy and program levers will be most effective in improving participation in employment, education, and training.
- Consider the diversity of young people who are classified as NEET – for example long-term unemployed young people, disengaged youth, and young people who are unavailable for paid employment due to caring responsibilities or health and disability issues and so address different needs and strengths.
- Contribute to knowledge about the diversity of pathways and issues that young people face when engaging with employment, education and training.

Research questions:

1. What is currently known about youth unemployment in Australia?
2. What are the characteristics of young people aged 15-24 who are not in Education or Employment and Training ('NEET') and their geographic distribution in Australia?
3. What structures, events and activities contribute to NEET pathways and to pathways out of NEET?
4. What are the approaches to address youth unemployment in Australia and comparable countries?
5. What constitutes best practice in promoting youth transitions, including identification of service gaps, existing innovation and opportunities for further innovative practice?

This report begins with an overview of youth employment and transition patterns for Australian young people. We then describe how causes of youth unemployment can be understood and addressed. Following this, we review policies and program types that aim to support young people transition effectively into work, beginning with those embedded in the education system and then turning to those embedded in the employment system and labour market.

To explore these questions the project involved three complementary methodologies, specifically selected to cover as many aspects of approaches to promote positive transitions for young people at risk of becoming NEET:

1. A review of national and international data on youth unemployment and young people who are in the category of NEET.
2. A review of Australian and international research, meta-analyses and external evaluations
3. A local study of youth unemployment and NEET status and experiences in an area selected because it is characterised by a strong labour market, high cultural diversity and high youth unemployment.

1. Youth employment in Australia

Labour markets and transition opportunity structures are changing rapidly, but the groups that experience inequalities are surprisingly constant.

Labour markets and opportunities have changed structurally over the last few decades. Economic changes are transforming work through automation, globalisation and more flexible work (FYA, 2015; CEDA, 2015). Employment opportunities in manufacturing and industrial work sectors are declining while opportunities in service and technology sectors are expanding (ABS, 2011). This has changed the skill requirements and nature of available jobs for young people in countries such as Australia (The Smith Family, 2014; Eurofound, 2014). There are fewer entry-level jobs between entry-level jobs, new forms of enterprise and sourcing income. Many young people experience complex and sometimes difficult transitions to their first full-time job (Cuervo and Wyn, 2011). Changes to technology and labour markets mean that today's young people are likely to have many different jobs over their lifetime. Lifelong learning, the capacity to navigate towards and adapt to new types of employment are likely to be critical skills (Cuervo and Wyn, 2011).

While longitudinal analysis of youth labour markets show significant changes in the characteristics of the opportunity structures that support successful transitions from education to employment, they also indicate that inequalities and disadvantages in the labour market are surprisingly constant across generations. Young people from families who are disadvantaged in the labour market continue to be the young people most challenged by school to work transitions (Roberts, 2009, Thompson, 2011; Gale et al, 2013; MacDonald et al, 2014; McInerney & Smyth, 2014).

The effect of delayed and unsuccessful transitions to employment can lead to economic, social and personal disadvantages for young people.

Protracted transitions impact on young people's current income, self-esteem, health and wellbeing, and their future occupations and income.

Such disadvantages may become acute if young people become discouraged from seeking work and withdraw from the labour market altogether (BSL 2015; Buddlemeyer and Heral, 2010; Anlezark, 2011).

Internationally young people's labour market opportunities were particularly affected by the Global Financial Crisis, which saw NEET rates for young people rise in many, but not all OECD countries after 2008 (OECD 2015^a:18, Figure 1.1b). Youth unemployment in Australia experienced a less dramatic rise than many OECD countries post-2008 (OECD, 2015b; Anlezark, 2011). Youth unemployment and NEET rates in Australia have tended to be below many OECD countries and the OECD average. Yet recent data suggest that youth unemployment rates in Australia have risen since 2011, in contrast to the OECD average trend of falling youth unemployment (OECD 2015b), although many OECD countries still have very high youth unemployment rates. The rate for young people who are NEET has also risen over the last decade in Australia, primarily among young people aged 20-24 years (OECD 2015c). These trends highlight the continued importance and relevance of a policy and program focus on young people's transitions to employment in Australia.

Participation in formal education and decent work is a key factor in enabling young people to become full economic and social citizens. Young people who complete school have a greater likelihood of continuing further study, as well as entering into the workforce (OECD, 2013^a: 9). Formal training, therefore, contributes to the development of a skilled workforce and to a pool of highly skilled young people looking for employment. Completing school and making the transition into decent work and independence presents challenges for a significant number of Australian young people (Te Riele, 2012).

Successive Australian governments have committed to the goals of improving the educational outcomes of students from lower socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds. The relationship between individual socioeconomic disadvantage and academic outcomes is well established, and current data confirm that underprivileged students have lower rates of Year 12 completion and university uptake than those of higher socioeconomic status (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2011; Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2011). The relationship between the quality and socioeconomic profile of schools and the academic and transition outcomes for young people is also well established (Gonski et al. 2011; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] 2010; Gemici, Lim & Karmel 2013).

1.1 Key patterns in youth transitions in Australia

Increased education participation and attainment and structural changes in the labour market and available jobs means that transitions to decent work are more complex and occurring at a later age.

Federal, state and territory governments have implemented policy measures which have attempted to address youth attainment and transitions in light of structural changes in global and national labour markets. These policy measures have themselves triggered shifts in the way that young people transition.

- Secondary and higher education participation and attainment is increasing, while participation in Vocational Education and Training (VET) and apprenticeships is declining.
- Full-time employment is decreasing, and part-time and casual employment have increased.
- Unemployment and underemployment has increased
- Graduate employment has decreased.
- Transitions to full-time work, on average, are occurring at an older age, particularly for young women. (FYA, 2014)

Overall, the structure of the labour market has changed with shift from manufacturing to services sectors and increase in nonstandard jobs and employment relationships (Bowman et al., 2015). Specific factors affecting young people are:

1. Employment expansion in sectors such as the knowledge industry that lack career ladders
2. Employment growth in insecure employment in service sectors
3. Reduction in apprenticeships in traditional fields and the requirement of higher level qualifications to access apprenticeships.
4. Decline in formal recruitment practices and the capacity to implement workplace learning in large organisations (The Smith Family, 2014:2-3)

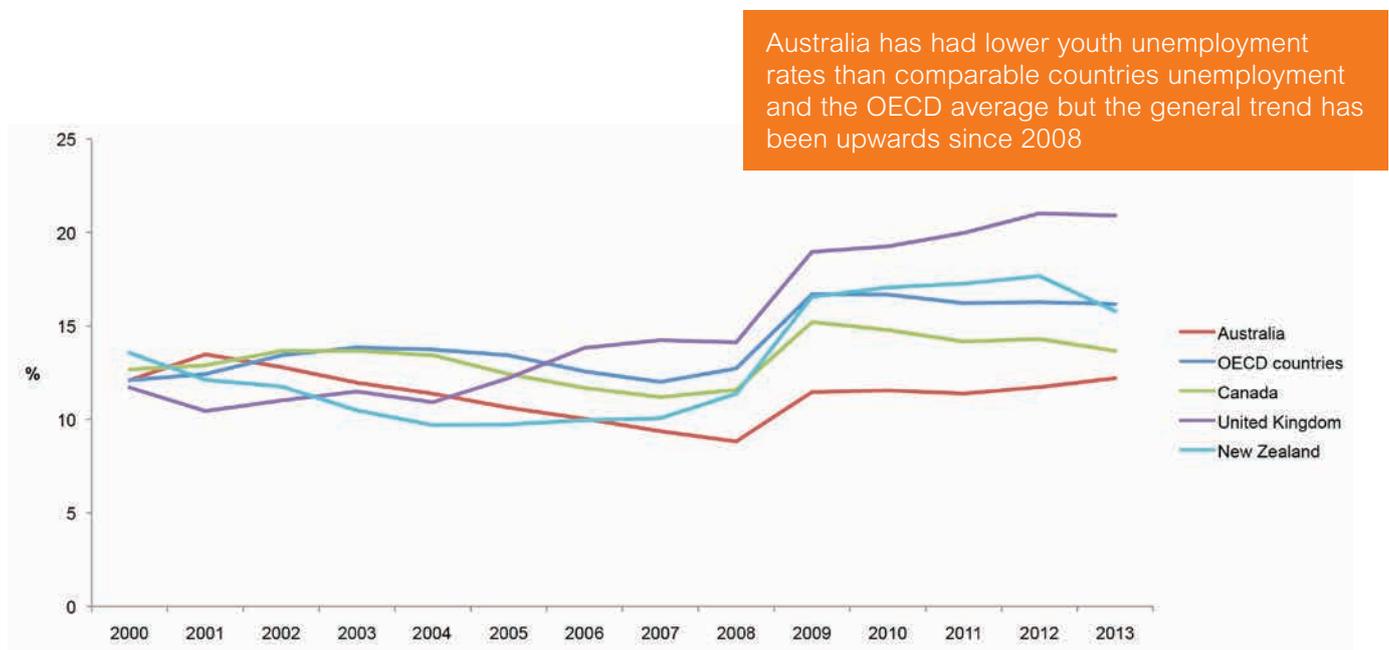
In summary, in recent years, young people's school to work transitions in Australia have been impacted by policies affecting education participation and changes in the structure and opportunities in labour market.

1.2 Youth Unemployment

Unemployment has increased in recent years since the GFC, with young men being most affected. Long term employment and underemployment has also increased.

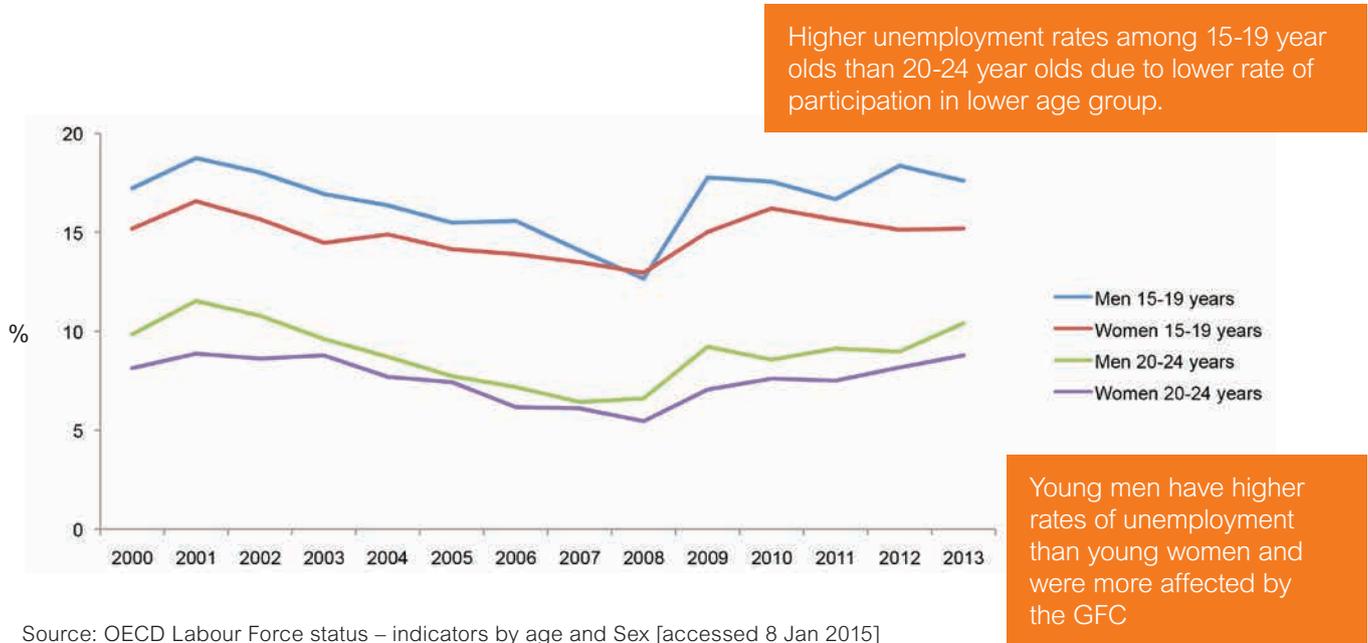
- In August 2015 an estimated 288,900 young people were unemployed (ABS, 2015^a: Table 13). The youth unemployment rate in August 2015 was 13.6 per cent (ABS, 2015^a: Table 13, Trend)

Figure 2 Unemployment rate for young people aged 15-24 years, 2000-2013



Source: OECD Labour Force status – indicators by age and Sex [accessed 8 Jan 2015]

Figure 3 Youth unemployment in Australia by age and gender, 2000-2013



Source: OECD Labour Force status – indicators by age and Sex [accessed 8 Jan 2015]

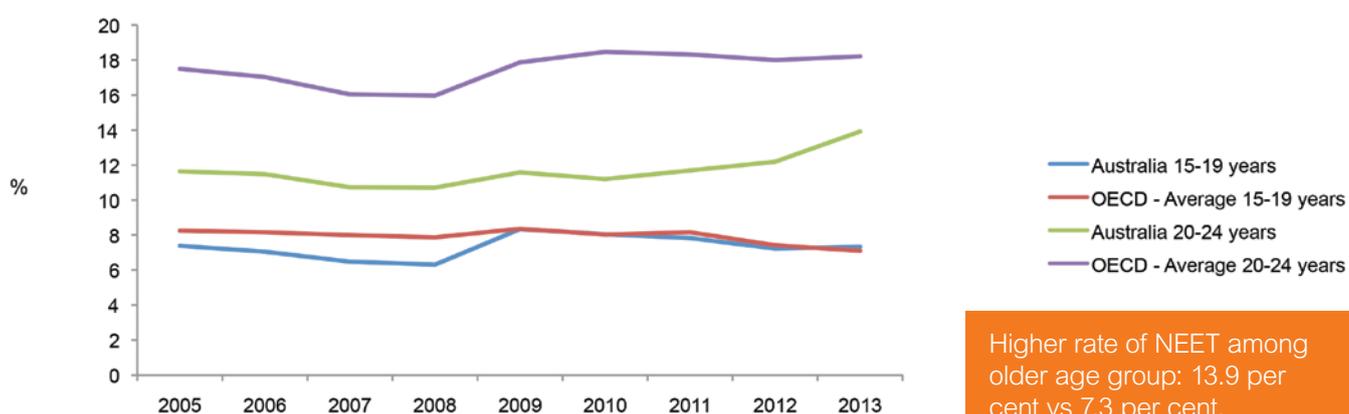
- Long-term unemployment rates have increased: in August 2015, 51,000 young people had been searching for employment for 52 weeks or more, up from 19,500 ten years before (August 2005) (ABS, 2015b: Data cube UM3).
- 367, 200 young people were underemployed in August 2015 (ABS, 2015^a: Table 22).
- Underemployment rates for young people have increased over the last few decades to 17.5 per cent in August 2015 (ABS, 2015^a: Table 22) with the increase in casual and part-time jobs.
- The unemployment and underemployment rate combine to produce a labour underutilisation rate of 30.4 per cent (ABS, 2015^a: Table 22) (unemployment plus underemployment), which is a waste of investment in young people’s human capital.
- Unemployment rates in Australia are higher for young people who are Indigenous and live in areas of lower socio-economic status (AWPA, 2014).

1.3 Young people Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET)¹

Young people who are NEET comprise a heterogeneous group, yet overall with young women are more likely to be NEET.

Policies and programs aimed at supporting young people who are NEET or at risk of NEET encompass a number of types of support relating to housing, transport, income, support for child care or caring responsibilities, social and emotional supports, skills development, job search and job readiness and work experience. The policy concern with young people who are NEET is that extended periods outside of the labour force and training 'may cause reduction in human capital, poverty and have a scarring effect on long-term prospects' (Carcillo et al., 2015:10)

Figure 4 Youth not in employment, education or training (NEET), by age, % in same age group, 2005-2013



Source: OECD (2015c), Youth not in education or employment (NEET) (indicator).
doi: 10.1787/72d1033a-en (Accessed on 30 January 2015)

Higher rate of NEET among older age group: 13.9 per cent vs 7.3 per cent.

The NEET rate increased to a greater extent for older age group (20-24 years) after GFC in 2008, although still below the OECD average.

Factors associated with NEET status in Australia:

- Young women are more likely to be NEET than young men (aged 15-29 years) (Carcillo et al., 2015:23, Figure 6).
- Low education is a key factor: around 40 per cent of young people who are NEET have year 10 level education, another 40 per cent have year 12, and less than 20 per cent have tertiary qualifications (Carcillo et al., 2015: 21, Figure 4).
- Skills gaps – higher rates of NEET for those with low literacy and low numeracy skills (OECD, 2015: 85-86).
- Australian Census data show that young people from Indigenous communities, whose language was not English and who lived in areas of lower socio-economic status were overrepresented among the NEET category (AWPA, 2014: 20).

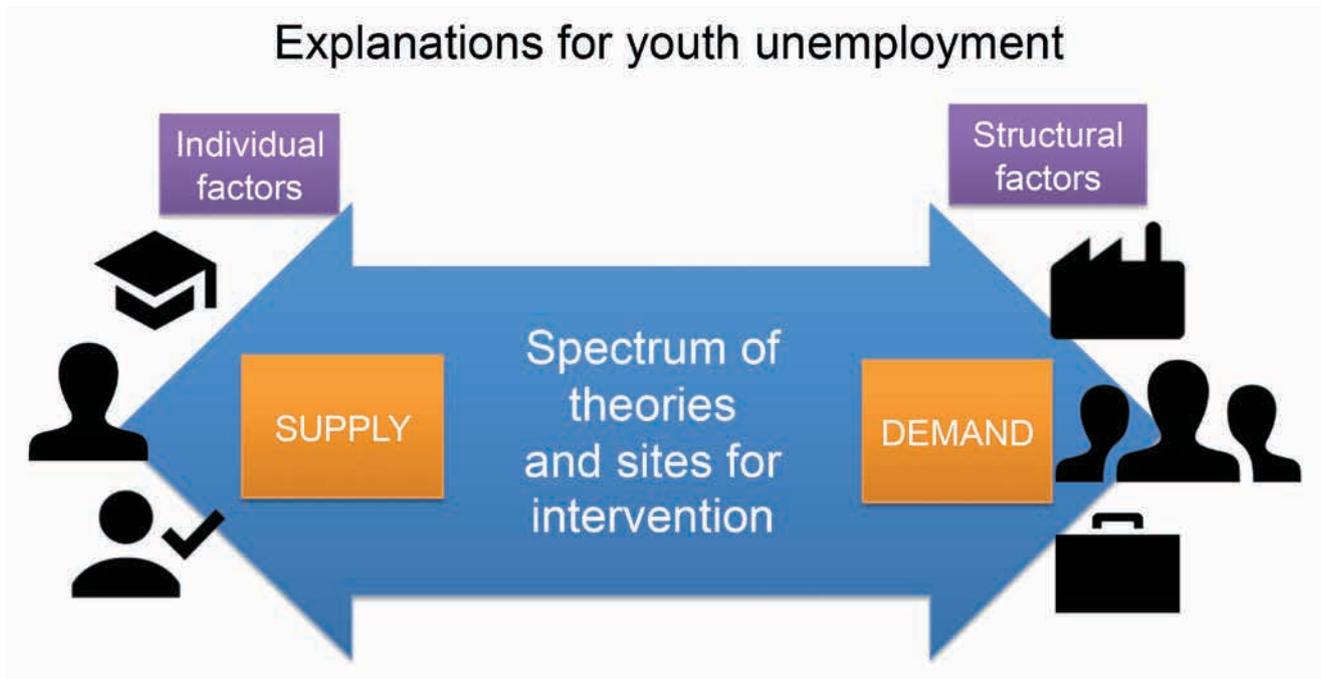
¹ See definitions in Executive Summary and Defining Terms in technical report

1.4 What are the explanations for youth unemployment?

The way we understand the causes of youth unemployment is important because it underpins how we decide to direct resources to address the problem and who is most responsible to take action to address the issue. Policy and program responses vary in the weight they put on individual or structural factors.

Conceptual and policy approaches to understanding the nature and causes of **youth unemployment** generally consist of 'supply-side' and 'demand-side' theories. These theories interact with discourses that frame the welfare state as either negatively undermining incentives to work, or positively providing necessary social protections (Fergusson and Yeates, 2013). Positioned at the neoliberal, supply end of the theoretical spectrum are frameworks that focus on the individual skills attributes and behaviours of young people. Specifically they focus on young people's 'poor adaptation to market requirements in combination with the prevalence of welfare dependency that disincentivises personal responsibility for acquiring skills that are in demand, discourages travel to jobs and encourages young people to maintain unrealistic reservation wage levels' (Fergusson and Yeates, 2013:6). By contrast, at the 'demand' end, frameworks based on social democratic theories of governance explain youth unemployment in terms of the lack of labour demand, particularly decent work and job security, and argue the welfare state has a role to provide social security and a minimum of social protection to mitigate against effects of youth unemployment (Fergusson and Yeates, 2013).

The predominant international, European and Australian discourses on youth unemployment have tended to focus on supply-side intervention and welfare activation policies within a framework of promoting overall economic growth (Fergusson and Yeates, 2013; Lahusen, Schulz and Graziano, 2013). Nevertheless, in the context of high youth unemployment, some international organisations, such as the OECD and the ILO, argue that governments need to intervene on demand to ensure that young people are provided with quality jobs, and to help provide income security (Fergusson and Yeates, 2013; ILO, 2013). Thus they argue for approaches which combine social protection policies to keep young people out of poverty while ensuring that income support is linked to mutual obligation requirements and skill development (eg. OECD, 2015^a; Carcillo et al., 2015).



Focus on individual factors:

Here significance is accorded to individual aspirations and motivations, employability and 'soft' skills and the role and responsibilities of families and social networks, education and training providers, governments, NGOs, agencies and employers in addressing youth unemployment. Programs focussed on individual factors aim to intervene on the level of personal aspirations and circumstances, education qualifications, skills and employability, geographic mobility, and specific disadvantages and barriers.

Focus on structural factors:

Structural models aim to intervene in the labour market, education and welfare issues such as geographic disadvantages in labour market opportunities; lack of full-time, entry-level opportunities; shift to service sector jobs, lacking career structures; insecure, casual and precarious work; reduced numbers of apprenticeships and traineeships; and concentrations of young people 'at risk' in particular schools.

Focus on 'whole of transition' factors:

Hybrid education/employment focussed programs contain elements across both supply and demand categories. They may begin with mentoring programs that connect young people with workplaces and that broaden their understandings of labour market possibilities and processes and end with offering these young people priority for available jobs.

1.5 Understanding and measuring youth transitions to employment

Youth transitions encompass multiple destinations, varying durations, linear pathways as well as more complex non-linear trajectories. The experiences of diverse and disadvantaged groups points to the key role of supporting practitioners.

Inter-country variations in the pattern of school to work transitions have formed a rich site for the study of how particular policy levers can positively or adversely affect transitions (eg Hannan, Raffe and Smyth, 1996; MCEETYA, 2003; AIHW, 2014; Eurofound, 2014).

Key elements of transitions;

- **Destinations:** The question of what constitutes a 'destination' is also an important defining element in research, policy and practice about transitions. A variety of outcomes and indicators are analysed to assess if transitions have occurred focusing on education, employment and quality of job outcomes:
 - Average age of transition to full time job (FYA, 2014)
 - The ILO has defined the concept of school to work transitions in two ways – the first to a 'regular' or 'satisfactory' job and, the second, stricter definition, to 'decent' or 'satisfactory' employment. A transition is "the passage of a young person (aged 15-29 years) from the end of schooling to" one of these types of jobs (ILO, 2009:8-12).(See Technical Report for definitions)
 - Eurofound (2014) has five indicators:
 - average age of young people leaving education
 - proportion of students combining work and education
 - average time finding the first job after completing education
 - the labour market status or school leavers one year after completing education.
 - The types of jobs held by school-leavers one year after completing education. (Eurofound 2014)
- **Duration:** transitions may be classified as short, middling and lengthy (ILO, 2009)

- **Pathways:** the sequences of activities, events, or stages that occur over time that lead to the outcomes or destinations – pathways may be linear or non-linear, trajectories may be complex, with multiple categories of participation. See case study below.

The notion of pathways is critically important to many of these analyses. For much of the twentieth century, the transition from school to work was thought of as a choice between moving into entry-level positions in a particular industry or public service, or moving into further education and training before moving to a particular profession. However, changes to labour markets since the 1980s have rendered the traditional notions of pathways to work problematic. Uncertainty and rapid change to work have meant the capacity for lifelong learning and flexibility are now seen as essential characteristics in contemporary workers (Furlong & Cartmel 2007, Wyn 2009^a, Cuervo and Wyn, 2011: 21).

In spite of social change in terms of school to employment transitions, there are significant and troubling continuities. Young people who are disadvantaged face an array of education and training options that means the path from school to work has become ‘an interchange that takes longer to navigate and includes dead-ends, u-turns, construction work and uncharted territory’ (Te Riele, 2010).

Some studies on school to work pathways identify a linear sequence of activities between school and employment and points of intervention along that pathway (eg: Eurofound 2012^a, b & c).

Others highlight complex trajectories in young peoples’ transitions. Increasingly, transitions between education and work are seen to involve unpredictable links between education and work (Stokes & Wyn 2007).

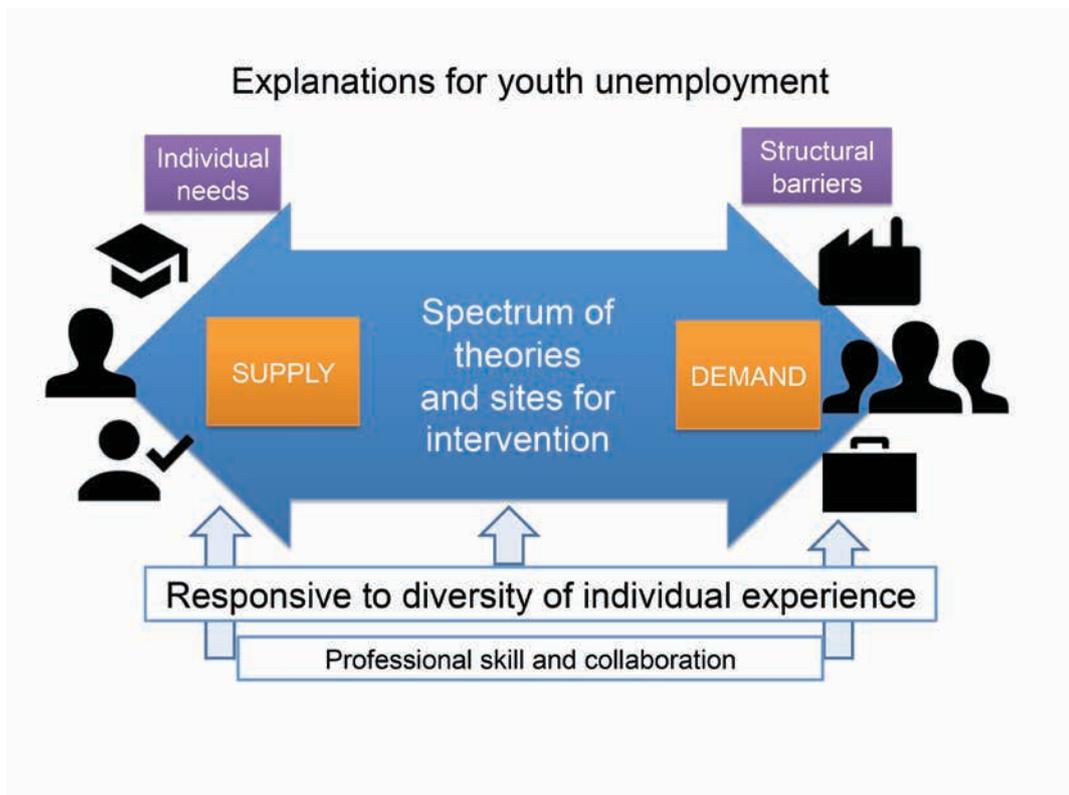
Common pathways identified for Australian youth included: three associated with transitions from education to work, one associated with women moving out of employment into childrearing, and another “churning” pathway in which individuals shifted between work and other activities. The churning pathway was the most prevalent of the youth age segment (Fry and Boulton 2013:52).

- **Diversity** of experience for differently situated young people: brings focus to the situation, context, place and characteristics of the individual to provide explanatory frameworks for youth transitions in and out of the labour market.

The breadth and diversity of young people as a demographic group is a fundamental consideration in research, policy and program design because different types of young people typically experience different transition to work trajectories (eg: Victorian Government, 2008; Garrison-Wade and Lehmann 2009; Aird et al., 2010). It is argued that it is necessary to develop more specific knowledge about the transition experiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) young people, young women, people with disability and homeless youth. In the case of young people who emerge from circumstances of profound disadvantage, the impact of marginalisation is likely to be significant and prolonged. This body of work shows that interventions aimed at improving transitions outcomes for these young people must respond to these circumstances.

▪ **Role of professionals** in supporting youth transitions

Continuing on with this attention to the particularity of transition experiences as a critical consideration in formulating effective interventions, some researchers have focussed in on the impact of different practitioner behaviours, including practice leadership and traditions of evidence-based practice rather than on models of intervention per se (Rogers and Creed, 2000; Department of Child Safety, 2008; Urbis 2011). Deploying conceptual and analytic tools from psycho-social disciplines (psychology, sociology, behavioural management, social work), this research identifies a need for shared understandings in the management of, engagement with, and level of custodial care provided for young people. This work challenges the idea that national level policy levers and structures alone can address the problem and argues for the need for frontline workers to strengthen the skills and engage in professional development appropriate for the client groups they service. This research points to the need for ‘practice guidelines’ that support practitioners (youth support workers, social workers, psychologists, case managers) to maintain professional autonomy, be able to develop rapport, and offer varied therapeutic supports appropriate to the needs of the individual young person.



Case study: Emin – a complex pathway

At first glance, softly spoken Emin appeared to have solid employment capital and a very good chance of finding secure employment. However, he had encountered a number of obstacles and needed support to navigate his way towards finishing his apprenticeship and gaining a foothold in employment. Emin was as eager to share his story as he was to earn some money. At the time of interview he was struggling with his frustration with barriers which were stopping him from working in his chosen industry.

At 18, Emin lived with his parents and younger brothers in a region of Sydney where there is high unemployment. His parents both migrated from a Middle Eastern country when they were young. His father has been employed by various large companies in sales and his mother is a contract professional. He attended a local public high school which had an emphasis on Vocational Education and Training programs. Emin looked to family members to consider his employment options.

I've got plenty of family members that are in the automotive industry. Plenty of spray painter, panel beaters. My uncle is an autoelectrician. I've got family members that are mechanics at Toyota and Holden. Yeah, it's an industry that I grew up in basically.

His attachment to school had been faltering and his family had been trying to persuade him to remain at school. His father heard about school based apprenticeships through his own workplace and was able to organise a placement for Emin.

He was talking to the HR about me and how I wanted to get into the automotive industry. They basically said well, we have this school based apprenticeship and dad pretty much signed - like he got details for me and I went 'you know what, why not?' It will get me ahead and it has.

Emin and his father then approached the school careers officer who organised the apprenticeship with the employer and the VET pathway. Emin undertook a mixed program comprised of three days of conventional school, one day at TAFE and one day paid in a workplace. Once engaged in paid apprenticeship work and training, Emin was more motivated at school. He said he struggled keeping up with school work at first but once he started receiving good marks in his apprenticeship related subjects he gained confidence and his marks improved across subjects.

Emin was paid \$13 per hour for his day at work and was able to do blocks of paid work during school holidays. He said *"the financial side of it, I was loving it"*. Nevertheless Emin found the workplace a difficult environment in which to differentiate himself.



There was a lot of favouritism there. You would be the best second year apprentice working his arse off, like getting all the big good jobs that everyone should get but then he doesn't get the limelight. Like he doesn't get the recognition that he should get in my opinion

When he completed school, Emin was short of a complete first year apprenticeship. He said he felt angry about being paid at this same level. He was then placed in a position for a second year that he was not interested in and he resigned to take up a position with another employer who would take him on as an apprentice-in-training.

This opportunity was with a friend's father's small new automotive business. Emin was attracted to this business because he felt his skills were recognised by the employer. There was a shared workplace enthusiasm for racing cars and high collegiality. However, after six months the business was unviable and they were unable to pay him even though he was still officially an apprentice with them. He again found himself angry about the conditions of his apprenticeship.

Emin required ongoing support to navigate through education, to secure work. He was connected with an apprenticeships and training broker organisation. They offered him emotional and practical support, which included legal advice and support to find a new placement. This support was critical for Emin to make sense of some of the decisions he had made.

Emin was eager to place himself in a workplace that provided him the specialist skills he imagined using in his future. He had stepped away from a large employer that was potentially able to provide this training in favour of a more immediately social and rewarding workplace only to find it did not offer the security he needed to complete his apprenticeship. Emin benefitted from his association with a specialised apprenticeship and training broker organisation where he could develop more realistic expectations about entry-level workplace conditions. While his family had been able to broker his initial steps into the workforce, he needed this outside support to guide him through the insecurity of this fledgling engagement with the workforce while he was still eligible for apprenticeship support.

Summary

- Labour markets and transition opportunity structures are changing rapidly, but the groups that experience inequalities are surprisingly constant
- Increased education participation and attainment and structural changes in the labour market and available jobs means that transitions to decent work are more complex and occurring at a later age.
- Youth unemployment, underemployment, long-term unemployment and NEET rates have been rising after the GFC, with different effects for young men and women.
- Policies and programs addressing the issue are embedded in explanations for youth employment emphasising individual and structural factors and supply and demand elements.
- The way we understand the causes of youth unemployment is important because it underpins how we decide how to direct resources to address the problem and who is most responsible to take action to address the issue.
- The experiences of diverse and disadvantaged groups points to the key role of supporting practitioners.

Youth transitions encompass multiple destinations, varying durations, linear pathways as well as more complex non-linear trajectories.

2. Review of policy and programs

Young people are best integrated into the world of work when education systems are flexible and responsive to the needs of the labour market, when employers are engaged in both designing and providing education programmes, when young people have access to high-quality career guidance and further education that can help them to match their skills to prospective jobs, and when institutionalised obstacles to enter the labour market, even for those with the right skills, are removed (OECD 2015a:3).

2.1 Approaches to addressing youth unemployment

Internationally, concern over youth unemployment has prompted calls for action. The OECD (2013) proposed measures to tackle the current youth unemployment crisis and strengthen the long-term employment prospects for youth through supply and demand side pressures. Measures include tackling weak aggregate demand and boosting job creation; providing income support subject to mutual obligations; tackling demand-side barriers, and expanding apprenticeships and internships.

Longer-term policies aimed to address the integration of the education system and young people's readiness for work, strengthen vocational education, and assist in transitions to employment are needed (OECD, 2013).

Approaches to conceptualising policies to address youth unemployment and youth transitions in different national and cultural contexts draw on a range of indicators and frameworks.

Eurofound (2014) define seven different types of approaches among European countries based on education duration, combinations of education and work, duration of time to first job and type of jobs young people are able to obtain. This analysis underscores the importance of national educational, training, labour market and social protection policies in providing the structures that enable and constrain young people's pathways and transitions.

What constitutes good practice?

As a point of departure, this review employs a framework outlined by Eurofound (2012; 2014), which essentially understands policies and programs to support youth transitions as falling into two broad categories: programs aimed at preventing early school leaving (sometimes involving reintegration into education) and programs aimed at facilitating access to employment. It is also noted that some programs work across education and employment sectors and offer supports all the way along young people's paths from education into decent employment.

The role of system coordination that draws together efforts across these sectors, reduces duplication and gaps is critically important for a comprehensive effective approach.

This review of programs aims to address research questions 4 and 5:

- What are the approaches to address youth unemployment in Australia and comparable countries?
- What constitutes good practice in promoting youth transitions, including identification of service gaps, existing innovation and opportunities for further innovative practice?

2.2 Programs aimed at preventing disengagement or supporting reintegration into education

Programs within this category seek to prevent young people disengaging from school or to reintegrate young people into education through providing an alternative education option.

Career guidance and development:

The need for career related information is increasingly seen as career development - starting in the primary years, and the purposes of everyday curriculum connected to a breadth of employment futures. Career Guidance is a term that often refers to more focused activity on entry-level pathways and skills.

Aspirations and mentoring programs:

Aspirations and mentoring programs aim to broaden young people's employment horizons and develop the 'soft or non-cognitive' skills required in workplaces. Thinking about work futures helps young people to stay engaged in school and learning.

Wrap around support and alternative education options:

Some young people require an array of supports - financial assistance, housing, family mediation, case management - in order to engage in education and/or employment. Many of these young people also benefit from flexible tailored learning which suits their circumstances. Most schooling systems offer various vocational and academic pathways which allow students to combine apprenticeship-based or vocational learning for formal schooling. Systems also offer a range of alternative education options which aim to reengage young people who have disengaged from formal schooling. These typically aim to provide basic skills and support non-cognitive skills and provide support for young people to secure employment.

The question of 'What works?' has been consistently identified by researchers as a very difficult question to answer. The factors that contribute to youth employment are multidimensional, enduring and compounding. There is a lack of reliable evidence from evaluations and most programs only address one dimension and often only in a limited way (Bowman, Borlagdan & Bond, 2015). This review explored evidence for good practice in programs promoting transitions for disadvantaged youth people. While this review is organised into education and employment focussed programs it is important to note there are a small number of innovative hybrid programs which offer supports to young people through education into secure work.

2.2.1 Career development and guidance

Career development is a continuous process that enables citizens at any age to identify their capacities, competences and interests, to make educational, training and occupational decisions and to manage their individual life paths in learning, work (ELGPN, 2014:7).

Long term career management orientations:

In an increasingly dynamic and insecure labour market, career development is critical. Disadvantaged young people in particular often need sustained incremental career development knowledge that facilitates well-informed and realistic decisions about career choices, educational pathways and employment options' (Polvere and Lim, 2015:5). The concept of career guidance (traditionally associated with schools) typically refers to activities relating to information-giving about courses, job seeking and vacancies, career counselling, competence and assessment. There is increasing recognition that this more limited concept of young people's employment information needs must be extended to include knowledge of changing labour market needs, longer term decision-making and career management skills.

Integrated incremental career development:

Furthermore, a review of the evidence base on the effectiveness of career guidance and development found that employment-related information in schools can 'increase students' engagement and success in school; support their transitions from school; and help them to establish successful lives and careers' (ELGPN, 2014:7). Career guidance and development programs found to be effective were ones where a number of interventions within a school were 'connected together for a meaningful whole' (ELGPN, 2014:35). There is evidence to suggest career development needs to begin early and be integrated into everyday Key Learning Areas (KLAs) and classroom learning and supported in school structures (Wiggans, 2011). While there is limited evidence available, it has been suggested that 'employer involvement and work-related learning opportunities' were beneficial to higher education students (ELGPN, 2014: 39).

'Career information needs to be trustworthy. There are few centralised resources of genuine experts who can resource brokers, mentors, teachers, parents and young people effectively'

- Nousgroup, 2014

Parents as partners:

Parents are a key source of influence and advice for young people but may lack information about contemporary labour markets. Some programs specifically that provide support for parents, for example, Parents as Career Transition Supports Program are an important component of the career development jigsaw (Polvere and Lim, 2015).

Multiple delivery points for career development

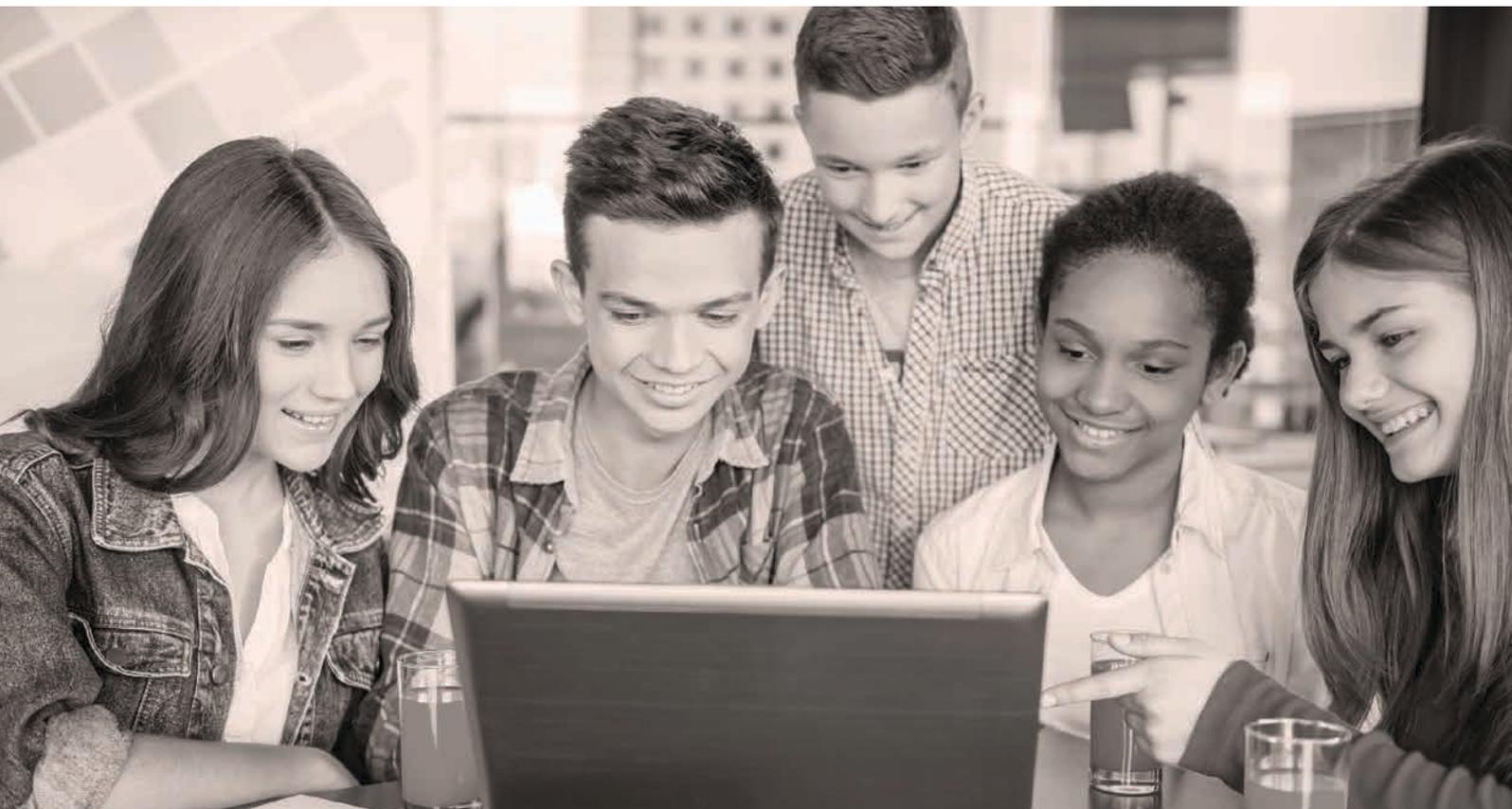
Young people no longer connected to schools may miss trustworthy career guidance and development opportunities provided in schools or information and advice provide through the internet (Polvere and Lim, 2015). There is a training market available to young people who have left formal education or who are trying to supplement their existing employment capital. However, there are strong incentives for these RTOs to place more focus on attracting students than on providing them with skills to help students achieve sustainable employment. This can result in young people paying for courses that do not lead to jobs or improve their employability skills. There should be further analysis of the functioning of this market (Nousgroup, 2014).

Elements of good practice: Career development and guidance

- Integrate careers development in all areas of syllabus and whole school approaches
- Deliver employment information appropriately from primary years
- Efforts to enable classroom teachers to develop their knowledge about education pathways for students and prerequisite knowledge from curriculum needed for those pathways through participation in university Open Days and information sessions (Wiggans, 2011)
- Creatively engagement of parents in programs (Erebus International, 2012)
- Tailored information to that responds to the needs of all young people
- Encourage the development of goals that recognise both labour market opportunities and personal interests and abilities
- Facilitate the development of a 'line of sight' from school to further training or education and employment
- Connect career development with the workplace
- Make appropriate use of technology

Snapshot from the local area study: Career guidance and development

- Unclear and modest employment plans:** The majority of young people interviewed in the local area study had modest aspirations, indistinctly defined plans to achieve their goals, or had not formed any plans at all. For example, one young person mentioned that he would like to become a youth worker. This was a job future that was visible to him within the youth specific service he attended. However, when asked how to prepare for this job, he did not know what sort of tertiary education or training he would need to undertake to achieve this aim. Even though they were past or nearing school completion, there was a general sense among these young people that the lack of a clear plan was 'normal' and age related. Most indicated they received one or two dedicated career guidance sessions at school, but that this did not help them navigate towards work. Many young people talked about Registered Training Organisations in the areas where they could take certificate courses to build their employability. These organisations were attracting young people with ipads and debt repayment schemes. Young people indicated they did not know how to judge whether the organisations were effective in supporting people into employment or not.
- Clear plans and motivation:** There were some exceptions where young people had clear ideas of what they wanted to do and were highly motivated in seeking opportunities that would strengthen their capacity to secure work. The positive differentiating factors in these young people's lives were parents in employment who understood the employment and further education system, or engagement in refugee settlement programs where employment information was well rehearsed and explicit, and finally, those who had been in dedicated, targeted career development (aspirations) programs.
- Under-resourced professionals:** Many of the school personnel and youth service providers interviewed struggled to find accurate information about local education to employment supports and opportunities. Most worked with young people to use basic job search tools and understand the basic steps of seeking work but struggled to locate additional opportunities. In the local area, there were employment brokers and intermediaries who had been funded to support collaborations and networks in the area but this core funding had ceased a year previously. If professionals working face to face with young people were connected to these brokers they could access services for a small number of young people. Service providers and school personnel were calling for greater resourcing and system coordination so they would be better resourced to guide young people appropriately.



2.2.2 Aspiration and mentoring programs

'Raising aspirations' is a widespread policy approach. Aspirations are viewed as important influences on the way young people's conceptualise their career development and thus their engagement with learning.

Programs that aim to raise aspirations encompass diverse approaches and may focus on improving 'self-esteem, self-efficacy or self-belief, motivation or engagement' (SVA, 2013). Programs identified in the literature encompass interventions partnering with parents, extra-curricular activities, volunteering and peer education, interventions with a primary focus on changing attitudes (Cummings et al., 2012). Many of these programs involve offer relationship based career development learning through one-on-one mentoring.

In Australia, the Review of Australian Higher Education (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008) found that students from low socio-economic backgrounds have considerably less knowledge about what careers higher education prepares students for, what higher education entails, how it can benefit the student in the longer term, and what is required to access these opportunities. The problem of poor retention rates for low socio-economic status (SES) students in school and tertiary programs was identified. This report triggered federal government targets to increase the proportion of people holding bachelor level qualifications to 40 per cent of 25–34-year-olds by 2025; and the higher education participation of people from low SES backgrounds to 20 per cent by 2020 (Australian Government, 2009). A considerable number of programs have been developed to support young people from disadvantaged backgrounds consider a broad range of employment futures and include higher education options as part of that vision.

Opportunities not Attitudes: Many young people have limited knowledge of what is available and how they might get there (Wiggans, 2011). Approaches that support young people to broaden their horizons and aspirations:

- Focus on employment related learning within the curriculum
- Improve (careers) information and opportunities
- Involve area-based multi-strand interventions that provide a range of supports
- Keep aspirations on track – adjusting opportunities and information rather than attitudes
- Avoid individual explanations and ensuring that any focus on attitudes is embedded in wider structural changes (Cummings et al. 2012:5-6).

Some aspirations programs aim to redress low parental and student aspirations (Cummings et al 2012). However, there is not sound evidence that socio-economic background factors (including family relations and the social context) are associated with negative attitudes and behaviour or have a causal effect on outcomes (Cummings et al 2012; Gorard et al 2012). Cummings et al (2012) found in their review of the research that many young people from low socio-economic backgrounds do not have low aspirations or ideas about where they would like to be, rather, they find it difficult to access information about how to get there. Furthermore, there is evidence that if parents or children think that others see them in deficit terms (that is, lacking in aspiration), programs can have negative effects (ARDT, 2014).

It is important to ensure programs communicate to families, students or professional partners that aspirations are shaped by opportunities and disadvantaged young people need rich, broad and incremental opportunities to engage with work.

Students need a line of sight to jobs: Some young people are not aware of the breadth of labour market possibilities or how to get there. In Australia, most aspiration-raising programs target students at the Year 8/9 level and above. However, evidence is emerging that children's sense of self as a learner and sense of an employment path develops much earlier (Goodman et al, 2010; Chowrhy et al, 2009; Croll et al 2005; Moore et al, 2011). Programs that connect classroom learning with broad knowledge of future employment options and processes often enhance children's learning and should begin in primary school.

Some aspirations programs work holistically with school (and parent) communities to support students to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to imagine themselves succeeding at university, or to build their motivation to do so. In this way, these programs hope to raise student attainment so that larger numbers of students have the capacity to meet university entrance requirements and cope with the intellectual demands of higher education. The *Aspire Program* (at UNSW) and the *Compass Program* (University of Sydney) are such programs that have been externally evaluated.

Many aspiration focussed programs contain elements of mentoring in recognition that relationship based learning is powerful.

'Youth mentoring is a structured and trusting relationship with a caring individual who offers guidance, support and encouragement'

- Australian Youth Mentoring Network Website

Snapshot from the local area study: Aspirations and mentoring programs

- **Broadening horizons:** Young people involved in formal aspirations and mentoring programs were able to name their desired career destinations and many had been into formal office work environments for the first time. They had met with volunteer mentors in professional jobs regularly to talk through pathways into work and clarify things they were interested in. They had opportunities to consider the range of employment options in corporate organisations (from hospitality and administrative services, graphic design and communications, legal, accounting, program development to other high level jobs). Almost all young people interviewed noted that the experience had built their confidence and social skills as well as their understanding of workplace cultures and opportunities.
- **Selection processes:** Young people interviewed believed they had been chosen for the program because they had demonstrated to teachers that they had the potential to benefit from such opportunities. It appeared that students with complex needs were not likely to be selected to participate in such programs.
- **Cohort approaches:** Alongside the rich experience of meeting with people in professional and semi-professional careers, young people noted the benefits of a cohort approach. They had been grouped with students outside of their friendship groups and formed a parallel informal network of students who supported each other to build their imagined careers together. These new visions often diverged from the employment realities of the significant people in these young people's lives. As such, the opportunity to feel like they belonged to a special group was critical to sustaining new visions. They reported sharing a special bond even though they did not always cross paths with each other. This bond enabled them to be different to not only the others students in the school, but to consider being different to their families and forge pathways that would create different working lives to those they had seen around them.
- **Pre- and post- program training:** Volunteer mentors appeared to be under-resourced and young people still struggled to find accurate information about the steps to take to realise their education and employment visions. There was little explicit follow-up from the schools when students returned from their intervention activities. (See Lucinda's case study below.)

Mentoring is relationship based: It is a way of fostering non-cognitive skills and support aspirations and knowledge of workplace cultures and pathways. Youth mentoring is often targeted at young people in disadvantaged contexts and can encompass a wide range of activities and approaches in the form of one to one, peer, team or cohort mentoring programs, or e-mentoring through schools and in the community (ARTD 2014; O'Connor et al., 2015). Activities and program principles can be structured within capacity building, resilience, youth development and/or social inclusion frameworks (Costello and Thomson, 2011).

Reviews of the evidence of effectiveness for youth mentoring programs have generally identified positive, while relatively small, effects on 'soft' domains such as attitudinal and motivational, emotional and psychological, interpersonal and social skills, while the evidence is less clear for effects on 'hard' outcomes such as academic performance and employment (DuBois et al., 2002; Eby et al 2009; Dubois et al., 2011; Costello and Thomson, 2011). Small numbers of studies had follow-up data, which suggested evidence for longer-term effects of some programs (DuBois et al., 2002 in Dubois et al., 2011).

A synthesis review of the research on youth mentoring also noted that:

- Hard (instrumental) targets, such as education and employment, are more difficult to achieve through youth mentoring than soft (non-cognitive) targets, such as improved self-esteem and mental health. This is largely because of the ineffective measuring and lack of previous evaluations.
- It is important to remember that some young people face barriers (related to structural inequality, racism, labour markets) that make social inclusion goals (related to education and employment) very difficult, if not unrealistic.
- Mentoring can also have negative impacts: this is the case when mentoring is managed badly, especially in relation to endings. (Costello and Thomson, 2011:15)

Four externally-evaluated NSW youth mentoring programs highlighted concerns with the process by which young people are selected for mentoring programs. These evaluations cautioned that the way in which a program is described may have an effect on parental buy-in to a program, the potential for stigma for children, and that mentoring programs should be represented through a strengths-based rather than a needs-based or deficit approach (ARTD, 2014).

Mentors and mentees need to be well matched:

Mentors need to be carefully screened to make sure they are appropriate for the young person, including having shared interests and developing strong relationships. The range of activities undertaken by mentors and mentees may be less important than the enthusiasm of both parties, as well as parents/carers and other parties. Recruitment training of mentors and ongoing support from highly skilled staff is critical as young people often need follow up information so they can enact their goals and new knowledge. School-based support and follow-up is an important component of the success of programs (ARTD, 2014).

Elements of good practice: Aspiration and mentoring programs

- Tailoring the program to the needs of schools and creating bespoke activities that 'fit' with school priorities and styles (Wiggan, 2011)
- Ongoing integration of program information with ongoing classroom learning occurring in classroom (including highlighting the link between the intervention learning activities and a range of Key Learning Areas) (Erebus International, 2012, Wiggan, 2011)
- Embedding aspirations and mentoring programs in school structures to ensure a whole of school approach (for example including program objectives in school action plans and annual reports)
- Young people are selected on strengths not deficits (ARTD, 2014)
- AND programs are available to young people with complex needs.

Where programs are relationship based – Mentoring

- Use of school and community settings to integrate learning opportunities with mentor-mentee relationship formation
- Providing orientation, ongoing training and support for mentors
- Matching mentors and youth based on similarity of interests (but not solely on race and ethnicity) (Dubois et al., 2011)
- Clear expectations for mentors and the level of contact expected for them to have with young people
- Programs are delivered for more than 3 months
- Systematically evaluations (DuBois, et al., 2002)
- Build a bank of case studies available to parents and teachers that illustrate the process of preparation for post school futures and high aspirations (Wiggan, 2011).

Case study: Lucinda

Lucinda was a sporty student who lived in an area where there is high unemployment. She attended an innovative local high school that actively addressed the employment futures for their student population. They specialised in subjects and curriculum that prepares students for labour market demand based on an analysis of the local labour market and forecasting of the skills and attributes required in the future. They maintained strong links with local businesses in their immediate area and in the business hub in their region.



Lucinda was from a family where adults moved in and out of precarious employment. She was selected by her school to participate in a program aimed at broadening employment horizons. The school selected students who showed potential but were lacking in direction with regard to career paths. The program placed Lucinda in a cohort approach of about 12 students and they were into the regional business hub for a series of activities and engagements over a 12 month period. They were each connected with mentors who were typically professionals (lawyers, business managers, accountants etc). Lucinda's mentor (a lawyer) encouraged her to have a look at a university course guide:

I just looked through - I looked through everything, and I just looked at the job skills.

She talked various options over with her mentor and eventually decided that physiotherapy might be a suitable career choice for her:

Injuries and stuff, I like to know about the body and how to fix it and stuff.

After the program ended she had a goal but remained unsure about what subjects she should be studying for physiotherapy. She stated:

I'm not very educated on uni and where to go from there. I don't know if it's important to choose the subjects that will help me in physiotherapy in senior years. I've heard you should choose the easy subjects so you get a higher ATAR, and then you can get into a uni and then go from there with your physio courses and things.

Asked about whether she should choose biology and related subjects, she stated:

No, I think I'm going to struggle in that and get a low mark. It's really confusing -no one's told me you really should do this. It's just a lot of opinions. It should be clearer. It's really hard to choose something, like a career, and what to put as a class.

Lucinda's experience highlights the need for mentoring and aspirations programs to provide accurate and timely advice to young people about the necessary requirements for tertiary courses, and viable career options. Young people were often given poor or no advice about what to study at school in order to prepare for certain careers. It is reasonable to expect that mentors may not be aware of the study requirements and pathways beyond their own field of expertise but this follow up advice needs to be provided by either schools or independent experts.

2.2.3 Wrap around support and alternative education options

There are significant numbers of young people who need a range of material and socio-emotional supports to be able to engage with education and plan for their employment futures.

Wrap around supports are critical for many young people who do not have the material and social-emotional support that enables them to thrive in formal schooling systems. With the right supports at the right time, most young people are able to engage with learning and make choices that support them towards secure futures. Some but not all of the young people who require additional supports, may not be able to engage with conventional or mainstream schooling and require alternative pedagogies and structures.

When young people begin to disengage with formal education it is important to 'look beyond perceived inappropriate behaviour or lack of aspiration as key reasons for disengagement and early school leaving. It is important to explore and address broader societal obstacles to young people's educational outcomes such as poverty, poor housing, ill-health and racism. When such obstacles are addressed young people can re-engage with education. Strategies aimed at supporting these young people often requires involvement of the community beyond the school grounds (Te Riele 2014: 30).'

Alternative education options target students at risk of disengaging or who have disengaged with education. Teams of teachers, community workers and members typically find out about and address the supports needed by young people and provide an environment which allows young people to recalibrate their sense of themselves as learners and citizens. The programs that fall under the alternative education umbrella are variously referred to as alternative education, alternative pedagogies, second chance education, re-engagement programs or flexible learning programs (Te Riele, 2014; Eurofound, 2012). Alternative education programs may operate under a range of organisational arrangements. They may be standalone programs that operate parallel to the mainstream curriculum, affiliated programs that intersect with the curriculum or fully integrated programs (Te Riele, 2012).

These programs can be differentiated from mainstream education by innovative approaches to pedagogy and curriculum that are responsive to the individual student and their learning strengths and needs.

A comprehensive scoping and review of the field conducted by Te Riele (2014) outlines a framework that maps the actions, principles and conditions that support valued outcomes in flexible learning programs. Key pedagogies in alternative settings:

- provide practical support for living
- create meaningful learning opportunities
- provide significant support for learning
- build genuine and caring relationships
- engage with community
- carry out reflection and evaluations (Te Riele, 2014:54).

Drawbacks of alternative settings: There are concerns that students in alternative schools may find it more difficult to access high status formal and tertiary education settings in the future. In this respect alternative programs may perpetuate exclusionary practices (Te Riele, 2014; Zygnier et al., 2014). Some reviews of alternative education practices and structures caution against overstating the achievements of alternative learning programs (Zygnier et al, 2014). These cautions centre on the short-lived nature of the alternative education experience in the face of entrenched inequalities. There are also concerns that alternative learning options can serve as 'dumping grounds' for students that schools identify as problematic. When students are separated from mainstream activities, they also lose connection with important sources of knowledge, including their peers, and from the kinds of authorised knowledge valued by employers and in education systems. Furthermore, some alternate education programs do not lead to recognised and credentialed outcomes, or allow movement into further education and training (Zygnier et al., 2014).

Programs are locally developed: Our review of both local and international case studies found that **the overwhelming majority of exemplary programs in schools are locally developed and internally implemented** (Zyngier et al., 2014). A research synthesis of programs identified effective alternative education settings as:

1. Both mainstream and relevant, with a clear relation to the wider community or the adult world reflecting real world problems,
2. Socially supportive, intellectually challenging and respond to student needs both currently and in the long term,
3. Rigorous in the selection and training of the participating teachers (leadership “from above” is less vital),
4. Actively involvement and connections to the students’ world and their communities (Zyngier et al., 2014: 3).

Systematic evaluation: There is a need for **systematic evaluation evidence of alternative schooling options**. No meta-analyses or systematic reviews of alternative schools were identified. An international review of alternate learning programs delivered by providers external to the education system found very little research literature focussed on the impact of such programs on student outcomes.

Elements of good practice: Wrap around support and alternative education options

- Programs in schools are locally developed and implemented
- Programs are connected to mainstream and wider community
- Programs are embedded in and engaged with young people’s communities
- Participating teachers are carefully selected and provided with ongoing training and professional development
- Learning opportunities are meaningful and intellectually challenging
- Significant support for learning
- Build genuine and caring relationships
- Provide practical support for living
- Offer recognised and valued credentials
- Incorporate monitoring and systematic program evaluation



Case study: Angelica

Angelica has done it tougher than most 18 year olds and had broken engagement with formal education. Her story shows how the right supports delivered at the right time can help young people be forward thinking and strategically move towards their goals to secure decent work.

Angelica's dad was violent and controlling and the family were forced to move constantly. Angelica grew up amidst gang culture at school that flowed across generations because of her dad's gang membership.

When her dad was imprisoned in their country of origin in the Pacifica region in 2012, she and her mum decide to 'start over' in Australia. When she first arrived in Australia, Angelica was not in any education, training or employment. It took some time for them to find their feet and understand what was available to Angelica in the Australian system.

Angelica and her mother needed and received wrap around supports from a welfare agency while they were settling in. Angelica has been involved with a case worker who has provided guidance and financial support for the family and got Angelica into her local school. She has now been regularly attending conventional school for over a year. This is the first school she has ever been able to attend continuously for that length of time. Angelica finds schoolwork a struggle: yet she is reluctant to blame her circumstances. She stated:

My marks could be better. I don't wanna use this as an excuse but I've been to a lot more schools than a teenager would usually go to. I didn't get to learn much. I really wanna get good grades so I can get a job and help my mum, she really does deserve a lot after everything she's been through. I need a job!

Angelica became a regular at the local youth centre where the workers supported her through some difficult reintegration issues. These youth workers have used their professional networks to support Angelica build her CV. The schools work experience program relied on students finding their own placement and the youth workers helped Angelica find a work placement at a welfare agency. Angelica proudly commented that *"the manager said that I was her best work placement ever"*. She continues to work at this welfare agency as a volunteer.

Despite her intermittent schooling, Angelica is aiming for a tertiary education at the Australia Defence Force Academy. She heard about this tertiary option at a careers expo she attended with her school. Her goals are influenced by her grandfather who was a WW2 veteran. She said:

He always used to tell me stories, so it's always been a dream of mine to join the army. We had a [careers expo] at school and they told me a couple of positions I could do with a degree.

She knows she must strengthen her CV if she is to increase her chances of winning a scholarship to study at ADFA. Angelica will need some kind of on-going financial support to study. The prospect of combining study and work is difficult because she needs to put the time into study to catch up on things she has missed along the way.

Angelica sees her opportunity to continue as a volunteer as one that helps her build a strong CV. As a volunteer, Angelica is building her knowledge of workplace cultures. She does administrative tasks, attends meetings, cleans, and cooks. *"It's not a paying job but I still love what I do!"*

Angelica has benefitted from personal case management and practical support to overcome obstacles and reconceptualise herself as a successful learner. This support has included financial support for her family, emotional and liaison support to return to school, guidance to information about employment horizons that has suited her orientations and culture and practical support to make steps towards those horizons. A well supported work placement and subsequent volunteering work have given her chances for deep engagement with a workplace culture. She has built her non-cognitive skills as well as build her CV and academic skills.



2.3 Employment focussed programs

Eurofound (2014) provides a typology of programs aiming to support young people into employment which has three groupings:

1. Programs that seek to facilitate the transition from school into the first post-school job, for example:
 - Youth guarantees- holistic support within a mutual obligation framework
 - 'One stop shop' - service coordinated approaches
 - Encouraging self-employment opportunities
2. Measures to foster employability:
 - Focusing on soft and technical skills to address skills mismatch
 - Providing work experience
3. Measures to remove barriers to employment:
 - Providing financial and logistical support.

Issues relating to effectiveness and good practice of key elements within programs in the employment focussed domain are discussed below. The review first considers good practice for young people with regard to work experience, youth guarantees and holistic programs and then considers good practice in engaging with employers and the evidence on wage subsidies.

Many placements in school driven work experience programs require young people to find their own placements which does little to expand their employment horizons and disadvantages those who are from low SES backgrounds.

2.3.1 Work experience/work for the dole

Work experience programs aim to assist young people to broaden and clarify career aspirations, improve motivation and attainment at school, support admission into university and develop employability skills (Mann, 2012a).

Motivational and attainment effects:

Young people who are 'uncertain or unrealistic about their career ambitions' have a greater likelihood of being NEET at a later stage (Mann, 2012a:11). Work experience is perceived to facilitate employment outcomes through having motivational and attainment effects in education and providing the opportunity to gain employability skills (Mann, 2012a). UK research also indicated that employers may offer paid work to participants after placements (Mann, 2012a). **Internships can be positive experiences and offer sustained workplace engagement for young people with complex needs.**

Value of external supports in work experience programs:

However, the potentials of work experiences and internships are often underutilised. As Mann (2012a) notes, many placements in school driven work experience programs require young people to find their own placement with the result placements are accessed through family networks. The breadth of these networks inevitably vary by social background and many young people choosing opportunities that are familiar, often gendered and which do little to expand employment horizons. Such processes reinforce existing inequalities and may mean that work experience opportunities are restricted to local labour market opportunities. Many young people need external support to find positive work experience placements and to make the most of the opportunities they have gained while on placement. The quality of work experience and internships is a key factor in positive outcomes. However, there is potential for exploitation in unpaid work experiences and internships may occur if schemes are not effectively regulated (OECD 2015^a: Stewart and Owens, 2013).

One program in the UK and Australia which has aimed to address the issue of providing meaningful work experience for young people is Work Inspiration which was developed through collaboration with the School Business Community Partnership Brokers program. A report, but not an external evaluation, on the Work Inspiration pilots in Australia identified positive outcomes for students, and emphasised the need to engage young people at risk through careful selection processes, to develop coordination, and for brokers to support the program (Work Inspiration 2013).

Snapshot from the local area study: Work experience and employment

- **Building a CV and finding a placement:** Most young people we spoke to were responsible for finding their own work experience placements. Many walked their neighbourhood taking their CVs into shops and requesting work experience. Most were unsuccessful. Some of the large retail chains were known to take on young people for work experience but that this rarely led to jobs.
- **First jobs:** Some young people we interviewed had found entry level positions. Many of these jobs were short lived and young people found themselves back in job search mode but with a stronger CV.
- **Brokerage:** We interviewed a few young people who were connected to brokerage organisations who offered support well into the first phases of employment and or apprenticeships. This sustained support (both informational and pastoral care) was critical for young people who sometimes took wrong turns or were poorly treated by employers. Pastoral care was an essential component for many young people who were dealing with feelings of despair and frustration. Emin's case study in Section 1.5 is a good example of this need for ongoing cross sectoral support.

Some forms of work experience are embedded in mutual obligation requirements.

In Australia, Work for the Dole programs have been in place since 1997 as part of the mutual obligation requirements for income support recipients (Borland and Tseng, 2011). At present, registered job seekers under the age of 30 years who have received income support for six months are required to do 25 hours per week of Work for the Dole for six months of each year (Department of Employment 2015). Studies of the impact of such programs on employment outcomes have reported both negative and positive outcomes (Borland and Tseng 2011). An Australian study of the pilot program in the late 1990s found a negative effect on participants exiting income support, which the authors argue is 'due to a "lock-in" effect, whereby program participants reduce job search activity' (Borland and Tseng, 2011: 4353).

Elements of good practice: Work experience

- Coordination between schools, businesses and workplaces
- Careful selection processes matching young people to employers
- Brokerage to support both young people and employers
- Clear purpose, aims and objectives which are discussed and agreed with the young person, school/college and employer/training provider
- Planning and preparation to ensure that all parties understand their role and responsibilities
- Induction once the young person starts their placement
- Matching individual young people with appropriate placements according to their interests and needs
- Addressing their needs for and while they are on the placement
- Monitoring and review during and after the placement, to help the young person make use of what he or she has learnt (Sources: UK Department for Education, in Mann, 2012)

2.3.2 Youth guarantees

All member states of the European Union were directed to adopt a youth guarantee “to ensure that young people up to age 25 receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months of leaving school or becoming unemployed”.

In response to the high rates of youth unemployment in Europe after the Global Financial Crisis, in 2012, EU member states adopted a youth guarantee to address rising youth unemployment (European Commission, 2012; OECD, 2014:8). Approaches to implementing the youth guarantee vary across European countries in terms of support provided, duration of assistance and compensation provided under the schemes (ILO, 2013). Youth guarantees also are implemented in a framework of activation and mutual obligation and aim to provide a rapid response to assist young people to transition from unemployment or ‘inactivity’ (Eurofound, 2012b).

Timely assistance to make decisions: Nordic countries have had Youth Guarantees in place since the 1980s and 1990s. An evaluation in Sweden found that the intervention assisted participants to find a job faster, but no effect on the likelihood of being unemployed one year after the program, while evidence from Finland suggested positive effects in reducing unemployment (ILO, 2013). **The main strength of these programs is in providing assistance to young people to make informed decisions, and the quality and speed of services** (Eurofound, 2012b: 3). It is argued, however, that they may not be so effective for more disadvantaged young people, who may require a more holistic approach (Eurofound, 2012b:3). Furthermore, their success appears to relate to the local labour market conditions and such programmes may not provide solutions to structural issues such as lack of qualifications (Eurofound, 2012b:3). Here the distinction between guaranteeing opportunities and guaranteeing outcomes and the challenges of the latter is important (OECD, 2014:52).

Elements of good practice: Youth guarantees

- Local areas have flexibility in policy design and delivery – this included flexibility to and within the local context to adjust the programs to local labour market opportunities and skills requirements of participants
- Strong local partnerships enable holistic interventions, coordination across a range of stakeholders and enable data sharing
- Programs have sufficient human and financial resources
- Staff have limited caseloads so that they can provide the intensive support to young people at risk
- Programs incorporate a range of methods to ensure early intervention
- Follow up support is structured into programs (for example a pathways approach)
- Policy sharing occurs between areas with similar local contexts
- Effective data collections at local levels
- Programs are underpinned by national frameworks that ensure quality of placements
- Mobility grants are provided to support young people moving to labour markets with better opportunities (OECD, 2014:8-10).

2.3.3 Employer engagement and incentives

Employer engagement and incentives encompass a spectrum of activities, including engagement with education systems and wage subsidies.

Studies of outcomes of a range of employer engagement programs have explored the impact on education attainment and employment outcomes. As Mann and Dawkins (2014) outline, employers may engage with education providers through:

- Work experience and related activities, such as job shadowing, part-time working and pupil volunteering
- Career talks, career networking and mock interviews
- Workplace visits
- Business mentoring
- Enterprise competitions
- Curriculum enrichment and real world learning resources (including work related learning qualifications).

Employer engagement activities have been the subject of studies considering preparation for the work place, skills development and labour market outcomes (AIR UK, 2008; Mann and Percy, 2013). Research reviews of evaluations of employer engagement programs have found evidence of positive effects on labour market outcomes, including higher wages (Mann and Dawkins 2014). It is argued that in the British context, the relatively short duration of many employer engagement programs and the lack of integration into the curriculum offer limited opportunity for skill development. These programs thus enhance the social and cultural capital of disadvantaged young people rather than actual employability or work performance (Mann and Dawkins 2014:30). The research suggests nevertheless that such programs provide important insights for young people into work and labour market opportunities (AIR UK, 2008; Mann and Dawkins 2014). In Australia, a range of programs exist to link education providers with employers. Work integrated learning is a key feature of vocational and higher education in Australia.

Involvement with employers through a range of activities decreases the likelihood of being NEET at age 19-24 years (Mann, 2012b:1)

A useful typology of employer engagement programs recognises a continuum of employment engagement from corporate social responsibility to labour demand. It moves from activities that support job readiness, knowledge of pathways to employment to vacancy-led approaches (Van Kooy et al, 2014). This typology distinguishes programs that may be regarded as addressing needs of young people from programs that are demand-led in the sense that there is the potential for an employer to provide a job for a young person (Van Kooy et al, 2014).

Key elements that support employer engagement are understanding the nature and needs of the business, and maintaining communication through a single point of contact.

Many approaches to addressing youth unemployment focus on the supply-side factors and the needs and skills of young people. Increasingly, policies have explored questions of labour demand and strategies to enhance employer's capacities to employ young people.

Time-bound and well targeted wage subsidies:

The 2015-26 Budget in Australia included the Youth Wage Subsidy which will be available to employers to hire eligible young jobseekers aged 15-29 years after 6 months. **The International Labour organisation supports the use of 'time-bound and well-targeted subsidies' for disadvantaged youth** (ILO, 2013:67). Wage subsidies have been found to be a useful incentive that encourages employers to employ young people. These need to be well structured so they feed into career ladders rather than lead young people to 'churn' through a series of subsidised positions without gaining a foothold in secure employment.

Address regulatory barriers to permanency pathways

Governments should address structural barriers where employment regulations structure temporary and permanent jobs in such a way it is difficult to move from temporary jobs to permanent jobs. Temporary jobs should be a stepping stone into permanent jobs rather than a trap. (OECD 2010:19; OECD 2015^a). Wage subsidies have been supported in the Australian Context by advocacy organisations as part of a suite of employer incentives measures to stimulate the availability of entry-level opportunities for young people (BSL, 2014b).

Elements of good practice: Employer engagement and incentives

- Brokers that invest in long term relationships with employers and understand the nature of businesses and support the development of entry level positions
- Single communication brokerage points which reduce the burden on business
- Government/business investment in funds that promote new skills for new jobs
- Subsidies that support the employment of young people
- Where there is a gap between employment regulations for temporary and permanent jobs this should be reduced so that temporary jobs become a stepping stone to permanent jobs rather than a trap. (OECD 2010:19; OECD 2015^a)



What works? Good practice principles

System coordination and longitudinal supports

- Mechanisms to tackle fragmentation and duplication
- Quality assurance
- Develop effective incentives and success measurement structures
- Adequate resourcing of appropriate referral mechanisms
- Built in support for cross-sectoral and cross jurisdictional approaches
- Improve data availability to understand nature of local skills supply and demand mismatch
- Monitor the implementation of programmes and evaluate successes

Education focussed programs

Career development

- Integrated in all area of school syllabus (primary years)
- Professional development/resourcing for 21st century employment systems
- Engage parents as partners

Aspirations and mentoring programs +

- Programs tailored to the needs of specific schools
- Programs delivered for more than 3 months
- Adequate training for mentors and teachers (pre and post)
- Selection on strengths
- Whole school and cohort approaches
- Better data monitoring and evaluation processes

Wrap around supports and alternative education +

- Programs are embedded in and engaged with young people's communities
- Ongoing specialised training and professional development
- Practical support for living
- Access to recognised and valued credentials
- Clear education to work pathway

Employment focussed programs

Work experience/work for the dole

- Careful selection processes - young people are matched to employers,
- Brokerage to support both young people and employers,

Youth Guarantees (EU)

- Local areas flexibility in policy design and delivery
- Adequate financial and professional resourcing (limited caseloads for intensive support)
- Programs flexibility - responsive to a diversity of situations and needs.
- Policy sharing occurs between areas with similar local contexts.
- Mobility grants

Employer engagement and incentives

- Brokers invest in long term relationships with employers,
- The development of entry level positions,
- Government/business investment in funds that promote new skills for new jobs,
- Subsidies for employing low-skilled youth,
- Address regulatory disincentives that prevent temporary jobs becoming permanent.

2.4 System coordination

A comprehensive approach to support young people requires collaboration and coordination between agencies, services and stakeholders (Eurofound, 2012^a; OECD, 2015^a).

Coordination Key evaluations of mechanisms that coordinate programs at a system level in Australia found a high level of partnership activity, sharing of resources and expertise which had improved outcomes for young people and identified the voluntary nature of partnerships as a key component (Dandalo Partners 2014:75, SVA Consulting 2013).

The diversity of the characteristics and experiences of the group of young people who are identified in the NEET category has brought attention to the ‘comprehensive and multifaceted’ range of policies and supports that may be required to assist young people to make transitions into employment (Eurofound, 2012c).

This policy and program range includes flexible, tailored, personalised advice focussed on the needs of the young person, good quality career advice and guidance, and the need to set young people up on a sustainable pathway to stable employment rather than focussing on short-term goals (Eurofound, 2012^a: 2-3). Similarly Australian researchers have identified the need for stable economic supports, supportive relationships and networks, the capacity to assess labour market opportunities, job readiness and employability skills, and opportunities for recognised skills development (The Smith Family, 2014). These policies and program supports require coordination and streamlining in order to be effective.

There is a need for greater collaboration between different levels of government to develop specialised youth policies across policy domains and jurisdictions, and for facilitated brokerage to mediate between supply and demand elements in the labour market.

Whole of community: In the Australia, under the National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions (NPYAT), the Youth Connections program offered a range of services to young people and the School, Business Community Partnerships Brokers were established to provide a central point to implement a ‘whole of community’ approach. The evaluation identified Youth Connections as making a ‘measurable contribution to improving participation’ (Dandalo Partners, 2014:6) and ‘encouraging ‘providers to work together, increasing capacity and creating avenues for professional development’ (Dandalo Partners 2014:75). The Social Return on Investment (SROI) evaluation of a number of regions of the Partnership Brokers estimated a positive return on the investment with regard to the value created (SVA Consulting, 2013). The SROI also identified challenges for local area coordination include ‘resource and time constraints faced by organisations; a lack of understanding about how to build effective partnerships; and a lack of cross sector relationships’ (SVA consulting 2013:5). Internationally, research has highlighted elements of successful local approaches to support youth into employment that involve developing joined up strategies and governance mechanisms.

An OECD Report noted challenges related to:

- Ambiguity of roles and responsibilities
- Fragmentation and duplication of services
- Data collecting and sharing
- Understanding local skills shortages
- Evaluation and monitoring
- The short-term nature of funding
- Involving youth and their families, and
- Engaging employers (OECD, 2013).

Snapshot from the local area study: System coordination

- **Coordination:** There was enormous goodwill and interest among professionals in our local study area to develop a better coordinated local area approach to addressing youth unemployment. However it was not clear to everyone what portfolio or tier of government was responsible for what. There needs to be more effective and transparent systems of coordination to address issues underpinning youth unemployment across tiers and portfolios of government to better support joined up local area initiatives.
- **Quality assurance:** School principals, youth workers and families working with disadvantaged young people have funding to direct to support those young people's education and transitions. Principals are well placed to determine the needs of their student populations and invest in programs that can respond to those specific needs. However, principals and their teaching teams and youth workers have to navigate a crowded market of services – most of which are not properly evaluated, subject to regulation or quality assurance. Young people and their families also face a crowded market of services and are unable to determine quality and how to best invest.
- **Brokers and trusted intermediaries:** Most service providers relied on brokers and trusted intermediaries, but the scope of such services did not extend to all players in the youth employment field and in particular to service providers who work with the most vulnerable young people.
- **Improved data and monitoring:** Improved data collection and monitoring would support better allocation of resources at a local level but this needs to be consistent across service types.

Interest in Collective Impact Models:

There is significant interest in trials of collective impact models in areas of high youth unemployment (BSL: 2014b).

Collective impact models have been promoted as a mechanism for community action to support disadvantaged young people or 'Opportunity Youth' in the United States (Corcoran et al., 2012). The elements of Collective impact models include developing a common agenda, shared measurement, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication and backbone support organisations (Corcoran et al., 2012). This model is yet to be trialled and evaluated for youth unemployment approaches in Australia.

A recent policy development in Australia in the 2015-16 Budget is the Youth Employment Strategy. The measures within this strategy include programs that provide for intensive support services, and that may enhance local area coordination of holistic support approaches:

- \$212.0 million over four years for intensive support services to be provided by a network of community-based organisations to early school leavers aged 15 to 21 years
- \$13.5 million over four years to reinforce existing 'earn or learn' requirements, requiring early school leavers aged 15 to 21 years to study, actively look for work, or undertake a combination of the two, and
- \$105.7 million over five years for intensive support for vulnerable young job seekers who are at risk of long-term unemployment, including people with mental illness, young refugees and migrants and young parents (Thomas 2015).

Elements of good practice: Local, state and national system coordination

National

- Effective systems of coordination to address issues underpinning youth unemployment across tiers and portfolios of government
- Greater clarity about federal, state and local government responsibilities
- A national framework with flexible policy structures to support local area initiatives and innovations
- Improved service system collaboration through longer-term funding, quality assurance systems and less local competition
- Developing the right incentives and success measurement structures, (for example: removing perverse incentives for organisations to focus on young people most likely to succeed within an outcomes based incentives structure by rewarding progress points rather than outcomes)
- Promoting employer ownership and ensure that firms invest in their future workforce
- Adapting funding arrangements in the context of reduced public spending, for example through social enterprises
- Policy initiatives that respond to differing concentrations of socio-economic and employment disadvantage and service the 81% of disadvantaged young people living outside of areas of concentrated disadvantage
- Monitoring the implementation of programmes and evaluating successes

State

- Support cross sectoral approaches to bring together educational institutions, industry organisations, employment agencies and other government departments to develop career pathways, articulating skills requirements and connecting youth to the local economies
- Mechanisms that tackle fragmentation and duplication at all levels

Local

- Service level agreements that outline roles and responsibilities of local stakeholders and monitor progress
- Shared targets for local areas
- Information sharing and joint service commissioning
- Embedded partnerships between schools welfare services and employers
- Well resourced local area referral agencies
- Support for collective impact models in areas where there are significant numbers of young people in disadvantaged circumstances
- Improving data availability and understanding the nature of local skills supply and demand mismatch as a starting point of the local youth employment strategy process

Conclusion

Unemployment over the long-term has been described as an 'unexpected tax on the current generation of youth' (ILO 2013:2).

There is clear evidence that career development and guidance is needed to support young people to navigate from education to work in rapidly changing labour market structures. Young people's views of their work futures are continuously forming and curriculum from the primary years onwards needs to make explicit links to work futures. Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds often benefit from programs that aim to enhance their non-cognitive employability skills as well as broaden their knowledge of the opportunities available and how to navigate towards these opportunities. Governments, business and non-government organisations need to collaborate to increase the number and quality of opportunities available for young people.

Effective career development requires interventions which support disadvantaged young people to make successful transitions by facilitating well-informed and realistic decisions about career choices, educational pathways and employment options and which build young people's employment 'capital' so they can navigate to jobs in the future.

Empirical work with young people suggested that programs that connect cohorts of students to workplaces for substantial periods (longer than three month periods) make a difference to young people's worldviews. Yet these experiences require considerable follow-up within school settings so that young people can assimilate new information into concrete and workable career plans and understand how to navigate to specific career pathways.

The role of parents in offering guidance to young people in terms of their education and employment choices was highlighted in both program reviews and in the empirical research with young people. Many parents are not able to help their children navigate the education and employment service options. Programs that support parents to take up this role effectively are important.

Alternative learning options and wrap around supports have a significant role to play for young people who have disengaged or are at risk of disengaging with education and employment systems. Key features of successful alternative learning programs are that they create meaningful learning opportunities, provide significant support for learning, build genuine and caring relationships, provide practical support for living, engage with community, and carry out reflection and evaluations. These programs need to offer recognised and valuable credentials and provide opportunities for young people to connect to mainstream opportunities. The overwhelming majority of exemplary programs in schools are locally developed and internally implemented.

Work experience programs can provide a mechanism through which young people expand their career horizons and become more familiar with the world of work. Yet work experience may be underutilised if young people predominantly source opportunities through their own networks, which may reinforce existing social and gendered inequalities.

Work experience programs embedded in mutual obligation schemes have been shown to have mixed effects and may impinge on job search activity due to program 'lock in' effects. Youth guarantees, as implemented in some European countries, have strengths in the quality and speed of their services. However, they may not be most appropriate for disadvantaged young people and may not address structural problems, such as lack of skills.

The diversity of the characteristics and experiences of the group of young people who are identified in the NEET category has brought attention to the 'comprehensive and multifaceted' range of policies and supports that may be required to assist young people to make transitions into employment. Such holistic approaches require local area collaboration between a range of services and stakeholders.

One of the reported consequences of changes to federal policy on Youth Attainment and Transitions is a significant drop in service system coordination that needs to be addressed. Many service providers do not feel linked in with other services or information about good practice/programs and policy directions. Recent policy changes announced in Youth Employment Strategy in the 2015-16 Budget may move towards addressing these issues for some young people in some areas.

Employers have a crucial role in engaging with education providers and fostering job opportunities for young people. The evidence suggests that students who engage in well-designed activities with employers may accumulate social and human capital that enhances realistic career choices and career outcomes. Labour market intermediaries also have a key role in brokering relationships between young people, schools communities and employers. Policy levers such as well regulated, targeted, monitored and supported wages subsidies to generate job opportunities for young people are generally supported by the research and policy.

The opportunity for meaningful work, which promotes dignity, wellbeing and social inclusion, should be a fundamental right of all individuals in each generation. While context, culture and national policies matter for young people's outcomes, well designed programs are needed to support young people in their transitions.



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