

EDUCATION BEYOND THE SCHOOL GATE: TRACKING EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT FOR 15-17 YEAR OLDS

In November 2005 the *Acts Amendment (Higher School Leaving Age and Related Provisions Act, 2005)* was passed with bipartisan support to amend the *School Education Act, 1999*. The *Acts* extended the compulsory period of education and broaden the range of educational, training and employment activities available to students, a range of which would be in non-school contexts. The legislation took effect in January 2006 with the school leaving age being raised from 15 to 16 years of age. The leaving age was then raised again from 16 to 17 years in January 2008. A new 'Directorate' was established in 2005 to facilitate the introduction of the legislation, and will be dissolved in 2010 when its tasks are completed.

The key responsibilities of the directorate have been to:

- To facilitate the implementation of the raising of the leaving age in a manner that effectively engages all 15 to 17 year olds, with a focus on students who traditionally have not completed year 11 and 12 (or equivalent).
- To develop mechanisms for ensuring that all 15 to 17 year olds that choose not to attend school are engaged in meaningful training (e.g. Apprenticeships, Traineeships, Technical Colleges) or employment with future prospects
- To support government and non-government schools and registered training organisations develop improved programs for the students most at risk of disengaging, (*learning programs, learning environments, career development and support services*).
- To build collaborative links between the schools, other government departments, industry and community organisations to align programs and services to improve the retention and participation of young people in education, training or employment.

The Department undertook a detailed analysis of student retention both State-wide and in each locality. To do this, school and registered training organisations attendance and enrolment records were analysed, and interviews were conducted with all schools, welfare agencies and other relevant agencies to ascertain contact details of all young people in their 15th year.

Although some of these students not continuing at school or training would have otherwise elected to or secured some form of employment, a significant proportion did not. It was this segment of the cohort that required varying forms of additional and often intensive support, other types of learning programs and learning environments to ensure they engaged successfully in school, training or purposeful employment.

To do this the Department of Education and Training developed plans for each district that matched the needs of all students with program provision, and funded programs in localities where there were no suitable programs for at risk students.

Additionally, 100 Youth Workers (Participation Coordinators) were appointed across the state to provide individual support to young people that were at risk of not participating effectively. The role of the Participation Coordinator has been to:

- provide intensive individualised support (case coordination) for young people at risk of not participating effectively at school, in training or purposeful training,
- develop plans for young people to access appropriate pathways to a range of post school options.
- develop and maintain an effective network of youth, employment, education and training services relevant to young people in the locality,
- monitor and report on client outcomes.

A mechanism for tracking and maintaining a data base on all students' participation in their 16th and 17th year has been established. This has involved clear accountabilities for schools, training organisations and Participation Coordinators for each at risk young person, and a set software to analyse a set of interconnected databases located in all school and training colleges. All at risk young people not attending school are allocated a case worker, who is notified if they stop participating effectively in training or employment.

The outcomes of the program to date have been an average of 98% of all 16 year olds participating in education, training or employment from 2006-2008, and 95% of all 17 year old students participating effectively in 2008. It is estimated that the economic benefit to the Western Australian economy of this initiative will be approximately 200 million dollars per annum.

This paper will outline the establishment of the program, and then discuss achievements and concerns with this model of using non-school providers to improve the education and training outcomes of young people in the post school years.

\FURTHER INFORMATION - www.det.wa.edu.au/schoolleavingage

Email – David.Ansell@det.wa.edu.au