

# Transition Pathways from School to Work or Further Study and Youth at Risk

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## 1. Introduction

“We aim at nothing less than assisting all young Australians from 13 to 19 to make a successful transition from school to an enduring career.” the Honourable John Howard, Prime Minister, September 2004.

To achieve the goal set out by the Prime Minister, it is vital that all sections of the community are assisted to acquire the skills and knowledge they need to participate in paid work to the extent they desire and to the level of their capacity. In this context, the Australian Government focuses on maximising the participation of young people making the transition from school to further education and training or work, or combinations of these.

In examining young people’s transitions from school to work in Australia, it is clear that the majority of young people clearly do in fact make satisfactory transitions. Based on data from the *Longitudinal Studies of Australian Youth* data set compiled by the Australian Council for Educational Research, we can conclude that in the first year after leaving school about 87% of young people make a sound start towards a good transition. After 4 years out of school, nearly 90% of school leavers make a good transition, including the vast majority of those who had a sound start and some others who made a less promising start soon after leaving school but eventually made good transition.

Our analysis also reaffirms that those who left school prior to completing year 12 experienced higher rates of ‘poor transitions’, as do young people from targeted groups (e.g. those with lower levels of literacy or numeracy, or Indigenous young people). Research also demonstrates that having undertaken some work-placement or vocational programme while at school improves transitions for early school leavers in particular.

In Australia, under our federated system, States and Territories have Constitutional responsibility for education. The Commonwealth (or Australian Government) is a key partner and major funding provider of education, vocational training and youth services.

The Australian and State and Territory governments have been actively committed to the ongoing development and implementation of programmes and initiatives to improve the transitions of all young people through and from school and post-school settings.

## 2. Context Setting

### 2.1. The National Reform Agenda

The Australian Government meets with the State, Territory and Local governments in the Council of Australian Governments (COAG).

On 10 February 2006, COAG announced a new National Reform Agenda (NRA) which builds on previous reforms, including the National Competition Policy. The National Reform Agenda addresses constraints on the economy by introducing Competition, Regulatory and

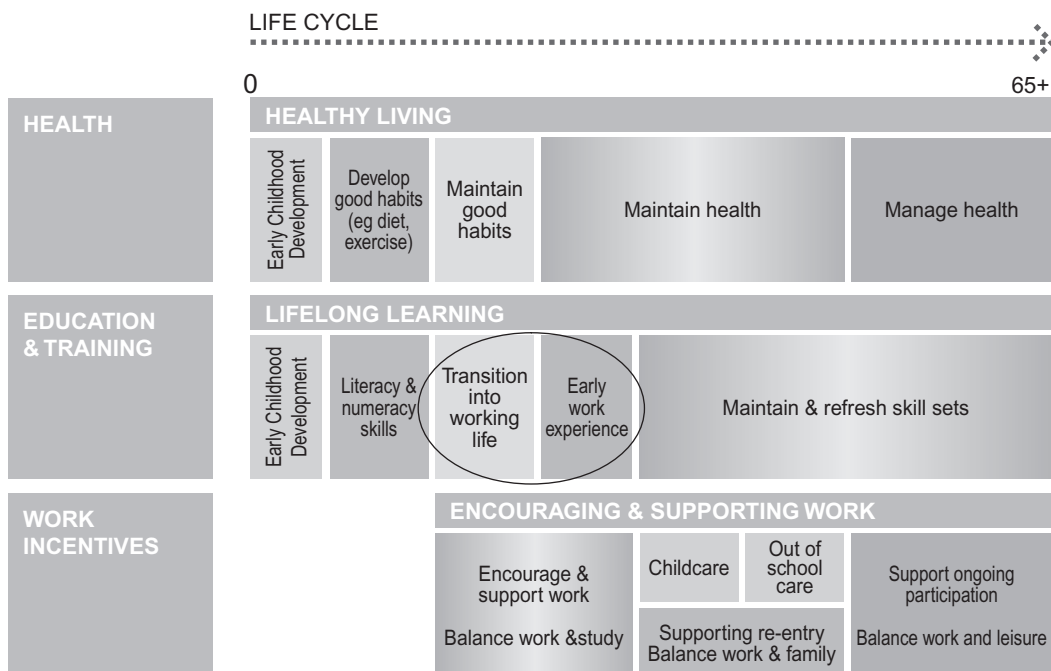
**Human Capital reforms.**

The Human Capital reform element stems from the role human capital has to play in ensuring Australia’s future economic growth through increasing workforce participation and productivity. COAG agreed that Human Capital reforms would centre on Health, Education and Training, and Work Incentives.

Within the Education and Training element of the Human Capital reform agenda, COAG has identified the following areas for reform:

- Early childhood development
- Core skills attainment (literacy and numeracy)
- **Transition from school to work or further study**
- Adult education

The figure below illustrates the relationship between Health, Education and Training, and Work Incentives and the location of transitions from school within these components of the Human Capital reform stream.



**2.2. Importance & Nature of Successful Youth Transitions**

For young people in Australia, a successful transition from school means being able to follow their aspirations and dreams – being able to do what they want to do. These aspirations and young people’s pathway choices are as many and varied as the young people in our country and they change over time.

However, what is very clear is that to become independent adults, all young people need the skills to manage their own lives and sustain their own livelihoods. So, getting the self-confidence, skills and qualifications to work, study and be an effective member of their family and community is vital to success. This active and self-reliant transition to adulthood is also critical to keeping our democracy vibrant and responsive to individuals’ needs and keeping our economy strong.

Australia’s living standards and continuing prosperity relies in part on young people participating in the labour force and being productive contributors. Arguably, this has never been more important than now, as we face the demographic challenges brought on as the

'baby boomers' leave the labour force. We currently face skills needs in a number of industry and occupation areas and this is predicted to become even sharper in some sectors. Australia simply can not afford to have even a small proportion of young people being left out of the opportunity to work, study, continually re-skill and contribute to our economy.

### **What is a successful transition for a young person?**

A successful transition from school refers to ending up in full time employment or full time education and training for a sustained period. A pathway involving a strong dose of full time activities is the most beneficial to good longer term employment and earnings prospects, with part time employment being less so but still generally serving as a good stepping stone to full time employment. A smooth transition is one which leads to a successful transition relatively quickly after leaving school.

Successful transitions are associated with:

- adequate literacy and numeracy skills;
- early work experience through VET in Schools and part time work while at school or full time work immediately after leaving school; and
- full time study, or work and training combinations such as Australian Apprenticeships.

Other factors are also important, including making informed career decisions, possessing employability skills expected by employers, and access to effective transition assistance.

Those identified as at risk tend to also have personal characteristics that impede effective transitions such as poor motivation and self-esteem and low social participation. A range of studies and pilot programmes, such as the Australian Government's Partnership Outreach Education Model (POEM) programme, show that these characteristics can be addressed successfully, independently of external forms of disadvantage, and that this can then greatly enhance the effectiveness of opportunities available to these young people.

Improving transitions can lead to more rapid transitions, which increase time in the workforce, and to more young people acquiring base qualifications, which are pre-requisites for higher labour force participation and productivity over the life span.

### **What are the characteristics of successful youth transitions?**

For some time now, governments across the world have recognised that successful youth transitions require a comprehensive framework of support and opportunity. The OECD has suggested that the key elements in improving transitions include: a healthy economy; well-organised pathways that connect initial education with work and further study; widespread opportunities to combine the workplace experience with education; tightly knit safety nets for those at risk; good information and guidance; and effective institutions and processes.

In Australia, all governments have acknowledged this and set in place a *Career and Transition Services Framework* under the auspices of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA).

The *Career and Transition Services Framework* advocates putting in place the following elements to support young people in making effective transitions through school and between school and post-school destinations:

- learning pathways plans
- transition plans and individual portfolios
- exit plans
- follow-up support
- career education
- vocational and technical education and structured workplace learning
- career information, guidance and counselling
- placement and referral
- individual support approaches

- monitoring and tracking

### **What groups of young people need targeted assistance?**

Data from a range of sources suggests there are a number of groups of young people that need particular support. For a variety of reasons, these young people experience barriers to successful transitions. Evidence from the Australian Census and other reports indicate the following groups are at increased risk to varying degrees:

- young women who leave school early
- young people with a disability
- young Indigenous Australians
- young people from some migrant groups
- those with poor literacy and/or numeracy skills
- those in rural or remote areas
- those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds

All governments need to put in place specific initiatives to support these young people. The specific reform proposals in this report will all address the needs of these identified target groups.

### **2.3. Broad Trends in Youth Transitions in Australia**

Patterns of transitions for youth from school to employment and post-school qualifications have been broadly stable for over a decade.

However:

- Participation in higher education has been declining slowly after peaking around the year 2000;
- The uptake of Australian Apprenticeships has increased substantially before flattening recently (for 15 to 19 year olds it doubled over the ten years to 2005);
- There has been little change in the proportion of school leavers in the first year out of school who are neither in full-time work nor in full-time education: when the recession of the early 1990s struck it rose from around 20% to around 30%, and it has been much the same ever since;
- Unemployment among young people has declined noticeably and been largely replaced by part time work; and
- The increasingly strong labour market may further increase the attractiveness of education and training combined with work and reduce the experience of unemployment.

The education and employment circumstances of young Australians have improved significantly in the past decade.

The proportion of 15-24 year olds in work or full time education has risen from 85% in the 12 months to March 1996 to 89% in 2006, while the proportion unemployed full time has fallen from 17% in March 1996 to just 11% in November 2006 (trend data).

The proportion of 25-29 year olds with Certificate III or higher qualifications, including university, rose to 56% in 2006, up 16 percentage points from 1994; see also Appendix 1: Labour Force Attainment of 20-24 year olds.

Strong employment growth and the expansion of Australian Apprenticeships have significantly improved opportunities for all school leavers.

Teenage full time employment levels are high with 242,200 teenagers fully employed in November 2006 (trend data).

Teenage Australian Apprentices have increased from 75,700 in training in June 1996 to 131,100 in training in June 2006.

As a result, teenage full time unemployment is currently at 60,000 (November 2006), less than half its 1990s high point of 128,500 in June 1992 (trend data).

As a proportion of teenagers, those in full time unemployment have declined from around 1 in 10 in the early 1990s to less than 1 in 20, and recent proportions have been the lowest in the last 3 decades.

Based on the latest available data, 96,000 young people left school without completing Year 12 in 2005. Of these, 67% were in study or work within six months of leaving school (in May 2006) and 50% were in full time study or full time work.

The pattern of transitions for young people in the four years after leaving school (from whatever year) has been fairly stable for more than a decade.

- Around 30% will have undertaken or be in higher education, and will have generally good long term outcomes.
- Another 40% will have consistently been in other full time education and training or full time work and will also have generally good long term outcomes.
- Around 24% will have mixed employment experience over the four years since leaving school, with considerable periods of unemployment and part time work.
  - This group may be at some risk and experiences protracted transitions. It tends to involve early school leaving and some of the characteristics of disadvantage, especially poorer literacy and numeracy.
- Around 6% will have had little or no work or study since leaving school.
  - This group is most at risk. It tends to involve early school leaving, and to have characteristics of multiple disadvantage, including poor learning experiences, low literacy and numeracy, and no work experience while at school. It is likely to also have specific disadvantage, such as Indigenous background, sole parenthood, homelessness or mental health issues.

### **The first year out of school**

The first year after leaving school is especially important in influencing the longer term outcomes of young people and is consistent with longer term participation patterns:

- 75% of students complete Year 12; 10% leave after Year 11; and 15% leave after Year 10.
- Over 60% of early school leavers (that is before the end of year 12) are in full time education, training or work, and over 70% of Year 12 completers; however, their pathways differ:
  - About a third of those who leave after Year 10 move to Apprenticeships; a similar proportion of those who leave after Year 11 move to full time work without training; and over a third of Year 12 completers move to higher education; and
  - Those who leave before completing Year 12 are twice or three times as likely as Year 12 completers who do not go on to higher education to be unemployed, in part time work or not in the labour force.

## **2.4. Range and Coverage of Existing Policies and Programmes**

Since the endorsement by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) of the *Framework for Vocational Education and Training in Schools*, their release of the *Stepping Forward Declaration*, and the *Career and Transition Services Framework* mentioned above, all governments have been actively committed to the ongoing development and implementation of programmes and initiatives to improve the transitions of all young people through and from school and post-school settings.

These frameworks and policies are intentionally not prescriptive about which programmes should be implemented, or how this might be done. They outline desired outcomes to be achieved over time and in ways that are appropriate to the contexts, priorities and resourcing profiles of individual jurisdictions.

Current approaches can be categorised under the following headings:

- Implementing individual learning plans

Developing approaches and curriculum in which learning and training opportunities are responsive to and designed around each young person's individual abilities, interests and career goals, and which take account of their personal circumstances and aspirations.

- Improving career development  
Providing career information and guidance programmes to assist young people confidently negotiate transition points across the middle and senior years of schooling, and in post-school training settings. Programmes are often determined at the individual site level and are responsive to local needs.
- Improving and diversifying pathways programmes  
Increasing the range, quality and access to Vocational Education and Training and other vocational and enterprise programmes that are offered as part of the mainstream school curriculum, as well as alternative programmes for those not in (or at risk of disconnecting from) learning or training.
- Monitoring and tracking  
Increasing recognition of the importance of effective and efficient monitoring and tracking processes to ensure that each young person is cared for throughout his or her education and guided into a successful initial transition. Such processes can be used to ensure that young people do not 'fall through the cracks' because action has not been taken. They can also ensure that those who have disengaged are assisted to re-engage through targeted intervention measures, including information about the range of support available and help to access them.
- Improving individual support for successful transition  
Introducing a range of mentoring and case management programmes to assist young people to monitor and support their education/training and career pathways.
- Improving planning and coordination of local provision  
Supporting the operation of school-community-business alliances to collaboratively develop education and training programmes that assist young people to better link with post-school/training opportunities.
- Improving the quality of teaching and learning in post-compulsory education and training  
Providing resources for the professional development of teachers and trainers about vocational education and career development.

## **2.5. Summary of Key Australian Government Initiatives**

The Australian Government has a comprehensive set of measures to assist young people with support in their transitions after school:

Career Advice Australia was announced in the 2005-06 Budget and commenced operation in January 2006. It provides additional funding of over \$143 million over the four years to 2008-09 to enhance school, industry and other networks to ensure that all young people aged 13 to 19 have access to up to date quality career related information and support. This brings direct Australian Government funding for specific career development and transition support in the education portfolio alone to some \$100 million per year.

The Youth Pathways programme commenced service on 1 January 2006 with the aim of retaining young people aged 13-19 years in school, or re-engaging young people who had left school within the last 12 months in education or training. The programme is targeted at those young people who are most at risk of not finishing year 12 and not making a smooth transition into further education, training or employment and successful participation within the community. In 2006, Youth Pathways funding was at around \$24 million and assisted approximately 17,000 young people. Following the Prime Minister's release of the Better Mental Health Services for Australians package in April 2006, Youth Pathways funding increased from 1 January 2007 to over \$36 million per year. At least 25,500 young people will be assisted each year as a result (see below for greater detail on Youth Pathways).

The Partnership Outreach Education Model provides flexible accredited education and personal development for young people aged 13 to 19 years who are disconnected from mainstream schooling. Over five years to 31 December 2006, the initial pilot projects assisted 7,700 young people. The POEM pilots ceased in December 2006. A new national POEM programme announced in the 2006-2007 Budget funded at \$34.9 million over four years will commence shortly in 2007. Sixty POEM services will assist more than 3,000 disconnected young people each year to re-engage with education in a supportive environment, and provide them with the ability to participate in further education, training or employment.

The Vocational Education and Training in Schools programme benefits more than 211,000 young people each year through accredited training relevant to work while at school (some 47% of the year 11 and 12 student population, operating across about 95% of schools). The States and Territories are obliged to support and promote Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Schools under the Agreements with the Australian Government providing \$45.2 billion specific purpose payments over the four years to 2008-09 for schools and vocational and technical education. In addition, \$22.25m each year targeted to VET in Schools is provided to States and Territories to assist implementation of VET in Schools courses. The Australian Government's leadership in supporting the mainstreaming of VET in Schools has been one factor in the rise of secondary school retention rates.

The Structured Workplace Learning Programme, a component of VET in Schools, benefited more than 96,600 senior secondary students in 2005 through experience of a structured placement in a workplace. The programme is funded to almost \$66 million over the four years to 2008-09.

Establishment of Australian Technical Colleges across Australia will benefit up to 7,500 young people per year once all are established, by offering a fully integrated academic and training programme for Year 11 and 12 students to enable them to achieve both a Senior Secondary Certificate and work towards a Certificate III level trade qualification. Initial funding of \$344 million will be provided over five years to 2009. There will be 25 Colleges in 24 regions with 21 of those operational in 2007.

## **Youth Pathways Overview**

The Australian Government is committed to enhancing the skills of all young Australians and to the continued development of an integrated national career and transitions system. Career Advice Australia (CAA) is a major platform assisting all young Australians to make a successful transition from school to an enduring career. Youth Pathways will complement the new initiatives introduced under CAA by providing intensive personalised assistance, and support to those young people identified as being the most at-risk of not making a successful transition.

From 1 January 2006 Youth Pathways replaced the former Jobs Pathway Programme (JPP).

Youth Pathways aims to assist young people aged 13 to 19 who are most at risk of not making a successful transition to reach their full potential, by keeping them engaged or re-engaging them with education or training through to the completion of Year 12 (or its equivalent) and ultimately to further education, training or employment, and active participation in the community.

Providers will identify eligible participants from the pool of eligible young people who are either attending school or have left school in the preceding 12 months without completing year 12.

Participants receive personalised assistance specifically directed to their needs including an assessment, assistance, and ongoing support and guidance to help them overcome barriers to effective participation in education, training or employment services programmes.

The activities will include:

- identification of personal barriers to participation;
- the development and implementation of an individually appropriate Transition Plan; and
- individualised case-management designed to address the barriers identified.

Also, where appropriate, it may include referral to: specialist support services such as youth suicide or drug and alcohol services; and community groups that engage at-risk young people – for example, in sporting, cultural, recreational and other community activities.

The preferred order of outcomes for participants of Youth Pathways is as follows:

- a) retain or re-engage participants in the school environment through to completion of year 12 or its equivalent;
- b) engage or re-engage participants in non school-based education, vocational learning and training; and
- c) prepare participants for effective engagement in Job Network activities.

Youth Pathways is an approved activity under Mutual Obligation and Preparing for Work Agreements administered by Centrelink.

### **Eligibility Criteria**

To be eligible to participate in Youth Pathways, a young person must be an Australian citizen or permanent resident between the ages of 13 to 19 and either:

- a) be at risk of leaving school before completing year 12 **and**
- b) be at risk of not making a successful transition through school, and from school to further education, training or employment;

**or**

- a) have left school in the preceding 12 months without completing year 12 **and**
- b) be at risk of not making a successful transition to further education, training or employment.

From the pool of eligible young people, providers must identify those young people who are most at risk of not making a successful transition through school and beyond. The programme targets young people who experience a combination of personal, social and educational barriers.

For Youth Pathways eligibility purposes, under 1 a) and 2 a), a school-equivalent course of education outside the mainstream schooling system is to be treated in the same manner as if the young person was still in school. For example, if the participant left school longer than 12 months ago but subsequently engaged with a non-school based programme this should not rule out eligibility on the grounds of having left school more than 12 months ago.

### **People who are not eligible**

Young people who are in one or more of the following categories are generally ineligible to participate in Youth Pathways:

- those who do not have significant barriers to successful participation in education or training;
- those who only need minor assistance, career advice or interview skills, and do not have personal factors that define them as ‘at risk’;
- those who have completed year 12 or its equivalent in accordance with the relevant State or Territory education system requirements;
- students who have indicated that they would only leave school (prior to completing year 12) to take up an employment opportunity and are likely to make a successful transition;
- those in employment or tertiary studies; or
- young people who are participating in Intensive Support Customised Assistance



(ISCA) or Intensive Support Job Search Training (ISJST), JPET, Green Corp or any State, Territory or local initiative that provides similar services to a similar client group.

### **Youth Pathways service model**

The proportional distribution of the 2006 17,000 participant numbers to each Youth Pathways Service Region was based on Australian Bureau of Statistics data. Specifically, it was based on the number of 15 to 19 year old unemployed early school leavers per Statistical Subdivision (SSD). Youth Pathways Service Regions are based on SSDs.

Under the Youth Pathways funding model, SSDs have been classified into four classifications (Metropolitan, Provincial City, Other Provincial Area and Remote), based on the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) Schools Geographical Location Classification. The MCEETYA Schools Geographical Location Classification is based on a combination of population size and geographic distance from population centres.

The contract value for each Service Region is determined by the business level (number of participants to be serviced), multiplied by the service fee (unit price) assigned to each participant serviced. This unit price varies depending on the geographical classification of each of the SSDs. The contract sets out the unit price attributed to each of the business levels assigned to each SSD in each Youth Pathways Service Region.

The Australian Government increased unit prices from 2007 for Youth Pathways providers delivering services to young people in “other provincial” and “remote” geographical areas. Prices for “other provincial” classifications rose from \$1,735 to \$1,985 and prices for “remote” areas rose from \$2,230 to \$3,435. These increases reflect the additional costs that Youth Pathways providers incur in delivering intensive support services in the more provincial and remote areas of the country.

The unit prices (GST exclusive) assigned to participants from each of the four geographical classifications used in the programme in 2007 are set out below:

Metropolitan:	\$1,235
Provincial city:	\$1,300
Other provincial:	\$1,985
Remote:	\$3,435

### **Further information**

Further information can be obtained from the Youth Pathways website:

[www.youthpathways.dest.gov.au](http://www.youthpathways.dest.gov.au)

Further information about the extended commitment of the Australian Government to young people leaving school can be found by accessing the following website:

[http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/career\\_development/programmes\\_funding/programme\\_categories/key\\_career\\_priorities/](http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/career_development/programmes_funding/programme_categories/key_career_priorities/)

### **Youth Pathways Case Study from the Gold Coast, Queensland – (2006)**

Youth Pathways started this year across 28 schools on the Gold Coast. Ten very committed Youth Pathways Officers are based in the schools to provide ready access for young people most at risk of disengaging from school. The Youth Pathways Officers work closely with the administration team within each school to identify students who need intensive support to stay on track within the schooling system.

“We get to know the young person on their level and spend time with them to find out what their needs are. As non-teachers we have a different approach that puts us in a unique

situation to be non-threatening”, says Arian Schapp, SCISCO’s Youth Pathways team leader.

“Once we identify their needs or barriers we come up with creative solutions to address those needs. Helping the young person to set goals, and to consider career options is a good start, and we often find work experience helps them with that”. Each young person receives a minimum of 6 hours of face-to-face contact with a YP officer and they are closely supported and monitored to maximise their success.”

Jasmine (not her real name) struggled to stay at school due to family stresses, financial limitations and a lack of peer support. “I was getting anxiety attacks each morning before I went to school, and some days I just didn’t go”, explains Jasmine.

“The deputy principal asked if I wanted to meet Stephanie, the Youth Pathways Officer at our school, and I thought it was worth a go. Stephanie explained how she might be able to help me and I trusted her”.

Stephanie wrote a plan with goals for the two of them to work towards, which meant for Jasmine that she had to ask for help when she needed it. Stephanie has linked Jasmine into a peer support program for students who are struggling at home with parental issues.

“I have learned to express openly how I feel, and have worked up the courage to ask for help when I need it. Stephanie has helped me with assignments, has given me a career interest test and wants me to do a work experience placement next term. I’m keen on child care and would like to give it a go. My mum has spoken to Stephanie too, and now we can communicate better”.

Jasmine is now attending school regularly, but still feels she wants to build self-confidence. That is something that Jasmine can work on over the next six months with her Youth Pathways Officer walking along her side every step of the way. They meet face-to-face at least once a month. “I’m confident that Jasmine will get a lot out of her industry placement because she’ll be able to work with other adults in a non-school environment. We’ll try our best to place her in the right environment that is nurturing and sensitive to Jasmine’s needs. She’s a great girl, and will do great things in the future,” says Stephanie.

APPENDIX 1. Labour Force Attachment of 20-24 Year Olds

