

## Contributed Article

---

**The New Child Labour? The Part-Time Student Workforce in Australia**

*Erica Smith, Charles Sturt University and Lou Wilson,  
Edith Cowan University*

---

*This paper reports on the findings about part-time school students' working from a research project, in two Australian States, into school students' experiences in workplaces. The findings, from a survey and case studies, indicate that over half of Australian school-children in Years 10 and above are engaged in formal paid work. The majority of students who wish to work do not appear to experience much difficulty finding jobs, although those from certain minority groups are less likely to work than the average. Nearly two-thirds of student-workers are employed in the retail and fast food industries. The paper argues that more attention needs to be paid to student part-time working, as it is now the normal form of entry to the labour market.*

**Introduction**

This paper discusses the participation of Australian school-children in the labour force. There is currently intense policy interest, in Australia as in other OECD countries, in school to work transitions. As one response, education systems have been introducing many ways for students to learn about workplaces. There has been rapid expansion of vocational education and training (VET) courses in schools since the mid-1990s (Malley, Ainley and Robinson, 2001) that generally incorporate structured work placements. As well, most students undertake at least one period of work experience, designed to familiarise them with working life and with particular career areas. However, what is relatively unacknowledged is that many school students are already having direct experience in workplaces on a regular basis through paid work. This phenomenon has only recently come to the attention of researchers and policy-makers in Australia although in the United States, for example, it is an accepted part of the employment and education landscape.

The paper presents and discusses some of the findings of a study in New South Wales and South Australia, which was designed to find out the extent and learning outcomes of school students' engagement with workplaces, and yielded rich data about school students' part-time jobs. The full results are

Copyright of Full Text rests with the original copyright owner and, except as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, copying this copyright material is prohibited without the permission of the owner or its exclusive licensee or agent or by way of a licence from Copyright Agency Limited. For information about such licences contact Copyright Agency Limited on (02) 93947600 (ph) or (02) 93947601 (fax)

200209304



reported in Smith and Green (2001) and Smith and Wilson (2002); this paper reports only on the findings associated with paid part-time work.

### Review of the Literature

In the United States, mass teenage employment has been a feature of the labour market for a long period of time, partly because of higher school retention rates (Committee on the Health and Safety Implications of Child Labor, 1998). In the UK, it has been argued that although it is likely that school-children from lower socio-economic backgrounds have always needed to work (Mizen, 1995), a feature of the second half of the twentieth century has been that middle-class children have entered the part-time labour market. (Griffin, 1985). In Australia, large-scale participation of school students in the formal labour market has been a relatively recent phenomenon. The labour market participation rates of 15-19 year olds who were still at school (from ABS data) increased from 26 per cent to 43 per cent over the fifteen years from 1986-2001, according to a current Victorian government inquiry (Industrial Relations Victoria 2002, p. 7). The recent growth in student working may be related to a number of factors including increased school retention rates through to the mid-1990s, the increase prominence of service industries in the Australian economy, and the rise in demand among teenagers for expensive goods and services (Industrial Relations Victoria, 2002).

The ABS data referred to above may slightly underestimate the amount of student-working. Two recent studies, in South Australia and Victoria (DETE 2000 and Brown 2001), found participation rates among senior school students of 51 per cent and 43 per cent respectively. The ABS statistics also under-represent school student working in that they do not capture school children under the age of 15 (Industrial Relations Victoria, 2002). Many children under the age of 15 may be working, and there are great variations in legislation about child employment across Australia. In general Australia is less regulated than other comparable countries (Industrial Relations Victoria, 2002, pp. 34-40).

Typically student-workers begin work in the early teenage years with what is generally perceived as more informal work such as delivery of newspapers<sup>1</sup> for boys, and babysitting for girls. As they get older they move into more formal work, generally in the service sector (Wilson, 1989; Hobbs and McKechnie, 1997). Part-time student workers in Australia seem to be employed in a narrow range of industries, mainly fast food and retail (Robinson 1999; Brown, 2001). Robinson (1999) found that in 1992 the average Australian seventeen-year-old school student was working for nine hours a week during the school year. This is consistent with other Australian studies (Labour Market Analysis Branch, 1993; Brown, 2001). Non-engagement in

student part-time work may be because of preference or because of lack of self-confidence (Hodgson and Spours, 2001). It may also vary with ethnicity; studies in the UK and US found that Asian students were less likely to work (Hodgson and Spours, 2001; Quirk, Keith and Quirk, 2001).

Most studies of student-workers have indicated that students work primarily to earn extra money and to gain independence (DETE, 2000; Robinson, 1999; Ashenden, 1990); and also from a wish to gain experience, which may be useful in future full-time employment. It is generally agreed that most teenage student-workers do not contribute to the basic family income, although, of course, their financial independence removes pressure from parents to provide money for discretionary spending. There is little evidence that students are looking for long-term employment in the industry in which they have part-time work.

Part-time work may have a beneficial effect on subsequent employment rates. Data from the Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth (LSAY) tracked seventeen year olds in 1992 until the age of nineteen, and found that those who had been student-workers were significantly less likely to experience unemployment after leaving school<sup>2</sup> (Robinson 1999). This was also a finding by Hawke et al. (1998) in their study of teenage employment in fast-food outlets and supermarkets. Greenberger (1988) found in the United States that not only did student working decrease the chances of unemployment, it was also linked to higher wages in the first few years of full-time work. Robinson (1999) found this correlation in Australia only for students who had worked in Year 12 for more than ten hours a week, and the effect was very small. She also found that working part-time might influence students towards seeking full-time work in the industry of part-time employment.

Most writers on student-working view the practice fairly negatively. Working long hours has been found to affect school grades (Greenberger, 1988; Robinson, 1999), to lead to stress (Mortimer and Johnson, 1998) and to cause loss of sleep (Committee on the Health and Safety Implications of Child Labor, 1998). The critical number of weekly working hours at which grades are affected was found to be nine by Robinson (1999) and twenty by Greenberger (1988). Brown (2001) in the Victorian study found some negative effects associated with working long hours in the school holidays. Teachers however, are consistently more likely to see working part-time negatively than are students themselves or their parents (Hull, 1999).

Safety and health issues have been a major concern of several studies into student-workers. The Committee on the Health and Safety Implications of Child Labor (1998) in the US and Hobbs and McKechnie (1997) in the UK both

report high levels of teenage injuries at work. While health and safety issues amongst student workers has not been the subject of any major Australian studies, some cases are reported in the current Victorian government inquiry into child employment (Industrial Relations Victoria, 2002). Inexperience itself may be a factor in industry accidents among student-workers, together with the fact that young workers may be less likely than older workers to recognise unsafe situations and ask for training or assistance. Research into clothing industry outworkers in Australia has revealed cases of extremely long working hours, often for very little pay; these cases, like those of farm children working in unsafe situations or for long hours, are made more difficult to address because the children are generally working alongside their parents (Industrial Relations Victoria, 2002).

Most commentators (eg Greenberger, 1988) believe that part-time work carried out by student-workers is routine, tedious, badly paid, and with poor working conditions. Greenberger (1988) suggests that any satisfaction gained from part-time work is mainly social, since she shows that most teenagers work with other teenagers. However, there is a little contrasting evidence. For example, Hill and Woolmer (1987) found that McDonald's student-workers enjoyed their work and developed useful skills. Ashenden (1990) was surprised by the high level of satisfaction in their jobs, reported by student-workers and ascribed this to the fact that their expectations were low in the first place. Walker (1988) in a study of Sydney boys, reported part-time work with significant degrees of responsibility, as did Smith (2000) who found that student-workers were routinely supervising other staff, carrying out bookwork, and opening and closing premises. However, it seems that student-workers do not see their part-time jobs as 'real jobs', considering that their real transition to the workforce begins upon leaving school (Smith, 2001, p. 14).

Many school students continue their student-working patterns into their university (McInnis, James and Hartley, 2000) and/or TAFE (Symonds, Burke, Harvey-Beavis and Malley, 1999) careers. The university sector literature generally paints a negative picture of the effects of part-time working upon university students. The retail industry, by far the largest employer of student workers, has argued for students to see their part-time work as a legitimate medium-term career with its own career path that continues from school through the university years (Smith and Slee, 2001).

Australian education policy-makers are now becoming interested in students' part-time working. There has recently been some interest (eg MCEETYA, 2000) on accrediting skills-based learning from students' part-time jobs. However the reports acknowledges that 'there is very little enthusiasm on the part of most student part-time workers in having their competencies formally

recognised' (MCEETYA, 2000). It seems that students prefer to keep their jobs separate from school. Increasingly, though, students are commencing in apprenticeships and traineeships while still at school. Commencements in school-based apprenticeships and traineeships increased rapidly from 1591 in 1998 to 4288 in 2000 (MCEETYA, 2001). These school-based contracts of training can only be introduced where industrial awards allow for part-time apprenticeships and traineeships. In some cases, also, school students undertake part-time apprenticeships or traineeships that have no connection with school. They are common in retail and fast food (Smith and Slee, 2001) and are not included in the figures for school-based apprenticeships and traineeships.

### Research Method

The findings reported in this paper were gathered as part of a study of school students' learning experiences in workplaces. The study, in New South Wales and South Australia, was designed primarily to describe and compare the learning experiences of school students in paid work, work experience, and vocational placements which were part of school VET courses.

Interviews were initially carried out with sixteen key stakeholders in Australia, with a particular focus on the two States in the study, enabling a picture to be built up of current policies and practices relating to school children and workplaces. These interviews informed the development of a questionnaire and of case study protocols. The qualitative data collection involved administration of a questionnaire to Years 10, 11 and 12 students in thirteen schools in the two States during September-November 2000. The questionnaire included personal details, a record of participation in a number of paid and unpaid activities in workplaces, and detailed sections about learning through work experience, paid work and vocational placements. The schools, including government, independent and Catholic examples, were selected to include variety across rural and urban areas, low and high socio-economic neighbourhoods, and areas with higher than average non English speaking background and Aboriginal populations. There were 1451 responses received, with an over-representation from Independent and Catholic schools because of poor returns from the government schools in NSW. Unfortunately response rates cannot be given as, due to varying degrees of co-operation from schools, in some cases the researchers had little control over, or information about, administration of the questionnaire. As an example of the disparity in return rates, two of the Adelaide government schools each with around 400 students in Years 10-12 returned over 200 responses each, while a similarly sized New South Wales government school returned only 34 responses. Thus the survey results cannot be claimed to be representative, although they are

supported by the case studies and are in line with other studies in the literature and are believed to be indicative.

In the qualitative phase, case studies were carried out in five government schools during late 2000, involving interviews and/or focus groups with students and teachers who were involved in various ways with students and workplaces. In addition special focus groups with Year 12 students (in NSW) and employers (in both States) were convened. The quantitative and qualitative data were analysed separately and were then drawn together to form overall conclusions, which were sent out to ten experts across Australia for validation.

## Findings and Discussion

### *Patterns of Student-Working*

The findings confirmed other studies in that around half of the students surveyed had undertake paid work. The study gave a more detailed breakdown of types of employment arrangements than previous studies. Table 1 shows the full range of students' activities in workplaces.

Several students had undertaken several of these activities. Overall, 60 per cent of the respondents had undertaken formal paid work (not including 'own business' or 'other paid work'). When family businesses were excluded the proportion drops to 50 per cent. Interestingly, participation in family businesses was higher in non-government schools (27 per cent) than government schools (16 per cent) and was found (from qualitative responses) to include professional practices as well as shops and farms. The over-representation of independent schools in the responses, therefore, has probably inflated the findings for family businesses. Twelve per cent of all students had done both paid and unpaid work in a family business; nine per cent had worked on a paid basis only in such a business, and 11 per cent on an unpaid basis only.

Only small numbers (six per cent) were engaged in part-time apprenticeships and traineeships. These were twice as likely to be independent as school-based. When the figures were inspected on a school-by-school basis, it was found that independent apprenticeships and traineeships were clustered in certain schools. This finding suggested the presence of large employers who might routinely recruit their student workforce as trainees. This finding is in line with anecdotal evidence from the State retail industry training advisory boards (ITABs) that note the propensity of certain large employers to engage in such practices.

**Table 1: Engagement in Workplace Activities Among the School Students Surveyed**

	Per Cent
<b>Paid activities</b>	
School-based apprenticeship/traineeship	2
Independent apprenticeship/traineeship	4
Family business	21
Other paid work for an employer	47
Own business (eg babysitting)	20
Other paid work (eg sports umpiring <sup>3</sup> )	5
<b>Unpaid activities</b>	
Work experience	68
Structured work placement	11
Family business	24
Volunteer work	26
Other unpaid work	8

The most common form of unpaid work was work experience. Considering that all school students are supposed to undertake this, the relatively low figure needs to be explained by the fact that Year 10 students in South Australia often do not undertake work experience until Year 11.<sup>4</sup> When only Year 11 and 12 responses were considered, engagement in work experience jumped to 88 per cent. Among the 26 per cent who had done voluntary work (for a charity or community organisation), non-government students were over-represented, as were Year 12 students. Eight per cent of all students had undertaken other unpaid work, which was found to include babysitting, helping at Sunday school and helping in parents' or friends' businesses.

Activities in workplaces were not distributed evenly across the sample. Twenty-one per cent of those who had had formal paid work (15 per cent of all respondents) had held down more than one formal job at the one time. Forty-four per cent had done work experience and also a formal paid job. However 24 per cent had only done work experience, and 15 per cent of the respondents had not had any formal workplace experiences (family business, own businesses, volunteer work and 'other' paid or unpaid work excluded).

#### *Differences Among Students*

This section will briefly discuss the findings relating to differences among different groups of students relating to participation in the paid workforce. The findings from the survey are augmented by qualitative data from the case studies. The survey results shows that:

- Participation varied by year level. Thirty-nine per cent of Year 10 students had an ordinary paid job compared with 55 per cent of Year 11 students,

and 52 per cent of Year 12 students. The case studies and the qualitative responses in the survey indicated that some Year 12 students had chosen to stop working in order to concentrate on studying.

- Students from government schools were more likely to be working than those from non-government schools.
- Rural students were more likely to work than urban students. This finding applied to all types of paid work, not just family businesses, so cannot be attributed solely to working on the family farm, although rural students were certainly much more likely (33 per cent) to work in family businesses than urban students (20 per cent).
- Students who self-identified as coming from a below-average socio-economic background were more likely to have 'ordinary' paid jobs, whereas students from higher socio-economic background were more likely to have their own business or work in a family business, ie the better-off students seemed to prefer non-standard ways of earning money.
- Students who self-identified as having above average academic ability were much more likely than those with below average academic ability to have paid work and to have their own business.

Discussion of access to paid work among school students is quite problematic. In some cases, students may wish to find jobs and be unable to, but, in many cases, they might prefer not to work. Thus, differential participation rates among different groups do not necessarily indicate either advantage nor disadvantage. The case studies showed that students had a range of reasons for not working. These included wishing to focus upon study, sport or music or simply wishing to have free time. These preferences concurred with Hodgson and Spours' (2001) findings but no evidence was uncovered relating to their findings that students who lacked self-confidence did not work. The rural case studies identified a number of barriers to getting paid work including the lack of locally-available jobs and the tendency observed by students of some employers in very small towns to pay extremely low wages. However rural students obviously managed to surmount these barriers to achieve high participation rates.

There appeared to be some variation in participation rates among students from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, as suggested by Hodgson and Spours (2001) and Quirk, Keith and Quirk (2001). Unfortunately, only 26 respondents to the survey were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (ATSI), so our findings must be qualified. Among these students there was a much lower participation rate in paid work than other students. None worked in a family business or was enrolled in an apprenticeship or traineeship, and their engagement in ordinary paid jobs was 39 per cent compared with the average of 47 per cent. Discussion with employers during the case studies and



focus groups indicated their beliefs that ATSI students did not usually apply for work with mainstream employers, preferring to work in ATSI organisations. However, teachers at one case study school reported several ATSI children working to assist with family finances. Students from a non-English speaking background (NESB) were much less likely to have ordinary paid jobs (39 per cent) than the average (47 per cent). However, when analysed by type of school it was found that NESB children at independent schools were more likely than the average to be working. Discussions with education officials underlined the fact that the NESB student population is diverse and is by no means uniformly disadvantaged. It is likely, however, that students from different ethnic groups used different methods to find work. Students were asked who made the first contact with their work experience employer. (Work experience figures are used here as a proxy for paid work figures because of the low number of ATSI paid student-workers). Table 2 shows clearly that there were some differences among groups.

ATSI students were clearly much more likely than average to rely on their school to find work experience placements, while NESB students were more likely to rely on their own resources. While it is not certain that these findings about work experience can extrapolate to paid work, they do suggest that ATSI students may have less confidence than others, and less assistance from friends and family, in finding paid jobs.

Male students were more likely to be engaged in apprenticeships and traineeships (eight per cent of all the males responding) than female students (four per cent). This finding is in line with male participation in apprenticeships generally, although normally male domination of traineeships is not as great. (The study did not ask respondents to differentiate between apprenticeships and traineeships). Females were slightly more likely to have ordinary paid jobs (47 per cent compared with 46 per cent). They were also three times as likely to have had their own business, which in most cases

**Table 2: Initial Employer Contact for Work Experience, by ATSI, NESB and All Students**

	<i>ATSI</i>	<i>NESB</i>	<i>All work experience students</i>
	%	%	%
Me	65	77	66
My parent	6	12	15
A friend of my own age	-	3	1
An adult friend	-	3	4
The school	30	6	13

appeared to be babysitting. Thirty per cent of females reported having their own business.

#### *Amount of Work Undertaken*

Students were asked how many hours of work they had undertaken in the week immediately prior to completing the questionnaire, which in all cases was a normal school-term week. For some students, more than one job would have been involved in the total number of hours, since over one-fifth of students had held at least two jobs simultaneously. Table 3 analyses the number of hours of work by year level. The average (mean) number of hours worked was 8.5, which is in line with other Australian studies (eg Robinson, 1999; Brown, 2001).

Table 3 shows that a large number of students (two-fifths of all student-workers) were working very small numbers of hours (five or less). Year 11 students were working the longest average hours. The slightly lower average weekly hours for Year 12 students, particularly the substantially lower rate for 16-20 hours, indicates that these students may have cut back to concentrate on study. However it is interesting to note that there was a small group of Year 12 students who were working very long hours (over 21 hours).

The data about working hours was analysed by a number of variables. Students from families with below-average incomes were found to be more likely to be working longer hours, with 28 per cent of such students working 16 hours a week or more, compared with only 17 per cent of students with above-average or average family finances. There were also found to be some variations in length of working hours according to intended post-school destination. Only 19 per cent of student-workers who intended going to university worked 16 hours or more, compared with nearly a quarter of those bound for a full-time TAFE course or an apprenticeship/traineeship. When

**Table 3: Number of Hours of Paid Work Undertaken By Student-Workers in the Week Prior to Completing the Questionnaire**

	<i>Year 10 students %</i>	<i>Year 11 students %</i>	<i>Year 12 students %</i>	<i>All student- workers %</i>
1-5 hours	46	38	46	42
6-10 hours	24	26	28	26
11-15 hours	16	20	15	18
16-20 hours	10	11	5	10
21 hours and above	4	5	7	5
Mean number of hours	8.4	8.8	7.7	8.5

working hours were analysed according to reason for taking the job, it was found that those whose main reason for working was to get spending money or to be independent were the most likely to work long hours. In the case studies, one student reported working 30 hours a week, and one teacher said that a student of his had saved \$19,000 from his part-time work.

Contrary to the findings of previous studies, students did not report much difficulty fitting in their school work as well as their paid work. Table 4 reports on the findings analysed by hours of work worked the previous week.

As might be expected, students working longer hours were generally finding it harder to fit in their school work. However, even amongst the students working 16-20 hours a week nearly a half reported that they did not find any difficulty, with only a fifth finding it very hard. It is possible that students choosing to work high or very high numbers of hours might not be very interested in studying and would not have spent much time on school work even if not working. This might help explain the counter-intuitive finding that a large proportion of workers who worked over 21 hours a week did not report difficulty attending to their studies, when it might be expected that they would have the greatest difficulty. Year 12 students, when analysed separately, showed very little difference to these general findings. It may be that these students see working long hours as a direct lead-in into their full-time working careers, with little importance attached to their school results. The case studies and the Year 12 focus group indicated clearly that those students not intending to go to university were more engaged with their part-time jobs and preferred working to being at school. For example one said 'You get treated like an adult no matter how immature you are'.

#### *Nature of Part-Time Work*

Students were asked to nominate the industry area of their jobs, from a provided list. A slightly adapted version of ANSZIC codes was used.

**Table 4: Students Reporting on How Hard They Found it to Fit in School Work as Well as Paid Work (Student-Workers Only)**

<i>Hours of Paid Work in Prior week</i>	<i>Very hard</i> %	<i>Quite hard</i> %	<i>Not hard</i> %
1-5	5	19	75
6-10	8	32	60
11-15	9	36	55
16-20	21	33	47
21 and above	12	16	72
All student workers	9	28	63

Students were asked to answer, if they had more than one job, for the job that they had held for longest. Table 5 presents the results.

As has been shown in all previous studies of student workers, retailing and fast food predominated. While this finding was not surprising, the sheer dominance of these industries in their share of the teenage part-time labour market is certainly significant. In contrast, analysis of work experience industry areas showed that students on work experience were far more likely to be in 'career'-type industries such as education or health. These are industries that do not offer much opportunity for part-time teenage employment. The case studies supported the predominance of retailing and fast food. One student commented that she did not work part-time because there were no part-time jobs in her preferred career area. Some employers in the case studies noted that legal restrictions prevented them employing school students aged under eighteen in some areas of their operations, such as bar work.

It is commonly believed that most student-workers are employed casually and this is borne out by the results of the study. Table 6 shows the nature of contractual arrangements in jobs held by the students who had paid work, in their longest-lasting paid job. No distinction was made between students in formal or informal work, in this and the subsequent figures.

**Table 5: Industry Area of Paid Job (Student-Workers only)**

<i>Industry area</i>	<i>% of student-workers</i>
Retailing	32
Fast food, cafes and restaurants	31
Babysitting	7
Cultural, recreational and sporting	6
Farming, forestry, fishing, mining	5
Health personal and community services (including formal child care)	4
Other	4
Manufacturing	3
Newspaper delivery	3
Building including electrical and plumbing	2
Communications, media and computing	2
Banking, real estate and insurance	1
Government administration including education and defence	0.5

Table 6: Nature of Employment Arrangements, Paid Student-Workers

	%
Continuing casual	56
Continuing permanent	20
Occasional	13
Only in school holidays	7
Term time	4

Only 20 per cent had permanent jobs while 56 per cent were in casual jobs that continued year-round. It is interesting to note in this respect that of the two major burger chains employing Australian school students, one always employs on a casual basis and the other employs on a permanent part-time basis following a probationary period.

Many students appeared to be working in workplaces staffed mainly or partially by other teenagers. This is to some extent consistent with the picture painted in the American literature (eg Stone, Stern, Hopkins and McMillion, 1990), which argues that teenage workplaces do not provide an authentic workplace experience. Twenty-seven per cent of those with paid jobs said they worked mainly with other teenagers, while one-third worked about equally with adults and teenagers. However, the workplaces were not exclusively teenage-dominated; 40 per cent worked mostly with adult workers.

Most students seemed to enjoy their paid jobs. Only 10 per cent did not enjoy their jobs at all, while 46 per cent enjoyed them 'a lot' and 44 per cent 'a bit'. There were some variations among different types of students:

- Students from families with lower socioeconomic status were more likely to enjoy their jobs than the average.
- Students with lower academic ability were slightly less likely than the average to enjoy their jobs.

While most students enjoyed work, some of the qualitative comments from the survey responses indicated that a minority of students were unhappy and/or exploited in their jobs. Comments included:

- 'Working at \*\*\* (fast food outlet) is like child labour, it's slavery.'
- 'I work at \*\*\* (fast food outlet). The managers are unfair and the uniform is horrid.'
- 'It was the most horrible, abusive environment I have ever been in.'
- 'I worked at \*\*\* (supermarket) and hated it because the supervisors were horrible.'

It was interesting to note that those students who hated their jobs enough to name their employers all worked in retailing or fast food. There was also some evidence in the case studies that retail jobs offered low pay and poor working conditions, and also that retail workers sometimes felt anxious about asking questions in case their managers thought them incompetent. One student-worker said, 'You do it how you think (is right) and then you wait for them to yell at you.'

#### *Methods of Finding Work and Reasons for Working*

Access to paid work was mainly through informal networks rather than through formal advertised channels. Table 7 shows how the student-workers found out about their jobs (they answered for their longest-lasting paid jobs). Just over half found their jobs through a family member or friend, and 20 per cent through a direct approach to the employer. These findings suggest that networks are even more important in finding part-time student work than they are for adults seeking employment.

The students were asked about the main reasons for taking jobs. The findings of the study supported previous studies about student-working (eg DETE, 2000; Robinson, 1999; Ashenden, 1990). Table 8 shows that well over half of the students worked primarily for extra spending money with only nine per cent requiring the money for living expenses. Seventeen per cent were seeking either general or specific working experience. While such experience was of minor importance to the students as a whole, employers in the case studies suggested that they valued part-time working experience highly when recruiting full-time workers. While students may have been aware of this, for most it was not a major impetus for seeking part-time work.

**Table 7: Student-Workers: How They Found Out About the Job**

	%
Family member told me	31
Friend told me	22
Direct approach to employer	21
Advert on local noticeboard	2
Advertised in newspaper	7
Through the school	5
Other	13

**Table 8: Student-Workers: Most Important Reason for Seeking Part-Time Job**

	%
Spending money	58
Living expenses	9
General working experience	13
Specific industry experience	4
Keep myself busy	1
Thought I'd enjoy it	4
Be independent	9
Parent(s) made me	1

### Conclusions

The findings about participation in paid work gained from this study present a useful insight into school students' involvement in Australian workplaces. Since its findings of the incidence of work concur with other recent studies, its findings may be taken to be broadly indicative of the senior school student population as a whole, although with the reservation of over-representation of students from non-government schools and thus, perhaps, a class bias. A labour force participation of over half of all Years 10 to 12 students is quite significant, considering that the total for all Australians was 63.7 per cent in September 2001. These students cannot necessarily be seen as working purely for pocket-money. They work, in some cases, long (and in some cases, late) hours; in a few cases students reported working till four or five a.m. They are employed, in many cases, under formal contracts of employment, and they develop coping strategies which enable them to mix work and study in ways which are bound to prove useful through their later lives. In a minority of cases, students appeared to have the unfortunate, if perhaps instructive, experience of working under abusive management or in environments which were unpleasant. With the majority of student jobs in retail or fast food, typically stressful and fast-paced environments, there is a possibility that part-time work may present students with an unfavourable view of workplaces.

Despite these difficulties, student-working appears to be a desirable method both of providing a workforce for those industries, which require part-time workers for non-standard working hours, and of assisting school children in their transition to the workforce. With student-working now established as a majority experience, it is clear that traditional views about the transition from school to work need to be revised. Employer attitudes to school-leavers may need to be revised as they are no longer likely to recruit school-leavers who have not worked before. In the case studies there was some evidence that some employers were already aware of this fact. Moreover, the predominance of student-working means that more attention may need to be paid to student-

workers as a large, important and formal part of the workforce. The literature suggesting that student-workers are more prone to injury than other workers, and that Australia is less regulated than comparable countries concerning employment of school children, raises some concern in this respect. Thus human resource practitioners and trade unions, especially in the retail and fast food industries, may need to consider the special characteristics of these young workers.

### Endnotes

- 1 Hobbs and McKechnie (1997) point out that while newspaper delivery is seen as 'pocket-money work' it is in fact an integral part of the multi-million dollar media industry.
- 2 The direction of causation is, of course, unclear. It could be that certain teenagers are more likely to seek and secure employment, whether full-time or part-time.
- 3 Respondents were specifically asked not to include payment for chores done around the home.
- 4 Since South Australia has one of the lower school retention rates among Australian states, many South Australian children must be leaving school without having undertaken work experience.

### References

- Ashenden, D. (1990), *The student-workers*. Report for the Department of Employment, Education and Training, AGPS, Canberra.
- Brown, F. (2001), The relationship between student part-time work, adolescent developmental contexts and autonomy, DPpsych thesis, University of Melbourne.
- Committee on the Health and Safety Implications of Child Labor, Board on Children, Youth and Families, Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (1998), *Protecting youth at work: Health, safety and development of working children and adolescents in the United States*, National Academic Press, Washington, DC.
- DETE (Department of Education, Training and Employment) (2000), *Survey of student participation in the labour force, South Australia, 2000*, DETE, Adelaide.
- Greenberger, E. (1988), Working in teenage America. In J.T. Mortimer and K.M. Borman (Eds). *Work experience and psychological development through the lifespan*, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado.
- Griffin, C. (1985), *Typical girls? Young women from school to the job market*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.
- Hawke, A., Lawn, P., Robertson, F. Van den Heuvel, A. and Wooden, M. (1998), *Early work experience and the consequences for future career development: An analysis of youth employment in the fast food and supermarket industries*, National Institute of Labour Studies, Adelaide University, Adelaide.
- Hill, D. and Woolmer, R. (1987), Is McDonalds a better place to work than school? *Independent Education*, 17(1), 11-13, 32.
- Hobbs, S. and McKechnie, J. (1997), *Child employment in Britain*, Stationery Office, Edinburgh.



- Hodgson, A. and Spours, K. (2001), Part-time work and full-time education in the UK: The emergence of a curriculum and policy issue, *Journal of Education and Work*, 14(3), 373-388.
- Hull, E.B. (1999), *Student workers: Earning and learning*, Centre for Curriculum and Professional Development, Murdoch University, Perth WA.
- Industrial Relations Victoria (2002), *Children at work? Issues paper*, Industrial Relations Victoria, Melbourne.
- Labour Market Analysis Branch (1993), *Part-time employment growth and 'student-workers' in the South Australian labour market*. Youth Labour Market Issues, Issue 12, Education Department of South Australia, Adelaide.
- Malley, J., Airley, P. and Robinson, L. (2001), *Witnessing evolution: A report on the growth of workplace learning in Australian schools to 1999*, Enterprise and Career Education Foundation, Sydney.
- McInnis, C., James, R. and Hartley, R. (2000), Trends in the first year experience in Australian universities, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Canberra.
- MCEETYA (Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs) (2000), *New pathways for learning: Report of the MCEETYA Taskforce on VET in Schools*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra.
- MCEETYA (2001), Report of the MCEETYA taskforce on vocational education and training (VET) in schools, draft report.
- Mizen, P. (1995), *The State, young people and youth training*, Mansell, London.
- Mortimer, J.T. and Johnson, M.K. (1998). Adolescents' part-time work and educational achievement. In K.T. Borman and B. Schneider (eds.), *The adolescent years: Social influences and educational challenges*. 97<sup>th</sup> Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Quirk, K.J., Keith, T.Z. and Quirk, J.T. (2001), Employment during high school and student achievement: Longitudinal analysis of national data. *Journal of Educational Research*, 95(1), 4-10.
- Robinson, L. (1999), *The effects of part-time work on school students*. Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth, Research Report Number 9, Australian Council for Educational Research, Melbourne.
- Smith, E. (2001), The place of learning and training in the transition from school to full-time work, *Australian Journal of Career Development*, 10(1), 14-20.
- Smith, E. (2000), Young people's learning about work in their first year of full-time work, PhD thesis, University of Technology, Sydney.
- Smith, E. and Green, A. (2001), *School students' learning from their paid and unpaid work*, National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), Adelaide.
- Smith, E. and Slee, K. (2001), *Industry training plan for the wholesale, retail and personal services (WRAPS) industries, 2002-2004*, SA WRAPS Industry Training Advisory Board, Adelaide.
- Smith, E. and Wilson, L. (2002), *School students' views on their working and learning in the workplace*, NCVER, Adelaide.
- Stone, J.R., Stern, D., Hopkins, C. and McMillion, M. (1990), Adolescents' perceptions of their work: School supervised and non-school supervised. *Journal of Vocational Education Research*, 15(2), 31-53.
- Symonds, H., Burke, G., Harvey-Beavis, A. and Malley, J. (1999), *Workplace and institute accredited training*, Adelaide, NCVER.
- Walker, J.C. (1988), *Louts and legends*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney.

Wilson, B. (1989), *Early labour market experience of young people: An overview, and proposals for further research*, University of Melbourne Youth Research Centre: Melbourne.