YOUTH ACTION

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About Us

Youth Action is the peak organisation representing young people and youth services in NSW. Youth Action works towards a society where all young people are supported, engaged and valued. To achieve this, it is the role of Youth Action to:

1. Respond to social and political agendas relating to young people and the youth services sector
2. Provide proactive leadership and advocacy and shape the agenda on issues affecting young people and youth services
3. Collaborate on issues that affect young people and youth workers
4. Promote a positive profile in the media and the community of young people and youth services
5. Build capacity for young people to speak out and take action on issues that affect them
6. Enhance the capacity of the youth services sector to provide high quality services
7. Ensure Youth Action’s organisational development, efficiency, effectiveness and good governance.
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Recommendations

1. A ‘Generic Skills Passport’ be developed by Government that documents the skills and experience that students receive in their part-time jobs to encourage combining study and work.

2. A restructure of the government agencies that deal with education transitioning.

3. The creation of a national peak organisation to deal with the issue of educational transitioning as a whole.

4. The funding of a centralised website/source of information for all families and young people that provides clear and concise information on all programs and issues relating to education transitioning.

5. The adoption by all levels of government of a person-centred approach that will allow for more flexibility and individual solutions to be designed for specific individuals/communities.

Introduction

Educational transitioning has increasingly developed in recent years as a key issue that can have ramifications in the short and long-term future of young people’s lives and career development. Education transitions ‘occur when students move between classes or schools or different settings’\(^1\) and can be characterized by increased stress and anxiety as new relationships are formed and support services are altered. Key transition points include the transitions between school levels and the transition from school to post-school options\(^2\) (commonly into the workforce, a trade or tertiary education).

This report will identify a broad set of issues that relate to educational transitioning as well as provide a set of solutions that seek to positively

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\(^1\) Standing Committee on Social Issues, ‘Transition support for students with additional or complex needs and their families’, Sydney, March 2012
\(^2\) Ibid., 26
correlate education transitions and their effect on young people’s lives and careers. Overall, this aims to increase year 12 attainment rates to the targeted 90% by 2016 and encourage the development of greater flexibility and individualization when dealing with education transitioning.

**What are the issues?**

Arising from basic educational transition between young people are numerous issues, which include, but are not limited to:

1. **Combination of Part-time work and Study**
   
   There are now 260,000 young Australians combining school and part-time work which can serve to assist the transition from school into post-school as it equips students with the skills and work-ethic needed in a variety of jobs. However, there is no formal documentation that lists the relevant skills acquired in part-time work and, thus, it is difficult to expand knowledge and research into whether combining school and work positively assists the transition from school to post-school options. Research also indicates that early school leavers have smaller completion rates in future attempts to gain vocation education and qualifications. Thus, it would be ideal to increase the year 12 retention rates to allow all young people to have equal benefits and opportunities in their future career development.

2. **Government Agencies dealing with Educational Transitions**

   NSW currently has no single agency that takes care of the majority of educational transitions, which leads to confusion amongst families and students with it being difficult to locate definitive information on education transitioning. Additionally, this means that resources and recognition by the government are not being used effectively and

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6 Standing Committee on Social Issues, ‘Transition support for students with additional or complex needs and their families’, 13
lobbying power to address these issues is, in theory, ineffective.

3. **Faulty design of Education and Employment Pathways**

Finally, the faulty design of education and employment pathways, which does not support or correlate with one another, needs to be re-assessed\(^7\). For instance, a provision of a broader range of VET subjects in the final years of high school that cater to a more encompassing range of interests and provide strong ‘connections with professional career practitioners… to improve access to quality career information, career development and experiential learning opportunities’\(^8\)

Issues have also arisen from educational transitions with multicultural and indigenous young people. These issues all centre on the need to recognize the special needs of these groups of people. The Multicultural Youth Affairs Network (MYAN) has identified that ‘The majority of refugee young people have had a disrupted education and need time, support and flexibility to catch up to their Australian-born peers who have been engaging in education since early childhood\(^9\). Additionally, ‘Services that work with multicultural young people have highlighted the need to provide additional resources to English as a Second Language (ESL) programs\(^10\)

In a general sense, the unique needs of indigenous and refugee students are largely ignored due to the inflexible nature of the education system with strict time limits imposed on completing grades and extra support and tutoring usually limited by the family’s financial position

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\(^7\) Victorian Settlement Planning Committee, ‘Pathways and Transitions: Post-Compulsory Education, Work and Refugee Young People’, Centre for Multicultural Youth, Carlton, 48

\(^8\) Standing Committee on Education and Training, ‘Adolescent overload?’, vii

\(^9\) Multicultural Youth Affairs Network NSW, ‘Inquiry into Transition Support for Students with Additional or Complex Needs and Their Families’, Sydney, October 2011, 3

What are the solutions?

The overarching issue can be seen to be this idea of ‘flexibility’ – helping others to find ways to work within and benefit from existing systems and processes. Thus the overarching theme of the given solutions is the increase in flexibility. It is clear that, through fostering flexibility in areas such as time limits and ESL programs, educational transition can be better suited to individual needs and decrease the stress, anxiety and negative professional-development impacts on the individual that are associated with them. The following solutions are supported by YAPA:

- **Generic Skills Passport**
  The Standing Committee on Education and Training suggests that a ‘national generic skills passport’ be developed to assist secondary school students in documenting the skills that they have developed. This promotes the combining of school and work and emphasises the developing of employability skills, which transforms part-time jobs into a platform of further education for students. In the long-term, the integration of work and education at a secondary school level is also recommended to ensure that all students are benefitted with the skills and practical experience of work.

- **Restructure of Government Agencies Dealing with Education Transitioning**
  It is essential that the NSW Government, in cooperation with the Department of Education and Communities, seek to synthesize and restructure the agencies that deal with the planning and support of educational transitions. This should culminate in the creation of a peak body that is easily contactable and coordinates all efforts in relation to education transitions. This will address the issue that was raised by the Victorian Settlement Planning Committee as to the difficulty of finding correct information in

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12 Standing Committee on Education and Training, ‘Adolescent overload?’, vii
order to plan the most suited transition program to meet individual and community needs\textsuperscript{13}. This will also allow for greater lobbying power for flexibility and for government funding/resources to be allocated on a more consistent and effective basis. This organisation will also need to be responsible for the continuing support in both the pre and post transition stages. It is especially vital that more credence is given to the post-transition phase with the suggested amount of time for support in this phase being 12 months\textsuperscript{14}.

- **Development of a Centralised Website/ Source of Information**
  
  A centralised website needs to be funded by the Federal Government to provide easy access to individuals and families looking for information and support on planning some form of educational transition. This would also assist in giving standardised information to the public, rather then the ‘difficult to find and hard to understand’\textsuperscript{15} information that is currently available.

- **Adoption of Person-Centred Approach**
  
  As an extension to this notion of additional support and flexibility, it is suggested that a ‘person-centred’ or ‘family-centred’ approach be adopted\textsuperscript{16}, as opposed to the current ‘standardised-program’ approach. A person-centred approach is based around individual needs and includes such objectives as appointing individual caseworkers and making exceptions to time limits. This approach has been adopted recently in the disability sector with the Council of Social Service New South Wales (NCOSS) stating that ‘this will be no less effective in education, especially at critical transition points where change can

\textsuperscript{13} Victorian Settlement Planning Committee, ‘Pathways and Transitions: Post-Compulsory Education, Work and Refugee Young People’, 48

\textsuperscript{14} Submission 56, p 7; Answers to supplementary questions 10 October 2011, Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect), Question 4, 3

\textsuperscript{15} Standing Committee on Social Issues, ‘Transition support for students with additional or complex needs and their families’, p.xi

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 124
create anxiety, disruption\textsuperscript{17}. This approach will also help to ensure that the young people ‘are central to the planning process’\textsuperscript{18} which affects them most. A person-centred approach is especially recommended when dealing with disadvantaged, disabled or multicultural youth as their needs tend to be unique and therefore their transitional programs need to be uniquely designed in order to be effective. Again, this approach encompasses the idea of flexibility in the hope that it will foster a greater success rate in the various areas of educational transitioning.


\textsuperscript{18} Standing Committee on Social Issues, ‘Transition support for students with additional or complex needs and their families’, 124