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LEARNING AND EARNING **- YOUNG PEOPLE IN EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT**

Exploring the SpeakNow Youth Survey

Tess Gregory
Ann-Louise Hordacre
John Spoehr

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Australian Institute for Social Research
The University of Adelaide
230 North Terrace
Adelaide
South Australia 5005

www.aisr.adelaide.edu.au

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2010 SPEAKNOW YOUTH SURVEY

KEY FINDINGS AT A GLANCE

This report presents information on the attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of young South Australians through data collected in the *SpeakNow Youth Survey 2010*. The survey was published in *The Advertiser* and supported by the South Australian Office for Youth.

The results referenced in this survey (unless otherwise stated) were collected from the Advertiser's **2010 SpeakNow Youth Survey** supported by the South Australian Office for Youth.

The key findings are as follows:

Employment

- Two thirds of young workers aged 18 -25 years felt their current working arrangements met their needs. For the 34% who were dissatisfied with their working arrangements, 16% wanted more hours, 3% wanted fewer hours and 15% wanted more flexibility in their working hours.
- Eighty percent of young South Australians were confident about their future job prospects, with confidence levels strongly related to current employment status.

Education

- Many young people who identified as being employed were also juggling some study commitments. Over half of these young people reported that working while studying negatively impacted on their studies.
- The key barriers to participation in education for young people were course fees and HECS debt (55%) living costs (51%) and work commitments (48%).
- Most young South Australians (62%) rated writing and arithmetic skills as the most important things to learn at school, with less traditional subjects such as computer/ ICT skills, life/independent living skills and financial skills also ranked important by more than a third.

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1 INTRODUCTION

This report presents information on the attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of young South Australians aged 18 to 25 years who responded to the 2010 *SpeakNow Youth Survey*. The focus of this report is on the information received from those young people in regards to employment and education, and how they transition from high school to paid work or further education (*the results referenced in this survey (unless otherwise stated, relate to the responses provided by those young people participating in this survey)*).

Much of the focus on young people is upon their high school years. While the wellbeing of that group of young people is important, there is a tendency to pay less attention to young adults during their transition from high school to paid work or higher education. For this reason this report focuses on young people aged between 18 and 25 years and their participation and experiences of employment and education.

In 2009, the OECD released a report exploring this transitional period for young Australians from high school to paid work entitled *Jobs for Youth: Australia*. The report stressed that the increase in the unemployment rate caused by the current economic slowdown was likely to have a disproportionately negative effect on young people. For instance, economic analysis in Australia has shown that a 1-point drop in gross domestic product (GDP) translates to an equivalent increase in the unemployment rate. However, the same drop in GDP translates to almost a 2-point increase in the youth unemployment rate. Fortunately, Australia has a youth unemployment rate much lower than many other OECD nations, so we may be in a better position than other nations to weather the economic downturn. Noting that in 2007, only 10% of young Australians had experienced periods of unemployment lasting longer than 12 months compared to the OECD average of 20%.

While recognising the low risk of unemployment for most young Australians, the report did point to much higher unemployment among disadvantaged young people. Moreover, the report suggested that young people who had received unemployment benefits for longer than 12-months were over ten times more likely to be unemployed for the subsequent five years than those not receiving unemployment benefits. These findings highlight the need for government to focus on ways to engage disadvantaged young people in paid employment

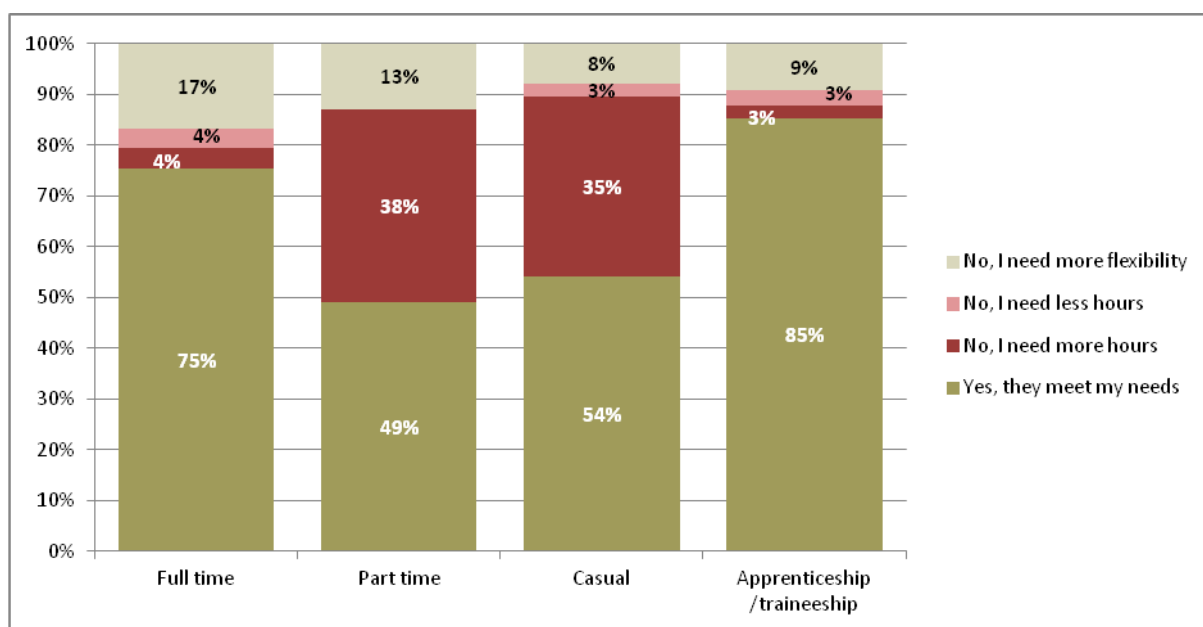
With respect to education, the report found that young Australians have a good level of achievement at age 15 based on OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) scores but a low retention rate in education beyond 16 years of age relative to other OECD nations. However, school leavers in Australia are able to transition into the labour market quickly compared to young people in many other OECD nations. The trend to work in a part-time or casual position while completing tertiary study is very common in Australia but is by no means universal across OECD nations. About 85% of Australian students (aged 20 years) were also employed in some capacity - which is the highest rate among OECD nations. .

2 EMPLOYMENT

2.1 SATISFACTION WITH WORKING ARRANGEMENTS AND EMPLOYMENT PROSPECTS

Two thirds of young workers felt their current working arrangements met their needs. For the 34% who were dissatisfied with their working arrangements, 16% wanted more hours, 3% wanted fewer hours and 15% wanted more flexibility in their working hours. Figure 1 examines satisfaction with working arrangements based on type of employment contract. Young people employed under apprenticeships/traineeships or full-time employment contracts were most satisfied with their working arrangements. About half of all young people employed on part-time or casual contracts were satisfied with the number of hours they were working but around one-third reported a desire for more hours. Very few young people expressed a desire to work fewer hours at their job. Not surprisingly, full-time employees were more likely to want more flexible working hours.

Figure 1: Satisfaction with current work arrangements by employment contract



Young South Australians were confident about their future employment prospects, with 80% stating they were confident or very confident, leaving 20% lacking confidence in this area. Confidence about future employment prospects was strongly related to current employment status, with the young employed usually confident or very confident (85%). However, these confidence levels decreased to 79% for students and 38% for unemployed adults. There were minimal differences evident between males and females or for young people living in metropolitan and country areas.

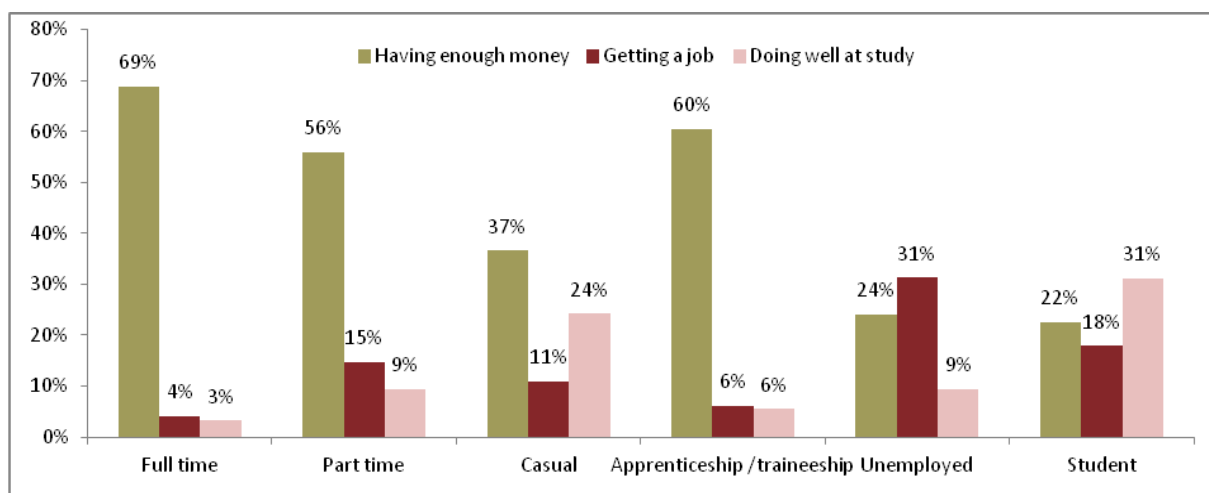
Although most young South Australians aged 18 to 25 years were confident about their future job prospects, job opportunities were one of the key *social issues* concerning them¹. The six most common social concerns for this group were job opportunities (48%), depression (24%), the environment (22%), health (22%), crime (20%) and personal safety (20%). As such, job opportunities was an expressed concern for half of all young South

¹ The survey presented eighteen social issues and asked respondent to select the three issues that concern them most.

Australians and was selected twice as often as the next most common concern - depression. Young people also expressed concern about getting a job when asked about the *personal factors* that worried them most². The three most worrying issues were having enough money (54%), doing well at study (11%), and getting a job (10%).

Figure 2 shows the proportion of young people concerned about having enough money, getting a job and doing well at study split by employment type. As expected, getting a job was of most concern for the young unemployed and for students. Also unsurprisingly, doing well at study was the highest cause of worry for students. However, concerns about having enough money were reported most frequently by young people who were employed. More than half of the full- or part-time employed and those on an apprenticeship/ traineeship stated that having enough money was the major cause of worry for them. This highlights the difficulties in economic conditions when even people employed on a full-time basis are worried about money.

Figure 2: Highest cause for worry for 18 to 25 year olds by different employment contracts



On a related topic, young people were asked whether they thought they would be able to afford to buy their own home in the future. About half (53%) believed this would be possible - at some point, a quarter (24%) did not while the remaining quarter (23%) were unsure. Personal potential for home ownership was affected by current employment status. Young people who were currently employed were most likely to believe they would be in the position to buy their own home (56%), followed by students (46%), and finally unemployed youth (30%). Having paid employment is clearly important for South Australia's young people and it influences their perception of their future. Most employed young people reported being positive about their future (78%), as did most students (72%). However, less than half unemployed young people were positive about their future. Improving the opportunities for youth employment is an important focus for government in improving the wellbeing of young South Australian.

² The survey presented nine personal issues and asked respondent to select the one issue that concerned them most.

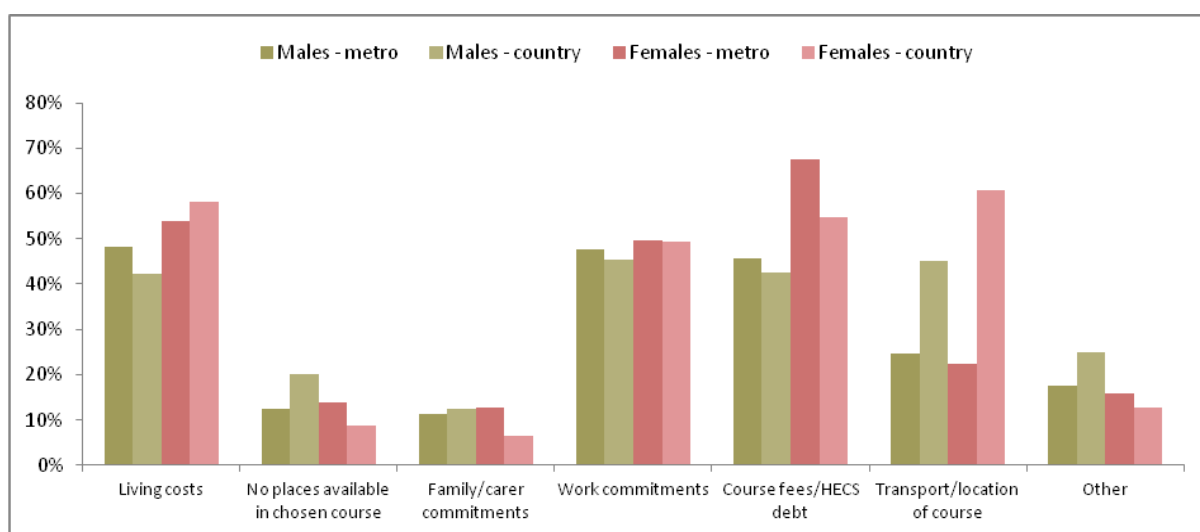
3 EDUCATION

3.1 BARRIERS TO EDUCATION

Many young employed people were also juggling some study commitments. Work was seen to negatively impact studies for 62% of those combining the roles, however, 23% suggested work had no impact and 15% suggested it had a positive impact. This highlights the difficulties for many students faced with the necessity of working to pay for living expenses. Nonetheless, it is evident that juggling study and work doesn't have a universally negative impact.

Course fees and HECS debt (55%) were a barrier to participation for half of all young people, as were living costs (51%) and work commitments (48%). Therefore, the main barriers to further education and training identified by SA's young people were related to financial difficulties or work commitments. Figure 3 shows the different barriers to further study for 18 to 25 year olds by gender and region (metro vs. country). Transport barriers were more significant for young people living in the country than in metro regions, and were particularly high for young women living in the country. Course fees/HECS debt was a more significant barrier for females than males, particularly for young women living in metropolitan regions. Living costs were also barriers for more females than males. Work commitments were a consistent barrier across gender and region.

Figure 3: Barriers to further education and training by gender and region



Note. Totals will not sum to 100% as respondents selected multiple options. These proportions exclude people with missing data (i.e. those who didn't select any barriers to further education and training).

3.2 BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS EDUCATION

Writing and arithmetic skills were selected as one of the most important things to learn at school by 62% of young South Australians (see Table 1). However, less traditional subjects such as computer/ ICT skills, life/independent living skills and financial skills were also ranked important by more than a third. Indeed, these subjects were considered more important than traditional subjects such as science (23%), arts (9%) and languages (9%). Driver education was also considered an important skill to learn at school by 20% of young people.

Table 1: Top 10 most important things to learn at school

	% of respondents who selected this in their top 5
English	62%
Literacy and numeracy skills	59%
Maths	49%
Communication skills	44%
Computer/ICT skills	42%
Health education, Humanities/society and environment	40%
Life/independent living skills	36%
Financial skills	32%
Science	23%
Driver education	20%

Note. Totals will not sum to 100% as respondents selected multiple options

Almost all (91%) of young people felt that leaving school before completing year 12 made it harder to get a job. Only 9% felt that leaving school before completing Year 12 made it easier to get a job. Similarly, 81% of young people agreed that it is important to participate in further education/training after school to have a successful career, with only 19% disagreeing that this was important.

4 CONCLUSIONS

This report explores the beliefs and attitudes of young South Australian's aged 18 to 25 years around employment and education. Most young workers felt their working arrangements met their needs but those who were dissatisfied wanted more (not less) hours or more flexibility at work. Most young South Australians were confident about their future job prospects, particularly those who were already in paid employment. Many young people who identified as being employed were also juggling some study commitments. Over half of these young people reported that working while studying negatively impacted on their studies. The key barriers to participation in education for young people were course fees and HECS debt (55%), living costs (51%) and work commitments (48%). Taken together these findings suggested that juggling employment and education while managing financially are key concerns for many young South Australians.