

How do young people find out about the world of work?

Damian Oliver and Janis Bailey
Griffith University

ABSTRACT

Young people comprise a significant proportion of the Australian labour market, despite the fact that school retention rates are improving. This is due to the increasing number of young people taking up part-time work while at school and university. Young workers are crowded into particular industries, forming, in the words of Lipsig-Mumme and Nielsen (2003 7), a “reserve army of the precariously employed young”. The deregulation and increasing complexity of arrangements governing how wages and conditions are determined in Australia, as compared with a decade ago, mean that the work context for young people is a difficult one. In contrast to the array of information provided by schools, employers, and career services on occupations, students learn much less about their rights and responsibilities in the employment relationship. This paper reports on preliminary research that explores the activities of various industrial and non-industrial actors in Queensland, and how they provide information and education for young people about their rights and responsibilities at work. It documents a considerable amount of activity, involving government departments, trade unions, and quasi-non-government organisations. However, this activity is uncoordinated, does not emphasise employment conditions, and is not integrated into most young people’s places of learning or work. Given young people’s near universal participation in the labour market, this suggests that many young workers may be unaware of their rights and vulnerable to exploitation.

