



Policy Platform: Employment

Youth Coalition of the ACT

Employment is a major issue for young people, be it part-time, casual or full-time. It affects many aspects of young people's lives including housing, health and education, and has an impact on income, social inclusion, workplace rights and relations, independence, and future prospects.

Unemployment and under employment have been linked to many poor outcomes. Unemployed young people are more likely to have mental health issues, poor dental and overall physical health, and have a higher mortality rate.¹ Conversely, employment is seen as a protective factor for social inclusion, better health and self-esteem.

Under the National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions, the ACT implemented legislation requiring young people to remain engaged in education, training or employment until the age of 17.² Educational attainment improves the labour market and broader life prospects of young people however, long-term trends indicate that much more needs to be done in many areas. Only 72.5% of 18 to 24 year olds were either in work, further education or training in 2011, a drop of 3.8% from 2008 levels.³ ACT attainment levels declined by 7.2 points to 79.2%, but were still significantly higher than the national average.⁴

See the Youth Coalition Education Policy Platform for more information on Educational attainment.

These issues have a significant effect on the employability of young people. Disengagement can be debilitating, isolating and can incur social, economic and personal costs - for those who are disengaged, for the communities in which they live, and for the broader economy.⁵ Disadvantaged young people are highly represented amongst the disengaged, such as young people with a disability, young carers and young people with involvement in the criminal justice system.

Employment Rate

The labour market for young people has changed significantly during the last three decades. The national unemployment rate for all teenagers is three times higher than for all adults.⁶ Rises in youth employment have mainly been in part-time and casual work, creating uncertainty in the lives of many young people.

In November 2012 the Youth Unemployment Rate in the ACT (15-24) was 8.6% - more than double the total unemployment rate of 4.1%.⁷ The Youth Coalition notes that this figure does not include young people who may be underemployed such as part-time workers who want to work more hours or full-time workers who work part-time hours for economic reasons (such as being stood down or insufficient work being available).⁸

Workplace Rights and Conditions

A recent independent inquiry found that 40% of all casual workers are aged between 15 and 24 years of age.⁹ Casual employment makes workers more vulnerable to dismissal, and prevents them accessing entitlements such as sick leave or holiday pay. Young people as a whole are more vulnerable to unfair and illegal work-place arrangements, such as unpaid work, sham subcontracting, below award wages and unfair dismissal. Many young people also report a lack of awareness regarding their rights, worker's compensation, taxation, and anti-discrimination policies.

The Youth Coalition believes it is the responsibility of regulatory bodies to inform young people of their employment rights, through ongoing accessible and appropriate education programs and resources. Clear pathways to complaints procedures and a commitment from regulatory bodies to treat young people's concerns in a respectful fashion is also needed to ensure that vulnerable young people feel confident in raising issues.

The Youth Coalition believes that young people need support to be actively involved with trade unions. This is consistent with International Labour Organisation convention standards to which Australia is signatory.¹⁰ Young workers are under represented as members of trade unions. Active involvement includes education about the existence of unions, targeted recruitment by unions, and the support by unions for young people to be involved in their structures.

Young people in Australia can be paid less in many industries, such as the hospitality and retail industries, simply due to their age.¹¹ This is age-based discrimination. It ignores the fact that young people are still doing the same work, at the same productivity rate as other workers. It further incorrectly presumes that young people do not have the same financial commitments as other workers such as family, loans, rent and food. The Youth Coalition believes that this discrimination needs to be removed.

The Youth Coalition recognises that most apprentices are young people. Apprentices can be more vulnerable to exploitative practices in the workplace. Additionally apprentice rates of pay do not adequately reflect the real cost of living.

Workplace Training and Support

Training and support for active, positive engagement in the workforce is necessary for all young people. Programs such as structured workplace learning, run by education providers, is an example of supporting young people to be 'work ready'. The Youth Coalition also believes that these work place skills should be modelled by youth support services, when appropriate. Young people, particularly those aged 18 – 25 years have also identified a need for formal mentoring for young workers.

In light of this critical phase of young people's lives, the Youth Coalition argues that ACT Government agencies, youth and community support services, and the wider community have a shared responsibility to ensure that young people are supported to maximise their engagement in education, training and employment. This includes the provision of reliable public transport, resources and incentives, including digital literacy and social media training for teachers and employers to attract young people to the workforce.

Occupational Health and Safety

Where young workers receive appropriate training they are less likely to be involved in workplace accidents due to lack of experience and proper supervision.¹² The

Youth Coalition notes the work of the ACT Health and Safety Commissioner in targeting programs to engage young people.

Commitments:

1. Advocating for young people's rights in the workplace.
2. Advocating for minimum wages to reflect the current economic cost of living.
3. Advocating for the removal of discriminatory age based (youth/junior) wage scaling.
4. Advocating for workplace related supports to be developed and promoted to young people.
5. Advocating for increased resources for youth support services to provide support and training to young people entering, or attempting to enter, the workforce.
6. Advocating for the active involvement of young people in designing, planning and evaluating youth policy and service delivery frameworks regarding employment.

¹ Mathers, C; Schofield, D (1998) *The Health Consequences of Unemployment: the Evidence*, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Canberra

² *Education (Participation) Amendment Act 2009 (ACT)*.

³ COAG Reform Council (2012) *Education 2011: Comparing Performance Across Australia*. COAG Reform Council, Sydney, Australia

⁴ *Ibid*, p. xiv.

⁵ Robinson, L & Lamb, S (2012) *How young people are faring 2012*. Foundation for Young Australians, Melbourne, Australia <online> <http://www.fya.org.au/hypaf2012/>

⁶ *Ibid*, p.45.

⁷ Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. Accessed 10 January 2013 <http://www.deewr.gov.au/lmip/default.aspx?LMIP%2fLFR%2fACT>

⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2009) *Underemployed Workers*, Australian Government, Canberra

⁹ Independent Inquiry Into Insecure Work (2012) *Lives on Hold: Independent Inquiry Into Insecure Work* (ACTU, Melbourne), p 23 <http://www.securejobs.org.au/Home/Howe-Inquiry/Report.aspx>> Accessed 12 April 2013.

¹⁰ International Labour Organization, Convention 87 (1948) (Ratified by Australia 28 February 1973); International Labour Organization, Convention 98 (1949) (Ratified by Australia 28 February 1973; International Labour Organization 'Freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining' <online> <http://www.ilo.org/declaration/principles/freedomofassociation/lang-en/index.htm> Accessed 12 April 2013

¹¹ *Fair Work Act 2009* (Cth), section 153(3)(a), 195(3)(a), 294(3)(a).

¹² Kate Hunter and Jane Elkington 'Report on available evidence about preventing injury to young people including a systematic review of the evidence of preventing work and sports related injury to young people aged 15 to 24 years', Youth Safe, Sydney, Australia, p. 21-23 <online> <http://www.youthsafe.org/publications-resources/special-interest-reports/146-report-on-available-evidence-about-preventing-injury-to-young-people-including-a-systematic-review-of-the-evidence-of-preventing-work-and-sports-related-injury-to-young-people-aged-15-to-24-years-2007.html>