



YOUNG PEOPLE IN FULL-TIME WORK

Issues Affecting Apprentices

Part 1: Perspectives on Changes in the Training Agenda

Bruce Wilson and Monika Engelhard

Part 2: Young Workers and Recession in the Transport Industry

Monika Engelhard and Bruce Wilson

Youth Research Centre
June 1994

First published June 1994 by the:

Youth Research Centre
Institute of Education
University of Melbourne
Parkville 3052

Phone: (03) 344 8251
Fax: (03) 344 8256

ISBN 0 7325 0643 3

Acknowledgements

The negotiations for access to particular firms and the cooperation of young workers involved a guarantee of confidentiality. Hence, the identities of both the interviewees and their employers is not revealed. It will be evident, however, that the 'young workers' projects have depended very heavily on the willingness of many young workers, their supervisors and company management to provide the time necessary for the interviews to be conducted, and to discuss various aspects of their working lives with us. We are very appreciative of their cooperation. Particular thanks are due also to the Australian Research Council for their financial support for this research.

A version of Part 1 of this paper has been previously published as 'Changes to Trade Training' in the **Australian Journal of Career Development**, Volume 3 Number 1, Autumn 1994.

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by Monika Engelhard and Bruce Wilson

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Preface

Over the last twenty five years, the process by which young people establish themselves as legitimate and successful members of the workforce in Australia have altered dramatically. Most interest has focused on the changes in the youth labour market and on the difficulties which many young people encounter in making the transition from school or further study to work. The Youth Research Centre's publications on young people's pathways to adulthood have provided clear evidence of the implications of these trends.

The introduction of new technologies and other aspects of workplace reform have also had very significant implications for the experience of those young people who have been able to enter full-time employment. The kinds of demands made on young workers, their experience of the workplace and workplace culture, the decline in trade union participation and the relationships between their work and other parts of their lives are significantly different from the circumstances of twenty-five years ago, and will in turn have significant implications for the future patterns of social and cultural formation in Australia.

The significance of these issues led the Youth Research Centre, in the latter part of 1990, to initiate a research program on Young Workers and Industry Restructuring. The purpose of this program was to develop a framework for more comprehensive, intensive and systematic research on, and analysis of, the impact of industry and economic restructuring on the experiences and practices of young workers, and on their prospects for establishing an adequate livelihood for themselves. Eight specific areas of investigation were identified, together with the interrelationships between these various aspects of the circumstances of young workers. These were:

1. young workers and macro economic forces;
2. changes in the youth labour market;
3. young workers and government skills formation policies;
4. young workers and award restructuring;
5. young workers and work place conditions;
6. young workers and new technologies;
7. young workers and new forms of workplace organisation; and
8. young workers and regional/inter governmental variations.

(See Wilson, 1992, for a fuller account of the overall research program.)

So far, three projects have been developed. The major research questions in these projects have involved consideration of questions such as the nature of the actual work which young workers do, the strategies for recruitment and deployment, and the appropriateness of their prior education and training experiences for their work.

The two papers in this publication report particularly on those young workers who have had apprenticeships. Traditionally a rather secure avenue for young males to enter the labour market, the changes in national training arrangements have redefined the typical patterns of technical training. The first of these working papers

outlines some of the key themes expressed by apprentices in commenting on their experience of existing training arrangements. The second notes that this process of change has been hastened by the recession. The downturn in economic activity, as much as workplace reform, has weakened the process through which apprentices establish a pathway to full-time employment.

Abbreviations

AEC	Australian Education Council
ANTA	Australian National Training Authority
ASF	Australian Standards Framework
AVCTS	Australian Vocational Certificate Training System
BCA	Business Council of Australia
ESFC	Employment and Skills Formation Council (of NBEET)
MOVEET	(Council of) Ministers of Vocational Education, Employment and Training
NBEET	National Board of Employment, Education and Training
NTB	National Training Board
OTFE	(Victorian) Office of Training and Further Education
STB	(Victorian) State Training Board
TAFE	Technical and Further Education

Part 1:

Perspectives on Changes in the Training Agenda

Introduction

The last two decades have seen great changes in the structure of the Australian economy, in Australian industry, and in Australia's economic inter-relationships with the rest of the world. Indeed, the process of industry restructuring can only be understood properly in its global context. The increasing importance of transnational corporations and international trade has been reflected in an ever more sharply defined concern about the global competitiveness of Australian industry.

Whilst these issues have been the subject of an enormous amount of public debate, relatively little attention has been given to the implications of these trends for young workers, especially those in full-time employment. Much greater emphasis has been given to issues related to the youth labour market. Richard Sweet (1991), in particular, has done extensive research demonstrating the decline in full-time employment opportunities for young people, accompanied by the considerable increase in youth unemployment and participation in educational institutions. The scale of youth unemployment has drawn particular interest, as it has been significantly higher than overall unemployment since the mid 1960s, generating much public angst about the prospect of a 'lost generation'. Yet while the political debate about jobs for young people has been intense at times, the main response, in terms of policy and programs, has been several extensive reviews of education and training programs.

Nevertheless, industry restructuring *and* the economic recession have had significant consequences for those young people (still more than one million, under 25 years of age) who have obtained full-time jobs. In many ways, the changes have been felt most acutely by those (young males) whose pathways into employment have typically bridged training and employment arrangements: in particular, those with apprenticeships. Vocational training itself has been subjected to considerable scrutiny as part of the broad framework of government policies designed to encourage and support restructuring. The goal of the review process has been to ensure that Australian industry has available a supply of skilled workers who are able not only to contribute productively from early in their working lives, but also have a capacity for continued learning, and possibly retraining, throughout their careers.

The purpose of this paper is to report on some aspects of a research project which has set out to explore the implications of industry restructuring for young, full-time workers. The paper focuses particularly on apprentices, as their experience of the

restructuring process helps to illuminate a number of issues which are at the heart of the debate about changes to the Australian system of vocational training. Before presenting some insights into the data on apprentices' working experiences, it is appropriate to review some of the recent developments in the structure of apprenticeships and vocational training more broadly.

The training context

From the mid 1970s, high youth unemployment has been interpreted as an indicator of the inadequacy of the existing education and training arrangements in meeting the requirements of industry and commerce. Very little attention has been given to the issue of generating additional full-time employment for young people. Two prominent themes have persisted, in various forms, through the inquiries and debates which have been conducted during this period: the preparedness of young people for the world of work and for making decisions about career development; and the competitiveness of young people in the labour market, as related to the quality and appropriateness of their education and training prior to entering the labour market. A third, and more variable theme, has concerned the issue of equity of access to the labour market, particularly with respect to the provision of opportunities for young women and young people from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Whilst a range of programs have been introduced during this period, significant structural reforms in the provision of training have emerged only in recent years. The structural reforms have been prompted partly by the need for a review of the overall provision of post-compulsory education and training, as retention rates have increased in the face of the difficulties a growing proportion of the 15-19 age group encounters in entering the full-time labour market directly. A second factor has been the need for much greater flexibility within industry in the deployment of their skilled workers. The restructuring of industrial rewards, with new possibilities for articulation between courses in schools, TAFE and higher education, has rendered the traditional basis of craft training, the apprenticeship, less and less relevant.

Key elements of the reform of training provision in Australia have focused on the establishment of tripartite arrangements (between employers, trade unions and government), initiatives to expand the number of training places available, and strategies to increase the relevance and the flexibility of training. Under the auspices of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training (NBEET), and specifically its Employment and Skills Formation Council, two separate kinds of change initiatives have been developed. The first has involved the restructuring of the national authority responsible for accrediting and managing training provision, while the second has taken the form of a series of expert committees (albeit dominated by government, rather than industry and union representatives), which have reviewed overall policy and devised new forms of program and curriculum. Commonwealth-State coordination of these developments has been managed under the auspices of MOVEET, the Council of State and Commonwealth Ministers responsible for Vocational Education, Employment and Training.

Under the rubric of a National Training Reform Agenda, several key initiatives have been undertaken. These have included:

- the establishment of the National Training Board in 1990;

-
- agreement on a national Framework for the Recognition of Training;
 - the subsequent establishment of the Australian National Training Authority;
 - the Finn and Mayer Committee reports;
 - work undertaken towards developing a new coherent structure of vocational education and training credentials; and
 - piloting of a new unified entry-level training system through the implementation of an Australian Vocational Certificate Training System. (see National Training Board, 1992; 7).

The establishment of the National Training Board (NTB) in 1990 was significant in that it brought the management of vocational preparation under the auspices of a single, national authority, with agreement on national objectives, principles and methods. Now restructured as ANTA, the Australian National Training Authority, the NTB played an important role in reforming trade training so that it was defined in terms of agreed competency standards which reflect industry's current and future needs. Considerable work has also been done on establishing a national framework of standards which is consistent across industries and across Australia, thus facilitating greater articulation, portability and transferability of achievement in competencies. The Australian Standards Framework includes eight competency levels which provide a basis for the development and recognition of competency standards across all Australian industries. Its purpose is to connect the competency requirements of workplaces and the vocational education and training certification system (see NTB, 1992).

Redeveloping postcompulsory education and training

The specific developments in the provision of training opportunities for young people were founded in the recommendations of the Finn Committee. With membership from trade unions, business and state and federal departments, the Finn Committee was set up by the Australian Education Council to review the effectiveness of postcompulsory education and training in meeting the needs of young people. Its main conclusion was that the distinctions between education and work should be diminished, and that Australia needed a convergence of vocational and general education in order to develop a more creative and adaptable workforce. A practical manifestation of this approach was the recommendation that there be greater articulation between different pathways and levels of education.

The Finn Report recommended that long-term targets for increased participation in education and training should be set, significantly increasing the proportion of young people up to the age of 22 years in such activity. The increased participation would form the basis for an Education Guarantee which would ensure that all young Australians would have a minimum of two years full-time or three years part-time post-compulsory education or training.

The Report also proposed that key 'employment-related competencies' should be required across all post-compulsory pathways undertaken by young people. This proposal became the main subject matter of the Mayer Committee. This Committee

has proposed the development of a Key Competency Structure with seven Key Competency Strands, each described at three Performance Levels.

With respect to apprenticeships and traineeships, Finn proposed that they should provide more general vocational as well as occupation-specific competencies, and be reformed to meet industry needs and standards more directly. The major *structural* reform affecting apprenticeships and traineeships emerged, however, from the Employment and Skills Formation Council (ESFC), chaired by Laurie Carmichael. Following extensive consultation, the ESFC proposed a system which would be capable of providing post-compulsory entry-level training to a much greater number of young people, in accordance with the Finn targets. The system was to be able

... to retain good features of existing entry level training, particularly of apprenticeships. It also needed to ensure a real advance in access and equity.

The vocational certificate training system recommended by the ESFC meets these requirements. It is capable of providing vocational education and training opportunities to the Australian Standards Framework (ASF) level 2 (or higher) for virtually all school leavers by:

- increasing the occupational and industrial areas covered by articulated structured training arrangements;
- providing multiple flexible pathways to accommodate the needs and circumstances of most young people;
- contributing significantly to the task of producing a more skilled and productive workforce and generating new employment opportunities in an internationally competitive market; and
- facilitating the articulation of the credentials held by young people with career paths established in most occupations and industries through the award restructuring process. (Carmichael, 1992; v-vi).

The core of the proposal was that an Australian Vocational Certificate Training System (AVCTS) be established, based on competency-based training which emphasised the achievement of defined outcomes, identified in a modified Australian Standards Framework (ASF), rather than time-serving. Apprenticeships and traineeships were to be merged into the AVCTS, which would encompass a more flexible range of mostly workplace-based pathways which would enable trainees to progress either directly or sequentially from ASF level 1 to ASF certificate levels 2, 3 and 4. Particular attention was given to equity of access, with the commitment, for example, of increasing the representation of women in non-traditional occupations to 'critical mass target levels' by 2001 (see Carmichael, 1992; 8).

The proposed changes have not been received with universal acclaim. While supporting the broad direction of change, the Business Council of Australia (BCA) has expressed some reservations, especially with respect to the role of the national training authorities in specifying competency standards, and in the relationship between workplace-based and off-the-job training. Some concern has stemmed also from the emphasis on portability of skills formation, at a time when many Australian companies are developing labour management policies which revolve around the

development of long-term commitment to the enterprise. The level of concern amongst some members of the BCA has been sufficient that they have withdrawn from the national arrangements and have established their own training agenda, relying on the enterprise's reputation to provide respect for the training outcomes. This decision appears to reflect a concern about the complexity and bureaucracy of the national vocational education and training system, as much as its intent.

Current developments

Whilst the current developments in industry restructuring and the global economy create an uncertain context for identifying training needs, the vocational training system does commit considerable resources to monitoring broad changes in the demand for certain kinds of skills. In Victoria, industry training boards are given substantial resources to investigate employers' needs and to plan appropriate programs. They are supported by a Labour Market Training Needs Model, which was developed to assist the State Training Board assess future requirements in particular industries. The Model provides some direction in the allocation of resources to the industry training boards in various industries. The priority industries for 1994 are:

- for the **employed** workforce:
Agriculture and Horticulture, Allied Industries, Food Processing, Forest Industries, Furnishing, Health, Printing, Tourism and Hospitality, and Transport and Storage.
- for **school leavers and inexperienced unemployed**:
Agriculture and Horticulture, Business Services, Food Processing, Forest Industries, Furnishing, Health, Local Government, Printing, Tourism and Hospitality, Transport and Storage, and Wholesale, Retail and Personal Services.

A persistent tension in planning the delivery of training resources to meet industry needs lies in reconciling the growing emphasis on workplace-based training with the investment which has been made in past years in the various parts of the technical and further education system, of which TAFE colleges comprise a very significant proportion. In providing background material to assist with budget preparations, the Victorian Office of Training and Further Education (OTFE) has reinforced the priority of increasing the responsiveness to industry's needs through measures to:

- take greater account of industry's needs in responding to demand from individuals;
- explore new approaches in providing curriculum, courses, modes and location of training from within their current provision;
- focus on training outcomes rather than inputs and throughput; and
- improve our capacity to identify industry needs. (OTFE, 1993; 12).

One strategy for promoting responsiveness to industry needs has been the introduction of competition between public providers, and public and private providers. However, these developments do not necessarily address the inherent differences which can arise from the separation of formal training activities from the workplace.

Young People's Perspectives

In this regard, it appears that much of the debate about the reform process appears to neglect the learners themselves, and the kinds of perspectives which they have on the training process. Whilst the needs of industry might be paramount, the effectiveness of the new structures and programs needs to recognise the complex forces which operate in workplaces, with various implications for the learning experiences in which inexperienced workers may participate. For example, the considerable effort during the last decade to increase the participation of girls in non-traditional occupations has been undermined in more than one instance by the experience of sexual harassment, and even more commonly, by the maintenance of a workplace culture from which women are typically excluded.

Some evidence on young workers' perspectives on their training has emerged in recent research on Young Workers and New Technologies. Through industry training boards, approximately ten enterprises regarded as being leaders in their industry agreed to participate in the project, which involved extensive interviews with young workers and their supervisors about the change processes underway in their organisations, the implications for their work, and the nature of their past and present experiences of education and training.

The interviews in three of these organisations provided extensive insights into the aspects of training provision which were seen to be of value by the young workers, and drew attention to a number of issues which require some attention if the objectives of the training reform process are not to be undermined. These organisations were part of either the printing or the transport industries, both of which have been identified by the State Training Board in Victoria as priority industries for the allocation of training resources. This section provides an overview of the perspectives of apprentices in these organisations on their experience of current training arrangements.

Apprenticeships: entry to secure employment

Apprenticeships have been the only avenues of entry to some occupational groups. In some companies, the apprenticeship system has even formed the basis for entry into particular jobs within the company. This pathway to secure employment has been jeopardised by the twin forces of industry restructuring and recession. This was recognised by many of the respondents in our project; the emphasis on flexibility and the portability of training, also represented a significant challenge to the persistence of cultural priorities and practices which had become linked with their trade over time (see Cockburn 1993 for a fuller account of this type of change).

In our project, all the tradespeople and supervisors have 'served their time', generally with the same company. Notions of 'serving your time' were important to the way young people experienced and interpreted issues in their early work years. Low pay, menial, boring and repetitive jobs, long hours and limited input into decision making were all rationalised as being part and parcel of having an apprenticeship, of serving your time. They were seen to be part of the 'necessary evils' in achieving the long term goal of becoming a tradesperson.

Apprenticeships: learning 'on the job'

One of the strongest and most consistent findings in this project was the emphasis which young apprentices placed on on-the-job training as being the most important part of the learning process. When asked about how they have learnt their job, the common reply was:

"... from working with tradesmen."

"... you have got a lot of good tradesmen around who help you out."

"... you probably find you work most of your time with a particular tradesman and either he or the leading hand will tell you."

"... on the job training ... actual hands on experience."

"... just by listening to the other blokes that have been here."

The older workers had also learnt their 'craft' from the previous generation. One supervisor said:

"... My old boss - he was great; he taught me a lot and the bosses here taught me a hell of a lot ... In 15 years I learnt so much."

The traditional training methods remain even at workplaces that have comprehensive training courses and restructured work places. Whilst there have been improvements made to the trade school experiences of young workers, they continued to talk positively about the way they had learnt their jobs from tradespeople. When asked if there was any way that the on-the-job training could be better, a typical response was "... no, not really; I think it is the best form of training actually."

This 'generational transfer' was seen not only as the main means of learning their trade but also the most effective. It was a matter not only of harnessing the experience and knowledge of tradespeople, but was valued because it involved an interactive learning process. The 'hands on' aspect provided an opportunity to ask questions, and to watch, listen and do as they were shown the task at hand:

"... I suppose if you listen to your instructors, to your bosses and tradesmen, I suppose that is the best training you can get, because they have done it you know; they kind of teach you the right way and the easier way and I'd say less confusing."

The one-on-one nature of this learning allows apprentices to ask questions and to follow up on difficulties, an aspect which is much less accessible at trade school. To compensate for the lack of personal interaction at trade school, it is not unusual for apprentices to take their school work to the workplace:

"In the sections where we have leading hands and they get to know them really well, it is not unusual for an apprentice to have their school work on the bench for a couple of days, doing their school work with a tradesman helping them." (a supervisor)

The supervisor's role appears to be twofold: one as a model for how the work should be done, and the other as a 'point of clarification'. Different young workers set different criteria for evaluating the role and need of the supervisor or senior tradesperson. One young worker felt that it had been more important to work the job out for himself and to only use the senior person as a reference point:

"I think the best way to learn is just without supervision you know, just here's the job, you go and do it; you make a mistake, you have to fix it ... If you don't know what to do, of course you are going to have to have somebody there to help you, and as soon as you have a reasonable idea, I think the best idea is to do it yourself."

The passing on of skills between generations has had its weaknesses as well as its strengths, for whilst it may be the main means of skill acquisition it can also be a means of passing on 'poor' work habits. As one supervisor observed:

"I think in your first four or five years it has a big bearing on your life as a tradesman, your attitude, your standard of work. I believe that if you are taught by blokes ... that do good jobs you end up that way. Most cases, if you are taught by someone that says 'oh that's near enough' ... that can rub off on you and here we insist on the best job all the time that is humanly possible ... I demand it anyhow and my bosses above me."

The importance of formal recognition

Despite the priority which was placed on on-the-job training, the apprentices stressed that the credibility of their training depended on it being conducted within the formal framework of the apprenticeship training system. On-the-job training alone, without certificates or licences which formally recognised and graded the skills acquired, did not seem to carry much weight. Trade school was important, therefore, not so much as a means of gaining skills but because it provided official recognition of training. At work places where there are both apprenticeships and other kinds of training arrangements which lacked formal trade school requirements, there was concern about the absence of official recognition of skills acquired. One young worker said:

"... They call them traineeships, which I think is more or less slave labour work ... There is no skill training there. You start at 17 until 21 and then you are made assistant wharf carpenter and then it is up to the boss's discretion when they are going to become wharf carpenters which I think is just pure slavery as such, because they get nothing for it. They get no certificate saying they have done this, done that."

The lack of official recognition, not the absence of trade school training, was the significant factor, and both young apprentices and trainees indicated that their on-the-job training was still the main means by which they would learn how to do their job.

The distinction between on-the-job training and trade school reflects the 'reality' of the work place experience with its 'real' pressures and problems, compared to the 'unreal' school environment:

“At trade school they teach you how to do it but it is always different to when you get outside (the workplace). Outside, there might be quicker and more efficient ways, whereas the trade school way may be a bit longer but it is nine times neater, so again you normally do a neater job because there is no real panic for a job to be done, so you do a neater job.”

Trade school could benefit, it was suggested, from building its curriculum around ‘real’ workplace tasks. As one young worker observed, trade school could have:

“... more practicable tasks, more realistic situations, because you get to school and, say you are working on a roof - you have got to put on a little bit of a roof, you work standing on the ground, whereas outside that never happens, you are up on a ladder or something. So I believe the work stations and that could be bit higher. Just little things like that, just to make it more like outside. It would be hard but it would be worthwhile if they could do it.”

Generational transfer and cultural practices

Particular attitudes to work and work quality have been passed on through the generations, reinforcing existing cultural practices in the workplace. It is through the process of ‘generation transfer’ that cultural dimensions of organisations have been maintained and the status quo upheld. Knowing how to work in the system remained the main way of gaining promotion and moving through the hierarchy. As one supervisor said:

“... Being an apprentice, starting off as an apprentice here, I’m interested in different things with the apprentices.”

This supervisor went on to discuss the importance of maintaining a constant supply of ‘internal’ recruits who are moulded to fit his expectations of the apprentices and workers:

“I must add the biggest bonus in my department is that all my plumbers have come up through being apprentices, bar one or two ... most of them have done their apprenticeship here, have been trained as apprentices Outsiders haven’t virtually come in into the place cold as we say. They have been brought up as young boys and moulded into what you expect and that is a big thing I think to, you know, a good workforce. I don’t say outside chaps don’t do a good job, it’s just ... the boys have been trained; if they like the place, they stay, don’t they; if they don’t like the place, don’t like the job, they leave after their apprenticeship but they all can.”

There exists within some organisations an ‘insider/outsider’ attitude, ‘us and them’, even though the recession has forced people to take their skills ‘outside’ to find work.

Apprenticeships: transferability of skills

The effects of the recession on long-term career plans have forced some young workers to reflect on their own workplace and skills, their ‘inside’. Those who are fearful about the prospect that they will not be employed with their company after their ‘time’ have concerns about the nature of the training they have received and

how transferable their skills will be, particularly where the trade is narrowly confined to a particular industry. Within a specialised industry, in which there is a small group of employers, there are limited opportunities for young workers, qualified or otherwise, to gain employment. The skills gained were not perceived by the young workers as transferable to other positions. For example, a certificate in aircraft maintenance is not the same as being a car mechanic or a ship builder. This concern has been compounded by the strong historical distinctions between different trade areas. This historical demarcation, a means of protecting the skills base, continues and therefore few young workers saw their trade as transferable to another industry. As one young worker noted:

“It is pretty good training and it will be recognised by other airlines but it is hard trying to get a job in a different field because this industry - this job - is so specialised ... The only disadvantage about the airline industry and this trade is that if you want to go somewhere else, this is very specialised, so there is not much work outside the airline.”

Trade School: the issue of gender

For female apprentices, the provision of the formal training component through trade school was an effective impediment to their participation in non-traditional trades. Whereas at the workplace they can ask questions or watch the tradespeople, trade school learning is based upon a theoretical understanding and experience of mechanical processes. This appeared to place many young women at an immediate disadvantage as they had not had the same childhood experiences with mechanical processes. One young woman commented that the male apprentices have it easier at trade school because:

“... they seem to be getting on really well, really good marks ... [They have] ... done it all before and I have only done the basics and that hasn't been enough to get me along in theory; practically yes, theoretically no.”

The timetabling of trade school appears to have further hindered the learning experience of female apprentices. Block release, where trade school has been undertaken a week at a time, has meant that there are limited opportunities for young workers to ask their trade supervisor at work for clarification if they have not understood:

“... if they have lost a bit on the first day, the whole week is lost.”

One female apprentice was concerned that she was unable to cope with the intensity of learning required in block release:

“I am finding trying to learn everything in one week, it's really difficult; it is too quick and I am not absorbing it ... I have been looking for help like with tutoring and I have got two friends who have been in some of the modules and I get some help, but it is still very difficult to understand - just in that one week you have got to learn; I am finding that really difficult, just that one week.”

The impact of recession

So central is the role of the supervisor and the 'hands on' experience that, during times of recession and downsizing, there was concern about the ratio of tradesmen to apprentices as it dilutes the central feature of that kind of training, namely the close relationship between teacher and student. At one company, where there had been significant downsizing, there was concern about the lack of tradespeople. To quote two apprentices:

"... A lot of times an apprentice works on his own, so it's probably right when I said there were not enough tradesmen around" (an adult apprentice), and

"There is not as many tradesmen as apprentices and there should be I think ... in some places where I have been, there have been ten apprentices and only about two tradesmen."

As the number of tradesmen has decreased, third and fourth year apprentices have taught first and second year apprentices, adding a new dimension to the skills needed by these apprentices.

On the whole, apprenticeships were still seen to be an important means of securing a worthwhile career. Even in the recent recession, where significant numbers of apprentices have not gained employment after their time, it remains an important first step. One young worker who would not be kept on at his company was philosophical about it, though disappointed:

"When I started my apprenticeship, I had to sign a document stating I realised I'm not guaranteed a position after my apprenticeship, which I thought was fair enough. The main thing I wanted to do was my apprenticeship."

An apprenticeship is more important than 'just any job' because it has formal recognition and the opportunity to find skilled work.

A more extensive discussion of the implications of the recession for the experience of apprentices is contained in part 2 of this paper.

Issues Arising

The examples from the data here reflect an overwhelming consistency in the views of the young workers about the centrality of workplace-based training. This is not only a matter of the obvious relevance of the learning which is expected of them, but of the adequacy of the materials and tasks. Even where many of the training issues varied between industries, the priority on the value of on-the-job learning remained unequivocal. This finding clearly supports the general reorientation of technical training towards a set of arrangements which emphasises the workplace focus. At the same time, it suggests some grounds yet about the effectiveness with which off-the-job providers will be able to support the new arrangements, at least in the short-term.

Industry restructuring and the recession have clearly affected the traditional relationship established between apprentices and their supervisors. The historical patterns through which young people have been able to develop career paths is also changing considerably.

Another more complex finding concerns the extent to which the development of the new vocational curriculum and associated policy initiatives has tended to adopt a view of skills training which centres too much on the individual, failing to take account of current developments in work design and organisational development which are attempting to influence workplace culture in quite particular ways. A brief comment will be made about each of these three issues.

Support for workplace-based learning

There appear to be a number of reasons why workplace-based training is supported so strongly by the apprentices. One important aspect is the 'reality' of the work. Not only are they learning the skills of a trade, but they can see that their efforts have tangible consequences, in a context where they must meet public standards of efficiency, as well as quality. The young male workers who were interviewed for this project also valued the social relations of the workplace. Even where they were the lowest status workers, they nevertheless recognised this as part of a process through which they were becoming identified with a group of workers with lengthy traditions.

Perhaps even more important than these aspects of workplace-based learning is the actual learning process itself and the kind of interaction which becomes possible between apprentice and supervisor. A process of observing how to do something, then having a go themselves, and being able to ask questions and have processes clarified in a timely manner was extremely important. The young female apprentices, for whom other aspects of the workplace environment might have proved difficult, especially valued the opportunities for immediate interaction with their supervisor. Where this kind of interaction was possible at the trade school, the estimation of the value of trade school also increased.

Despite the emphasis on 'on-the-job' learning, the formal recognition of the skills gathered was considered to be essential. In so far as the new vocational education and training arrangements provide much more comprehensive and coherent mechanisms for assessing and recording the learning which young people acquire, a greater commitment to ongoing training would be likely to result.

The effects of industry restructuring and recession

There are two distinct issues arising from the effects of industry restructuring and the recession. The first is the actual disruption which has affected apprentices as a result of established tradespersons leaving organisations, whether on voluntary or forced redundancy arrangements. The second is the increasing likelihood that apprentices will not be employed on a continuing basis by the organisation with which they have served their 'time'.

The first of these issues has implications which might well have long-term as well as short-term negative ramifications. There is an immediate consequence in that there is a threat to the quality of the training which is available to apprentices who are indentured at present. This is typified by the evidence that, in some cases, senior apprentices are taking the place of established supervisors. In the longer term, the loss in an unplanned and sudden way of extensive experience and highly refined skill poses a risk to the capacity of the organisation to manage the process of change in a manner which harnesses the most productive aspects of existing and new ways of undertaking production.

The second issue can be seen more as a planned outcome of the present changes which are occurring, as the vocational training system becomes more flexible and responsive to the changing needs of industry. In the short term, at least, however, there are some grounds for concern about those young people who have embarked on a particular career path, and who now see their future pathways being pulled away from underneath them. Apart from the personal doubts which this has prompted amongst some young workers, the decisions which some may make to try and anticipate the inevitable may mean that some drop out prior to completing their apprenticeships, or that they will otherwise seek positions which do not utilise the skills which they have acquired.

The narrow construction of skills acquisition

An interesting finding has been the importance both male and female apprentices placed on social context in their evaluations of their workplaces, and their training experiences. Furthermore, it is apparent that a number of organisations are adopting work design and organisational development strategies which emphasise team-work and other kinds of collaborative work practices.

Whilst this might not in itself be a new insight, it raises some questions about the development of training curricula which have been based specifically around the identification and classification of competencies. The value of the competency-based approach is that it specifies the skills which are required in generalised contexts in terms of performance. The risk, identified throughout the interviews with apprentices, is that the focus on an individual's competencies will omit an understanding of the innovative contexts of work design which an increasing number of young workers can be expected to encounter. While the competencies in themselves might still be appropriate, the critical ingredients in work performance will arise in the manner in which specific competencies are integrated in a collaborative (and innovative) context.

Greater attention to the social relations in which learning occurs may also have implications for the conduct of trade school training. The stronger the 'fit' between the workplace and trade school components of vocational training, the more effective will be the outcomes for the young workers concerned.

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Part 2:

Young Workers and Recession in the Transport Industry

Introduction

The initial projects in the Young Workers and Industry Restructuring Program have explored a range of issues related to training and award restructuring, and to the implications of new technologies and workplace reform for the actual task expectations of young workers. It has become apparent from these studies that the economic recession and the high levels of unemployment may have serious implications for the longer term disruption of the availability of skilled labour in Australian industry.

Part of the data collected has involved interviews with young workers and their supervisors in two companies that are part of the transport industry. These companies both have an apprenticeship system with a number of features in common: this form of recruitment and training was the only avenue of entry into certain jobs within the company; they required specialised skills and had a large base of tradespeople in their total workforce; they had a unionised workforce; there was low staff turnover; they had company policies which actively promoted internal recruitment and advancement; and they were undergoing significant internal restructuring with an emphasis on new training and job redesign.

Stories from Other Research

Generally speaking, there is relatively little published research on the experience of young people in full time employment. The Fitzgerald Report on Poverty in 1975 was an important Australian analysis of young people in full time employment. The report documented the plight of early school leavers, without credentials, who took up unskilled jobs with little future for advancement or further education. Since then, two substantial studies on schooling and the transition to work have provided some useful material on the circumstances of young males moving into full time employment in the mid 1980s (see Walker 1988 and Reeders 1989).

Furthermore, there is little evidence of research on the impact of recession on workers actually *in* full-time employment, let alone on young workers in this situation. Most research on issues related to recession has dealt more directly with trends in unemployment. Whilst there has been some attention to the impact of economic trends (restructuring, as well as recession) on the youth labour market (see Sweet 1987, 1991), the main focus has been on the implications for unemployed young people themselves and on the emergence of part time and casualised

employment opportunities, rather than on trends amongst young workers in full time employment. Some related work has addressed issues regarding the experience of young people in part time employment, and the implications for educational activity and career development (see, for example, Munro 1992).

Similarly, Polk and Tait (1990) argued that youth employment has not kept pace with overall labour market growth, while there has been a concurrent expansion of 'the informal wage for service economy, the non waged economy and the economy of crime for young people'. Aside from the concerns of the black economy, Carr (1992) warned of the loss of Australia's future skill base as a result of the current recession and the consequent decline in recruitment into apprenticeships and trainee programs.

Very little research on young workers in full time employment appears to have been published internationally, let alone on their circumstances in times of recession. One significant report was released by the United Nations Department of International Economic and Social Affairs in 1986. Entitled *Economic Recession and Specific Population Groups*, this report outlined the apparent effects of economic decline on young people with particular reference to employment, education and social mobility, urbanisation and migration and student and political participation. Despite the lack of reliable data, the report noted the importance of technological innovation and increased education, with many young people being forced to take jobs for which they are over qualified. This tendency is heightened during periods of economic downturn when the job market is shrinking.

In view of this void, this Working Paper has been prepared to present the preliminary findings from our research data. Whilst drawn from only a small sample of the overall number of interviewees involved in our projects, a range of issues has emerged which might be of interest to other researchers and policy makers interested in the experience of young workers and formal vocational training arrangements. It is intended to stimulate further research and discussion about these issues, especially in the context of the proposals contained in the recent federal government White Paper on Employment Opportunities, *Working Nation*.

Exploring the Data

The preliminary analysis of the data has indicated that the context of economic recession has become a significant influence on the thinking of young workers with respect to their orientation towards their jobs, their skill formation and their future careers. The issues are much more complex than the relatively obvious fear about unemployment. In the transport industry the negative effects of both industry deregulation and intensified competition, combined with the recession in 1991-93, have forced many companies to decrease staffing and rationalise their operations, involving not only reduced recruitment but also staff retrenchments and diminished career prospects for the young workers. As one young worker observed,

“... The recession is hitting (the company) pretty bad from what I understand of it ... They have had to retrench quite a few people.”

'On-the-job' training

The cut in staff numbers has seen a reduction in the ratio of trades people to apprentices and to concerns about the subsequent effect this will have on the quality of 'on-the-job' training and skills transfer. 'On the job' training provided by the experienced tradespeople is fundamental to the way that knowledge and skills are transferred from one generation to the next. While there have been improvements in the trade school experiences of the young workers, they continue to talk most positively about the way they have learnt their skills from other tradespeople. When asked about how they have learnt their job, the most common replies are,

"... from working with tradesmen",

"... you have got a lot of good tradesmen around who help you out",

and

"... you probably find you work most of your time with a particular tradesman and either he or the leading hand will tell you."

The older workers also learnt their 'craft' from the previous generation:

"... My old boss he was great - he taught me a lot and the bosses here taught me a hell of a lot, because I had never done concrete before or chain fences or glass; I learnt a hell of a lot in that respect."

The experience and knowledge of the tradesman is important as it provides an opportunity for them to interact in the learning process. The 'hands on' aspect provides them with an opportunity to ask questions, and watch and listen as they are shown the task at hand. For most of the young workers, the only aspect of the on-the-job training that needed changing was an increase in the ratio of tradespeople to apprentices:

"... A lot of times you don't have a tradesman with you. I think every apprentice should have, but you can't; you would have twice as many workers ... A lot of times an apprentice works on his own, so it's probably right when I said there were not enough tradesmen around ..."

The recession was seen as contributing to the problem. When asked about the ways the recession has affected the company in regards to the work she did, one young worker replied:

"... From where I have been, there is not as many tradesmen as apprentices and there should be I think ... In some places where I have been, there has been ten apprentices and only about two tradesmen; I mean there are five apprentices per tradesman."

In this situation, it appears that third and fourth year apprentices have been teaching first and second year apprentices.

Quality of work

Not all aspects of generational transfer of skills are positive. Incorrect and negative work practices are passed on from tradesperson to apprentice. With the recession, there is heightened concern about negative work practices as morale is low and loyalty to the company and industry has waned. As one supervisor noted:

“... The morale, it rubs off ... I try not to rub it off on the apprentices here and the guys but the leading hands and the tradesmen do rub it off. I have noticed the quality of the work of some of the guys - they don't care any more.”

Lack of morale has a detrimental effect not only the quality of the work but also on general work output. The recession, coupled with industry restructuring, has led to job insecurity and tension within the workplace. Increasingly there is competition amongst the workers to be kept on rather than to be made redundant. This new element of insecurity has had particular consequences in companies where the workers have expected job security and have been guaranteed it in the past.

“The biggest difficulty at the moment is really knowing whether we are going to have a job in six months time ... That is nothing to do with you This business of insecurity at work is the biggest thing.”

The implications for people's sense of their working lives was revealed graphically by one of the more experienced workers, now a supervisor, who commented,

“It used to be a pleasure, even when I was a worker or a leading hand, a pleasure to get up in the morning, coming to work, and it didn't matter what you did, it was fine because I had a permanent job. But now, in the morning, I think any day we are all going to leave, they are going to sack us all ... No one wants to leave and that is the biggest problem at the moment; it has been for the last two or three years, and we have gone through bloody redundancy ... You hear rumours for months and months and months and no-one makes a statement and no-one has got the guts, or they can't say this because it has got to come from Kennett or something like that, and the longer they drag it on, the morale drops ... and chaps think they are not going to be working here in the next couple of months”.

As for encouraging people to work more effectively and efficiently:

“... Work wise, the guys, sort of, you can't really push 'em; like, I've got a job to do and if I really push them, they will just say 'get stuffed, why should we work because we are going to lose our jobs?'.”

Availability of skills

There is concern that some companies do not adequately balance the short term economic considerations with long term needs. Any current cost-cutting should not be at the expense of maintaining a future supply of skilled labour, particularly in a specialised area. An earlier recession had affected one company's skill base adversely and it was hoped that this would not be repeated:

“... There’s nobody ... you can’t get people from nowhere else; in 82-83, when we didn’t employ apprentices, we were paying the penalties for that right up to six years later severely ... We brought in people from around the world to fill those positions when things exploded and we couldn’t respond ... That is what we are all terrified of now; we are going through the same drama again.”

The staff reductions in these companies has disrupted the ‘culture of longevity’. Traditionally, having an apprenticeship meant a life time of employment with the company and the opportunity to move on and up within the organisation. Those who currently hold senior positions have, for the most part, been promoted from the shopfloor. There is little external recruitment because of the small pool of skilled labour, because of its specialisation, and because there are relatively few major companies in the industry.

Some parts of the transport industry are highly specialised, so that, once trained in an area within a particular company, there are few external employment opportunities to use that particular trade certificate. The trade skills learnt are not perceived as being transferable to other companies, industries or careers. As one young worker noted,

“It is pretty good training and it will be recognised by other companies in *this* field, but it is hard trying to get a job in a different field because this industry is so specialised ... The only disadvantage about ... this trade is that if you want to go somewhere else this is a very specialised, so there is not much work outside.”

Most recruitment to senior positions has been from the shopfloor, adding to the culture of longevity. As a controller said when asked about recruitment to positions,

“... 99%, yes there are a few people around the place that come in, but they are very rare people in this company. (*In what areas would they be?*) We certainly have people come direct into the finance areas, accounting, things like that but usually they come through [our own] system. With a big company it is fairly hard for someone to come in, because the system is so huge and weighty - it would be hard for them to come in and scratch and know how to make the system work for them.”

It is not just the skills acquired but the knowledge of the organisation and the networks which makes internal recruitment attractive to the company. An apprenticeship is more than skills training; it is work socialisation, acting as a means of inducting young workers to the company’s culture and structure. Those who succeed in the culture are promoted in the company, thereby reinforcing the company’s culture and processes of operating, and excluding the criticism of those from the ‘outside’. As a controller said,

“... The experience that they (apprentices) gain and knowing where to find things and how to do things in the company just makes them so much more attractive, and in this company in particular, I mean, they are very strong like that; not that they stand up and say we bias things towards these apprentices, it is just it makes it that much easier for you that you understand the whole place, because in your apprenticeship you move for six months, you move

around the whole of engineering so you have got to know people everywhere. You also find in your year, say, there would be a hundred of them (so) they have got a fairly strong network of people which you use."

'A job for life'

The culture of longevity in the organisation has created expectations that, once a young worker had an apprenticeship at the company, they had a job for life; in previous years this appears to have been the case. There had always been room in the organisation for the apprentices once their time had finished, whether they had done well at trade school or not. As one supervisor said,

"... In normal years they would be employed - this is the first years where we have honestly looked at whether we should or shouldn't employ them; we have never done that in the past - they have always had a job somewhere."

The recession has not only cut the number of qualified tradespeople, but has prevented many apprentices from attaining that status. Whilst the culture of longevity had created the expectation of future careers with the company, the reality for the majority of the 1992 final year apprentices is that they will not have jobs in the company or, if they stay with the company, it might not be in their trade area. As one young apprentice said,

"... There are only limited jobs for next year; there are 92 apprentices (in fourth year) and only 40 jobs, so they are advertising all the jobs. That 40 jobs include things like cleaning, loading dishwashers in the catering section ..."

and another commented that

"... the recession has, like, hit fourth years; ... the fourth years have been given a letter when they finish their apprenticeship: they can seek employment as a cleaner here. No matter what trade they have learnt after four years, they can seek to be a cleaner or they can leave and you know, you have been doing four years in the company to do a specific trade, and then the only position you have got isn't a trade - well that hits the company pretty hard."

This has forced the apprentices to look beyond their past four years of training and to seek other avenues of employment:

"... That is why, at the end, I am coming on my final month now of my apprenticeship and they haven't really said, 'Look we have a job for you'. What I have actually decided to do is to apply to be a [service] attendant ... if I don't have a job at the end of the time."

But some will not accept just any job in the company, particularly as they have had four years of training in the field. One young worker, who is regarded by his controller as one of the most exceptional of apprentices, has said, when asked if he would be willing to work in the company in a non trade position,

"No; for my side I reckon I'd be better served by looking for work in the field than doing that ... because we have been through this and, you know, you work so hard (and I have put in a lot), you work so hard to become as good as

you can in this field, and it just seems all for nothing if you are just going to go off and be a cleaner or something like that, you know. I am not that desperate to stay in the company, you know what I mean ... I am not that desperate - not that I am going to do another job, no, because if you do that, you sort of stop your development, stops in your field ..."

For other young workers, while they are concerned about their future careers, they feel disempowered about making decisions about their future careers. Their response is to simply try as hard as they can to remain with the company:

"... They are sacking lots of apprentices at the end of their time, you know I have been thinking what I want to do after my apprenticeship if they don't keep me on; I am just going to try my hardest to stay here, that is all."

The disempowerment arises from the lack of opportunity for input into, and control over, the decisions that will affect their future:

"... Well recently, with these things going on with our jobs, it seems that nobody can really make a decision, you know; you are just left out on a limb, you are just waiting to get your head blown off, basically, if they decide to get rid of you ..."

and from another young worker at another company:

"... Unfortunately, typical again, the idiots upstairs making all the decisions don't know we are here, don't know what type of work we do, don't know how much money we are making, but they are all worried about their own skins, so they say: we will get rid of blue collar workers first, but unfortunately, I think their time has run out."

To maintain a position at the end of their time, the young workers recognised that all aspects of their training, on-the-job and trade school, as well as undertaking additional education, were important. As one young worker said,

"Electrical has got the most basics (tests for gaining an engineering licence), yeah, you have a better chance of keeping a job next year."

Some of the apprentices will complete 'their time' better qualified than their supervisors. As a strategy to secure employment, they have undertaken additional training and attained extra qualifications. Many of the young apprentices who were interviewed had undertaken additional training for licences which meant that they were actually qualified at a level beyond that normally required for their trade. This was particularly evident in a company where the majority of young apprentices interviewed were in the process of obtaining the necessary licences to be licensed as engineers. Some young workers have done all they can during their time to maximise training opportunities and to gain additional skills and credits.

Multiskilling and career choices

However, this still did not mean they were guaranteed a position in their field at the end of their time. It did mean that, when it came to competing with their fellow apprentices for work, they were ahead and in a more favourable position. For the

most part, additional training was seen as desirable and was actively encouraged by the supervisors and reinforced by company policies.

During the recession, multiskilling has been an effective strategy for companies to manage the rationalisation of their workforce, as it has enabled them to have fewer workers covering a broader range of tasks. As one supervisor observed,

“They have trimmed down work wise, not replaced anyone and that is the biggest thing and the work load has become bigger; it’s a bigger thing than say twenty or thirty years ago, because we had twice the staff and things were a lot easier going, but now-a-days, once you got one job, there is another one to do.”

Multiskilling was interpreted as meaning workers had to take on many other tasks, not necessarily learning additional skills. Multiskilling was a tool to precipitate additional redundancies and even eventual closure of some areas of work. However, the young worker saw that multiskilling was good for him personally, as it meant he would keep his job and therefore have an income for a longer time, as he would be one of the last to go.

This issue is relevant in another way. The anxiety about future careers was based not only on high unemployment but also on concerns about the narrowness of the training that apprentices have received in their specialised field and that their skills are not transferable, making it difficult for them to find employment ‘outside’ the industry. When asked whether the main concern was about being unable to stay with the company with which he had trained, or whether he would get a job somewhere else, one young worker replied,

“... A bit of both, because I mean it is not easy out there; there is not a lot of work out there and it isn’t a matter of saying, ‘Oh well, if I haven’t got a job here I will just leave and go somewhere else’, because more often than not there isn’t anywhere else to go to.”

In some cases, career choice had been affected already by the recession, as some young people had taken the first available job rather than continue to seek a position in their first career preference. They were concerned about establishing themselves as adults, and this meant having a job rather than being unemployed:

“I didn’t actually want to come into this industry. I wanted to more or less become a police officer or go to the fire brigade - do something more exciting - but after year twelve, the recession and stuff, my Dad got me a job here.”

Initially seeking employment has been harder for some young workers, particularly due to the number of company closures and to work place competition. Given the traditional barriers experienced by women trying to obtain trade positions, the recession has made the situation of young women more difficult. For one young woman, now working, her initial success in finding a trade position was short lived, as the company reassigned its need for an apprentice because of the downturn in demand:

“Just because of the recession and everything, they just didn’t have any work to go on. They were working, instead of five days, four days. Times were

going down and everything, and they said, 'Look it is not really worth taking on another apprentice'."

She eventually got her job through a labour market program, but there is now no guarantee that her current apprenticeship will lead to on-going employment.

Living away from home

To increase efficiency, one company centralised its operations in Melbourne, with an 'out post' in each capital city. This centralisation has forced apprentices to come from interstate to 'do their time':

".... Over a period of time we have scaled down or shut down all the operations in other states and centralised it all in Melbourne so, in actual fact, our workload is going up. (*But your numbers are going down?*) Yeah, it is going down; we have learnt to be a lot more efficient and we are still having to be."

The major impact of this was a concern about the difficulties in trying to maintain an 'independent' lifestyle on a first year apprentice's income. Whilst there was some small compensation from the company, a number of the young workers in this situation felt it was not enough:

"It is hard when you come from interstate on first year wages, like living away from home, and actually you get forty dollars a week from the government and if you are living away from home you have to pay rent and you are only getting a 150 dollars a week or something, and you have got to pay rent, you have got to run a car, and things like that, so that is pretty hard. It has been a bit hard living away from home on these wages ... you get the same wage as the people from here... It is hard living away from home. I reckon the wages would be a lot better if you lived at home and didn't have to pay rent and things like that."

Another commented on the financial hardship of the move from his home:

"I have also been transferred from port to port (which) doesn't really help ... it is a lot of money to find. The worst thing is when you have done your third year and you know that at the end of the time you can put down for a mortgage on a house and then you get transferred and you spend half your money because you are transferred. It is not really that good."

However, not all young workers see the recession as having a negative impact. One young worker commented,

"... With the recession I have seen the company tighten its belt a lot. They are very slack in the way they operated in a lot of areas. Now that everyone is feeling the pinch and everyone has got to tighten up, they seem to be running a lot more cohesive now. Everyone seems to be pulling their weight a lot better. Other than that, there doesn't seem to be any changes. They are good changes but I don't think I have seen many bad changes since I have been here ... I think you appreciate your job a lot better, appreciate it a lot more. It seems to be recognised by the company a lot more because they are tightening the belts; they have to motivate you and they turn around and take a look at

what you are doing. They seem to be paying just that bit more attention to you.”

While this was not a common view, compared to the general anxiety about the future, it does indicate that restructuring is a complex process which young workers do experience in different ways.

Some Leads for Further Research

This kind of data, while drawn particularly from young workers, raises some rather broad questions about the manner in which the restructuring of Australian industry has been conducted, especially in the context of recession. How does the sense of jeopardy to 'lifelong' careers, which many workers have had to endure, actually assist a company to achieve greater efficiency and effectiveness in the workplace? Are the broader implications of internal competition and destabilisation ultimately counterproductive? It is not surprising that some recent research in the USA has begun to cast doubt on the overall strategy of 'downsizing' as the predominant means of increasing competitiveness within global markets.

From the preliminary analysis of the data reported here, a number of more specific issues warranting attention from researchers and policy makers have emerged. The concerns raised by the respondents have been summarised under five headings.

The quality of 'on-the-job' training

As older and more experienced workers have left companies on redundancy or retrenchment arrangements, it appears that the availability of experienced staff to assist with 'on-the-job' training has been significantly reduced, even to the point where other apprentices in their third or fourth year have had to take over some of this responsibility. This raises questions about the continued consistency and reliability of the quality of 'on-the-job' training. The potential problems take on greater significance when it is recognised that the broader trends in the training system, reinforced by the clear preferences of young workers themselves, are placing greater emphasis on the importance of learning that is integrated with practical experience. The absence of more experienced workers in the workplace affects not only the transfer of specific trade skills but also the contextual learning about the organisation, how different parts relate together and the significance of a particular trainee's contribution to the overall production effort.

Prospects for careers

The assumption that a sustained commitment to a training program such as an apprenticeship would be foundation of an ongoing career is being undermined even before the career has begun. It is one thing to assert that all young workers will have to adapt to continuing retraining and possible career changes as industry develops, but the experience of many apprentices at present is that, even within a few years, their apparent choice of a career has become redundant. This has significant consequences for the commitment which young people are able to make to their training, to their company and ultimately to their own futures. Even where many apprentices have retained their employment, they have become increasingly pessimistic about their prospects of practising their trade in the future, as they observe a decline in the overall number of skilled workers employed in the firm, and see other apprentices being asked to undertake less skilled work at the end of their training.

This is not only a matter of initial recruitment and employment by a company as a tradesperson, but also of the prospects for promotion once young people have established themselves with a company. Internal restructuring has frequently

involved the elimination of middle management positions and, even if this has not occurred, the mobility of the present incumbents has slowed. Young workers see few opportunities for them to gain management skills or experience in supervision.

Training for what?

Young people who have been transferred to areas of a company in which they have no prior experience and in which the skills which they have acquired are apparently useless, have been shocked at the perceived deception which has been practised upon them. Such decisions have been interpreted as a lack of respect for the skills which they have acquired, especially where the young workers have perceived the new tasks or demands as inferior to those which they had previously been expected to meet. 'Multiskilling' has been seen as a management label for expecting a worker to become a 'jack of all trades', or even a form of scab labour, with few opportunities to develop specific expertise. From a company point of view, there must also be some waste as four year apprenticeship programs are costly, and the undermining of staff commitment will have consequences for many years.

If this pattern is appearing widely throughout industry, it calls into question the strong policy emphasis in *Working Nation* on a greater expansion in training places, when there is no apparent guarantee of employment afterwards - in any field, let alone that for which young people have actually trained. Such a potential contradiction augurs badly not only for the policy objectives of the White Paper, but also for the willingness of privately owned companies to continue to participate in labour market programs, when the costs of providing training are not complemented by long-term benefits in staff expertise and commitment.

Implications for gender relations

Efforts to get young women to enter occupational areas which have been dominated historically by males have been frustrated by significant limitations on recruitment into those areas, especially in access to apprenticeships. In general terms, the competition between the *sexes* for access to trade training has intensified, as it has for the few available employment positions which are available, once they have completed their 'time'. This issue was demonstrated partly by the limited number of young women who were available to participate as interviewees in these projects. However, those that did contribute had stories which indicated the particular difficulties which young women face in entering non-traditional trades. In times when both restructuring and recession combine to constrain severely the number of training and employment places which are available, there need to be quite distinctive policies which acknowledge these constraints and specifically provide access for young women.

Preparation for restructured workplaces

One of the most serious consequences of these developments to emerge in this research was the effect on morale amongst both young and more experienced workers. It appears that has significant implications in the short term for productivity and for enhancing production, as opposed to reducing costs. However, when most contemporary management theorists are emphasising the importance of teamwork and of continual learning and improvement (eg Senge 1990; Dawson and Palmer 1993), it must be of some concern that young people report such negative

views in response to staff reductions and 'abbreviated' careers. Under these circumstances, even amongst those who remain, it could be very difficult to engender the trust and commitment to organisational improvement which appear to be so crucial to enhancing competitiveness.

Conclusion

This part of the Working Paper has presented some preliminary analysis of data which suggest some disquiet about the implications of current management strategies with respect to restructuring in the context of recession. The difficulties which might arise for the continuing supply of skilled labour in Australia are derived not only from the specific decisions made by employers with respect to training and the operations of their firms, but from the actions of young workers themselves in response to the perceived negative circumstances with which they must cope. In some instances, young workers have broadened their perspectives and thought about more diverse career options than they would otherwise have considered. However these apparent 'positives' appear to be rather less important than the difficulties which will result in developing committed and positive workplace cultures in which young people are able to develop skills, confident in the knowledge that they will be able to make a significant contribution to workplace reform and a productive future.

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Youth Research Centre

The Youth Research Centre is located within the Department of Social and Educational Studies in the Institute of Education at The University of Melbourne.

It was established in 1988 in response to a recognised need by the youth affairs sector for relevant and up to date research on the issues facing young people today.

As part of the university, the Youth Research Centre draws on the research skills, knowledge and experience of senior academic staff.

The aims of the YRC are to:

- conduct relevant, coherent and reliable research on young people in Australia, with a state, national and international focus;
- assist with the development of policy and the implementation of initiatives based on research findings;
- develop strong links with the youth affairs sector, with particular attention to helping to identify and address the sector's research needs ;
- facilitate communication between educators, researchers, policy makers and youth workers;
- support the research activities of university staff and post-graduate students who have a specific interest in youth affairs; and,
- enhance the professional development of staff and students by assisting them to be informed about the broader context of young people's lives.

Youth Research Centre Activities

To fulfil its aims, the Youth Research Centre undertakes a broad range of activities, which are primarily research based.

The YRC has particular expertise in research on education, transition pathways, social justice, gender equity and employment issues as they affect young people.

The main YRC activities are:

- undertaking research and publishing the outcomes in a manner accessible to policy makers and the youth sector;
- providing information and policy advice to governments and other organisations;
- assisting and encouraging individuals or groups who work with young people.

Other YRC activities include:

- undertaking small projects for groups lacking the capacity or opportunity to do so themselves;
- providing a base for post-graduate students wishing to undertake Masters or PhD research on topics related to young people and the youth sector;
- enabling academics to participate in established YRC projects, and/or undertake their own research on youth related issues;
- maintaining a youth sector resource library;
- publishing series of **Working Papers** and **Research Reports**;
- conducting public seminars and conferences on a variety of issues relevant to those working in the youth sector.

ISBN 0 7325 0643 3