



MEDIA RELEASE
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Low score for work experience

South Australia's work experience system is broken and needs a major overhaul to set high school students on the right career paths and open up opportunities for all young people across the State, research has found.

Surveys of businesses, schools, community groups and students conducted by the Commissioner for Children and Young People and the Committee for Adelaide show the secondary school system has major flaws, failing to deliver for both businesses and young people.

In the wake of yesterday's release of a State Government paper on vocational training that has been welcomed by both organisations, Commissioner Helen Connolly said that children whose parents had extensive networks often secured meaningful work experience placements while those without often missed out.

Committee for Adelaide Chief Executive Officer Jodie van Deventer said this was bad news for businesses and the entire community as work experience was an important way to inspire students and help them make informed decisions about their future.

"Preparing our young people for current and future industries is vital for our economy to thrive and a whole of community approach is needed to solve this," she said.

Both organisations said the concept of work experience was outdated and more initiatives such as businesses visiting schools and students working on real-life business problems or running virtual organisations were needed.

The Committee and Commissioner have joined forces to tackle the issue engaging with interstate experts and even including a visit to an entrepreneurial-based school program in Washington as part of an innovation tour the Committee is planning later this year. They are also keen to hear from other organisations across South Australia that have implemented successful programs.

Ms Connolly said it was essential that all young people, regardless of where they lived, had access to meaningful work experience opportunities both inside and out the school system.

"From my conversations with children and young people, children as young as five have told me that they are anxious about their future and whether there will be jobs for them. Young people have also told me that they want meaningful opportunities to give them insight into the tasks and roles required in an industry. This helps them develop an understanding of what skills are then required to enter into that industry," she said.

FINDINGS FROM THE SURVEY:

Students and parents

- For some students, arranging work experience placements is stressful, particularly when they receive multiple knock backs from potential hosts.
- Transport to placements can be a major barrier while regional and rural students have limited choices with many lacking the funds required to travel to a city placement.
- Many cited their experiences as boring, a waste of time, or outside their area of interest.

From a parent: "We had to do all the running around and locating a company, getting all the forms completed etc, the school did very little."

From a student: "We don't do work experience, [just a] 1000 word essay on what job we want, when we don't know that yet!"

Schools

- A number of schools stated they no longer offered work experience either due to burdensome requirements or while ATAR results were considered more important.
- Typically a work experience coordinator looks after governance, curriculum requirements and helping students find placements with many feeling "overwhelmed".

"We stopped offering work experience several years ago, as it's all about the ATAR and we don't want anything to distract from that."

Businesses

- While many organisations would like to offer work experience, legal issues and resourcing placements were cited as major barriers.
- Most organisations did not have a formal work experience program in place, often hosting children of staff, friends and clients/customers.
- Those with programs in place were keen to highlight their industry to help stimulate future demand and interest.

"I would not have knowledge of how to engage with a school or the legal parameters."

"My desire for the benefits would be my experience from my high school involvement, which led to my first job. I would see the major challenge as organisational size and the capacity to offer a meaningful experience."

"Challenges include ensuring staff have capacity to provide meaning experiences for the work experience student, eg meetings align to for the student to sit in, etc. Potential risk if attending a site visit."

"It takes lots of time setting up a meaningful orientation and experience program and they require constant oversight and task setting."