Australian Think Tank

Youth to Education/Employment Success

Coach and Learner profile presentation

Summary Report

Professor Derek Colquhoun

2\textsuperscript{nd} August 2014
Executive Summary

Across the country there are a range of developed and funded State/Territory and Commonwealth Government programs aimed at supporting those young people who, for one reason or another, are outside traditional learning contexts and consequently have limited employability. In Australia, as in most Western countries, this could be approximately 15% of all young people.

It is clear there are significant challenges and opportunities for young people today in Australia. Approximately 40 participants from across Australia, New Zealand and the UK met in a two day Think Tank in Wodonga (a list of participants is in Appendix A). The Think Tank was sponsored and funded by the Albury Wodonga Community College.

The purpose of the Think Tank was:

To explore the challenges and opportunities facing communities, and government and non-government agencies specifically in the area of learning and employment success for young people.

There is evidence to suggest that options need to be explored to develop alternative learning programs for those who are disengaged from the traditional learning process and education system for whatever reason. With this in mind, there are several main recommendations to emanate from the Think Tank:

- Successful programs should be shared with appropriate audiences throughout the country for greater effectiveness of youth to education/employment responsiveness;
- Transferable evidence including a cost-benefit analyses across a range of learner contexts would be welcomed but must be provided by an independent body on behalf of government, ensuring the value proposition of contributed taxpayer funds;
- A more robust research and evaluation framework would assist policy makers in adapting alternative program delivery. This should be inclusive of non-financial and/or non-traditional education measures, that acknowledge holistic influences which play an often unheralded contribution to those 15% of youth for education/employment achievement;
- Structured networking of government and non-government agencies including employers would be useful, particularly when seeking to apply consistency of alternative programs across a national landscape and towards the ‘world of work’;
- Including funding in developing programs for youth to education/employment that maintains an ongoing literature review, drawing on international evidence, would increase the future success of programs such as 2cool4school across Australia.

To date there have been significant resources invested in Australia which have produced a range of results and which have achieved some significant educational outcomes for young people.

It would however be fair to suggest that not all programs have been successful, that not all young people have reengaged in learning and given the market mechanisms for workplace skills and employment are constantly changing, the option of work is getting still ever further away for a large proportion of people with previously poor academic achievement (and without Government intervention, this proportion of the population will continue to grow).
Participants in the Think Tank shared their experiences of programs from across the world. These experiences from a variety of contexts when shared with others may form the foundation to lift young people out of a life otherwise consigned to un/under-employment, limited family and community opportunities.

The work of the Wodonga Think Tank participants is presented here in the hope of adding something meaningful to an ever present issue for people without an education, without a job, without self-esteem and community respect and in their view, without much hope.

Think Tank – The Cube Wodonga

2Cool4School

School not your thing
Those bells that ring
And Heap of kids
That not your biz

So a word to the wise
Open up those eyes
And then go see
A cool place to be

2Cool4School
Don’t be a fool
It’s the place to learn
If you want to earn

Some self-respect
And time to reflect
On life’s new coarse
Check out this source

2Cool4School
A learning tool
For you to learn
Now it’s your turn

2Cool4School is made for all
2Cool4School should be your call

Stephen Mitchell
Presented at Think Tank 17\textsuperscript{th} July 2014,
54 yr old student
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Foreword

The latest OECD report ‘Education at a Glance’ provides us with a sobering statement regarding the issues facing many young people today. The challenges and opportunities facing policy makers and practitioners are clear:

This edition of Education at a Glance comes at a time when youth unemployment keeps policy makers awake at night. Between 2008 and 2011...unemployment rates climbed steeply in most countries and have remained high ever since. Young people have been particularly hard-hit by un- and underemployment as a result of the global recession. In 2011, the average proportion of 15-29 year-olds neither in employment nor in education or training (NEET) across OECD countries was 16%; among 25-29 year-olds, 20% were NEET. (Among this latter group, 40% were unemployed, more than half of them for more than six months; the rest did not participate in the labour market at all). In some countries the figures are much higher, with more than one in three people between the ages of 25 and 29 neither in education nor in work. These young people are forced to pay a very high price for a crisis that was not of their making, with long-lasting consequences for their skills, work morale and social integration. The demoralising short-term effects for individuals, families and communities demand urgent policy responses, while the longer term ramifications, in terms of skills loss, scarring effects and de-motivation, are real and affect countries’ potential for sustainable recovery. (OECD, 2013; p.13)

The relationship between learning, work and individual and community wellbeing, especially for young people, has never been more significant. The Think Tank participants were clear that this is an increasing concern for most Western nations. Over the two days of the Think Tank participants explored: the contribution learning could make to young people and their communities (with shared examples notably from New Zealand and the United Kingdom); how ‘alternative’ programs could support young people re-engaging with schools, communities and the workplace; the growth and development of learning programs for young people; administrative, structural and bureaucratic issues in relation to young people learning and employment success; and the need for inter-professional collegial working to support young people holistically.

This report from the Think Tank on Youth to Education/Employment Success provides a brief background of various experiences nationally and internationally to different learning approaches which are unique and have achieved proven learner outcomes.
Introduction and Rationale (World View)

For many young people today, the beginning of the 21st century has seen significant challenges to their sense of self and to their belief in the future. Being a young person today often means being aware of and experiencing greater levels of uncertainty and risk, especially in relation to learning and work.

The global financial crisis (GFC) which began at the end of the first decade of the 21st century, seemed to exacerbate young people’s exposure to increasing levels of austerity brought about by financial instability, military conflicts especially across the Middle East, Crimea, Iraq and Afghanistan, climate uncertainty, increased threats to their health (mental health, depression, suicide, STI’s, obesity), and social, community and technological change (especially from social networking).

The GFC and its inherent uncertainty and complexity has seen young people considered by policy makers, politicians, educators, employers and academics in various ways especially in relation to learning and work. Countries are responding differently to how they seek to improve the retention of young people in school, in further education beyond school and of course into employment. Each country has their own particular economic circumstances to contend with such as reducing the size (and cost) of public service, cost transfer to individuals, reducing local expenditure in communities, reducing welfare costs and containing health costs with an ageing population, funding old age etc.

Allied to each country’s financial concerns are issues related to the social and cultural position of young people within an era of austerity and ambiguity. Issues related to multiple literacies, workforce development, dis/connection and dis/engagement with community, social media, inequalities and disadvantage, widening participation, sense of self, relationships, wellbeing, housing and debt/budgeting. All of these of course are exacerbated for young people outside of the ‘normal trajectory/lifecourse’ of school to work/employment or school to further/higher study. In addition, young people are often characterised in a particular way: the term ‘youth’ for example is often represented negatively.

Politicians, policy makers, academics and practitioners in education systems around the world are beginning to understand that diverse approaches to learning are needed for the complex world within which young people find themselves today. The global financial crisis over the last 6 years or so has concentrated the impact of a complex world on young people: an ineffective ‘one size fits all’ approach to school education; poor access to apprenticeships; unemployment; an increasing range of health and wellbeing issues; reduced direct state/government funding for young people and indirect funding for support services; increased homelessness and increased crime have all in one way or another led to a growing number of young people ‘at risk’. Many of these at risk young people would also not be in education, employment or training. In the UK for example, the number of young people not in education, employment or training is growing and is currently around 1.09 million (ONS, 2013) which is approximately 15.1% of all young people aged between 16-24. Acknowledging it is difficult to compare national statistics, this figure would be fairly similar in both Australia and New Zealand, with of course significant variations for gender, ethnicity, disadvantage and rurality/isolation.

1 In the UK, young people in this ‘category’ are called ‘NEETs’.
International Context

Approaches to young people at risk and those not in education, employment or training vary considerably within and between countries. These young people are often seen as a ‘problem’ to themselves and to society needing ‘tackling’ (LSN, 2009) or even ‘curing’ with ‘upstream’ measures needed to prevent young people becoming at risk in the first place or ‘downstream’ approaches to ‘cure’ the problem once it has occurred (Second Chance, 2013). There are common features of many international programs for ‘at risk’ young people including:

- They are responsive to the local context;
- Rewards are often a feature for young people;
- Effective interventions combine life skills, basic education training and work placements or apprenticeships;
- Freedom for programs to innovate;
- Student centred approaches are central, as well as empowerment and individual student planning;
- Positive reinforcement;
- Individual support is holistic;
- Small student-teacher ratios;
- Excellent monitoring and evaluation;
- Applied cross discipline (no one curriculum subject dominates);
- Use of new technologies;
- Excellent partnerships with local businesses; and
- A system which supports young people at different stages in their learning career (Second Chance, 2012, no page).

In the USA, like elsewhere, young people are exposed to a range of risks and challenges including ‘employment, independent living, drug and alcohol use, pregnancy, parenting, life skills, mental health, leaving the care system, homelessness and violence’ (Hadley et al, 2010; cited in Second Chance, 2012; no page). According to Second Chance (2012), programs also exist in Canada but these have often been criticised for not providing young people with the opportunity to gain qualifications, as they transition into the workplace.

In the UK:

2nd Chance uses a simple learning model that is driven by stepped improvements in self-management, self-reliance and readiness to work. Over a 12 month period, they are guided towards full-term employment and equipped with the skills that they need to progress in their chosen field. (http://2ndchanceuk.org/index.php/about-us/model; Accessed: 28/01/2014)

Young people on Second Chance are called ‘learners’ and they are provided with an individual ‘Progression Coach’ who supports their development through the program, as well as a wage for their time spent in the workplace. There is an emphasis on literacy and numeracy in Second Chance and it appears that Second Chance is a structured program which young people work through, rather than a program which is developed by young people with a view to building on their strengths with their Coaches.
‘Elsewhere in Europe the position is patchy with the better programs being in Germany and Scandinavia and the worst in the Mediterranean countries such as Spain and Italy. Across Europe policies tend to focus on the transition phase between education/learning and the workplace with job creation schemes, apprenticeships and the early ‘streaming’ of young people into vocational education and training (such as in Germany and Finland) being popular across the EU. The risk profile of young people is the same in Europe as it is elsewhere: ‘young people from immigrant and ethnic minority backgrounds, those from single-parent families and those whose parents are long term unemployed have a much higher risk…’ (Second Chance, 2012, no page).

In the most successful programs, young people are not seen ‘as a problem’ who have ‘failed’ school, have fallen foul of the criminal justice system for one reason or another, are impacted by drugs or are having a ‘problematic’ teenage pregnancy (or all of the above)…rather, they are seen as valuable members of their community, each with their own unique context, history, skills, dispositions, attitudes and motivations.

Hammond (2010; p.3) has suggested that good strengths based programs focus on the following:

- Trusting and workable relationships;
- Empowering people to take a lead in their own care process;
- Working in collaborative ways on mutually agreed upon goals;
- Drawing upon the personal resources of motivation and hope; and
- Creating sustainable change through learning and experiential growth.

Writing for the NFER (National Foundational for Education Research) in the UK, Nelson and O’Donnell (2012) recommend that if policy makers are to develop successful programs for young learners then they should:

- Identify need early;
- Intervene early with families at risk of poor outcomes;
- Develop informal learning and volunteering opportunities for young people whose personal barriers to learning are not necessarily entrenched, but who lack clarity about their personal goals;
- Develop alternative and flexible learning opportunities for young people who do not benefit from a conventional classroom experience; and
In Australia

Currently, Australia has Commonwealth and State/Territory policies/projects/funding targeted to improve secondary school retention, youth un/employment, young people’s health and wellbeing and so on. These are complex and challenging areas for both policy makers and practitioners with targets often difficult to achieve. The time is right to examine these complexities and challenges drawing from national and international perspectives on successful policies and practices.

Our collective obligation is to be relentlessly optimistic about the young people of this country and supportive of their capacity and capability to envision and create the nation, and world, in which they want to live, work and contribute. Delivering on this commitment will require a significant, intergenerational transfer of leadership, trust and resources to empower our young people to meet the challenges and take up the opportunities which lie ahead.

(Jan Owen, AM, 2013; CEO, Foundation for Young Australians)

Generally, and in comparison to young people from other countries, Australian young people have good levels of literacy and numeracy and they can benefit from the full range of programs, especially apprenticeships and traineeships, on offer for them (Second Chance, 2012). However, from the recent PISA testing there is concern that Australia is slipping down the international league table in relation to literacy, numeracy and scientific literacy (Thomson, Bortoli & Buckley, 2012).

According to the OECD (OECD, 2013), Australia is spending less (public and private spending combined) than the OECD average on all educational institutions, as a percentage of GDP (being ‘sandwiched’ between Mexico and Estonia). Because of this it may be expeditious to explore alternative programs which could ‘add value’ to existing education approaches and improve Australia’s standing internationally.

Several key findings of How Young People are Faring: the national report on the learning and earning of young Australians (Foundation for Young Australians, 2013) point to a mixed picture for young people living in Australia today. According to the above report:

- Young Australians are participating at higher rates in education and training

Three-quarters (75%) of teenagers and just under one third (32%) of young adults are in full-time education.

Participation and achievements in education and training can vary considerably between subgroups of young people.

Young Australians are faring relatively well in education and employment compared with other OECD countries.

- More young people are working on a casual basis

Young people are less likely to be in full-time employment and are more likely to start full-time work at a later age.
Unemployment and underemployment rates for young people have increased since the Global Financial Crisis.

The proportion of young higher education and vet graduates who are in full-time employment has dropped since 2007.

An estimated 22% of 23 year-olds are not fully engaged in employment, education or training (meaning that they are either not in the labour force, are unemployed or are only working or studying part-time).

- Some key transitions are occurring later for young Australians

Important life transitions extend beyond the realm of education and employment and young people are delaying many of these transitions.

The proportion of young people who are very satisfied with life has increased over the past decade.

- Education and skills are critical to the economic success of young Australians

There are growing opportunities for young people to get good jobs, but they need good qualifications and skills.

Often the skills young people have do not match the skills they need for their existing jobs or to get a new job.

The set of skills which young people need to be successful in the workplace is changing.

Our education and training systems will play a crucial role in building the relevant capabilities that young Australians need to capitalise on the opportunities from the ‘Asian Century’.

(Foundations for Young Australians, 2013; pp. 6-7)

Writing in New South Wales, Scerra suggests that a strengths based approach has common features (2011; p.4):

- Every individual, family, group and community has strengths, and the focus is on these strengths rather than pathology;
- The community is a rich source of resources;
- Interventions are based on client self-determination;
- Collaboration is central with the practitioner-client relationship as primary and essential;
- Outreach is employed as a preferred mode of intervention, and
- All people have the inherent capacity to learn, grow and change.

In addition, the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (2011) position a strengths based approach as central to their Learning and Development Framework.

Finally, and most recently, the Commonwealth Government of Australia (2014) in its published Budget 2014-15 Higher Education document; pp 7, recognises that early school leavers without a Certificate level qualification are twice as likely to remain in unemployment that someone who achieves a diploma level qualification in their life.
2Cool4School

2Cool4School (2C4S), Accredited Certificate Levels I, II and III began as a pilot in July 2012 and using non-Government agencies including Job Network, local Police/courts and Youth Agencies has expanded to over 650 secondary level Learners. (July 2014) delivering into Albury-Wodonga, Melbourne, Mildura, Shepparton, and Wangaratta. 2C4S, which was developed initially to support some of the 20% of 15-19 year olds not engaged in education, training or employment in Wodonga, was presented at the Think Tank as an example of a rapidly growing, small yet successful program supporting learners who were outside the traditional educational context. Learners in the program were present throughout the two days of the Think Tank and shared their experiences with other participants.

Without doubt the most important feature of 2C4S is its fundamental belief in valuing each young person as an individual and adopting a strengths based approach to their learning and development through a personalised and thematic approach.

There are two main aspects of the learner outcomes for 2C4S which need acknowledging. The first thing to note is that 2C4S has been successful across a range of ages (from 14 – 60+), testifying to the appropriateness of the 2C4S pedagogic model across a range of ages and contexts. Second, there is very high completion rate 90%+ (against their pilot target of 50%) and a clear sign that learners who stay in the program tend to do very well as a result. Of the small number who withdraw from the program, over a third either return to school or find employment.

Learner satisfaction with the program is very high and outline why it is so successful. It is:

- flexible and manageable by most people in their busy and often complicated lives;
- encouraging, motivational and holistic;
- hands on and complementary to other learning approaches involving industry partners;
- individualised with one-on-one coaching; and
- supportive and productive in preparing Learners for the world of work.

Indeed, as 2C4S itself reports:

There is evidence from our early evaluations of the strong capacity of 2C4S to reach home-bound and socially excluded young adults who might not otherwise access adult or vocational education. This pilot group are almost all young adults with ‘a lack of skills, no work, low esteem, low expectations, fragmented communities, poor housing, crime, ill health and drugs: problems that have persisted over several generations.’ Expecting such young adults to progress in large numbers to successfully complete accredited training and then go on to work and/or further education training after 2C4S is very optimistic, though now we can show many clearly do.
2C4S shares many of the features of successful programs for educationally at risk young people including:

- A focus on the strengths of each individual Learner;
- Inclusive and open to all (it has no entry requirements);
- A common language recognising the uniqueness of the approach to learning (i.e., it’s not school based with traditional hierarchies between student and teacher);
- Flexibility for the Learner to start the program at different places;
- Individualised support and coaching using technology (notebooks);
- All resources are provided by the program;
- The program is free to Learners;
- Varied locations for learning are mutually agreed by the Learner and qualified Coach;
- A holistic approach to each individual Learner focusing on their health and wellbeing and if/when appropriate, their progression into the workplace;

Participants in the Think Tank agreed that these features form the basis of a pedagogy which is transferable to almost any setting across Australia (and internationally). Indeed, a significant discussion was held throughout the Think Tank over the need for a broad ranging cost/benefit analysis of 2C4S to assist policy makers’ decision making over the funding of such programs as 2C4S.

2C4S (Accredited Certificate Levels I, II and III) uses a thematic approach using 6 themes to structure the young people’s learning.

These include:

**Taking Off** Is about your **Self** – about you, your goals, your needs and wants

**Tapping In** Looks at **What’s out there?** – about work choices, communication skills, your talents)

**In Control** Starts the **Transformation** – about budgeting, small business, study options, work)

**Taking Care** Is about your **Health and Wellbeing** - about food, exercise, safety, housing, community

**Touching Base** **Supports** you – about relationships, parenting, social media, family

**On Track** **Begins the journey** for you – about community, environment, Australian social issues

Clearly and in other terms, these themes cover the individual’s understanding of themselves, as well as their health and wellbeing, their position within their community, their social capital (networking) within that community, and their contribution to the community through their learning career and their transition into work. These holistic themes were seen by the Think Tank participants as ‘all inclusive’ covering the most important aspects needed to support young people’s transition between learning and employment.
In consideration of any transference to a broader population, 2C4S may need to seek national policy support to overcome Australian State/Territory differences in different school curriculum/enrolment requirements (for younger learners) and the differences in the each jurisdiction Vocational Education and Training delivery approaches (for adult learners). 2C4S can clearly provide needed outcomes for Australians of any age but such a program could find great difficulty of achieving wider success, without National Government support. Examples of this were shared from the international participants at the Think Tank.

Recommendations

It is difficult in this short report to capture the full range of discussions and reflections held by the participants of the Think Tank. However, it would be fair to say that there were several recommendations emanating from the discussions and presentations:

- Successful programs should be shared with appropriate audiences throughout the country for greater effectiveness of youth to education/employment responsiveness;
- Transferable evidence including a cost-benefit analyses across a range of learner contexts would be welcomed but must be provided by an independent body on behalf of government, ensuring the value proposition of contributed taxpayer funds;
- A more robust research and evaluation framework would assist policy makers in adapting alternative program delivery. This should be inclusive of non-financial and/or non-traditional education measures, that acknowledge holistic influences which play an often unheralded contribution to those 15% of youth for education/employment achievement;
- Structured networking of government and non-government agencies including employers would be useful, particularly when seeking to apply consistency of alternative programs across a national landscape and towards the ‘world of work’;
- Including funding in developing programs for youth to education/employment that maintains an ongoing literature review, drawing on international evidence, would increase the future success of programs such as 2cool4school across Australia.

Conclusion

Young people, probably more so than any other part of the community, have suffered significantly as a result of the global financial crisis. Education systems in particular have been struggling to meet the challenges and opportunities that young people face today. The parents and families of young people who are in the predicament of not reaching the educational levels necessary to secure and keep employment feel helpless. Programs must be developed and successfully implemented to address those challenges and opportunities and to help young people make sense of their world, which is becoming more and more complex. What the many young people (and older Learners) as the focus of this Think Tank want, is support which is individualised to build on their existing strengths and to assist to address their challenges and which is flexible, motivational and tailored to prepare them for their learning career towards the world of work.
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Commonwealth of Australia (2014) Budget 2014-15 Higher Education CanPrint Communications Pty Ltd
Appendix A  Think Tank Attendees

The Hon. Sussan Ley MP Assistant Minister for Education
Professor Derek Colquhoun – United Kingdom
Dr Nick Owens – United Kingdom
Professor Susan Cullen – New Zealand
Dr Evie O’Brien – New Zealand
Helen McLaren - Branch Manager
School to Work Branch
Department of Education
David Hardy - Director
Transitions and Partnerships Team
Department of Education
Andrew Bishop - Director
Pathways Team
Department of Education
Kate Davidson CEO Community Colleges Australia
Janine Hutton - Programme Development Manger
Community Services
Campbell Page
Janice Scelzo Taylor - Head of Relationships
Campbell Page
Anne Murphy
Campbell Page
Jacqueline Hewitt – United Kingdom
Sue Colquhoun – United Kingdom
Brett Cullen – New Zealand
Councillor Lisa Mahood – City of Wodonga
Rachel Howard – Advisor (The Hon Sussan Ley)

Director Rodney Jones
Director Kevin Poulton
Director Sharon Muggivan
Director Alison Reed
Director Natasha Callewaert
Di Benson
Pauline Butler
Max Caruso
Geordie Graham
Sue Hamence
Natasha Hillier
Gary Johnson
Nicola Jones
Renea Kaitler
Kassi Kelly
Joe Knight
Karen Knight
Derek Murray
Gabby Potter
Gavin Reed
Marita Shiels
Katrina Wangman
Kathy Wangman
Rodney Wangman