School students and part-time work
Workplace problems and challenges

The literature has identified some potential problems and challenges associated with teenage part-time workers and the nature of the workplaces that employ them. However a large national project on student-working found few problems in the two companies researched because these companies had policies in place that addressed the potential problems. Some suggestions are made about how problems and challenges could be avoided in a wider range of adolescent workplaces.

by Erica Smith
& Wendy Patton

I n Australia, the majority of young people work while they are still at school. Student-working is now recognised as an established fact rather than an aberrant phenomenon, as has tended to be the case until fairly recently. Many employers, particularly in the retail and fast food industries, rely on students to run their businesses. Some school students need to work to help support their families and most want to work for discretionary spending, and school systems now accept that their students have part-time jobs.

However, some people are still of the view that the jobs that school students do are menial, that students are often exploited and that they are at risk of injury. Of course, individual problems do exist, as in adult work, but many young people enjoy their jobs and gain a lot from them. The weight of recent research evidence shows that the majority of Australian school students are happy in their part-time jobs (e.g. Smith & Green 2001; NSW Commission for Children and Young People 2005). To characterise young people as victims of exploitation by employers (Think: Insight & Advice 2007) and their work as boring and meaningless could be seen as disrespectful to young people and the work that they do; perhaps even more importantly it serves to prevent proper examination of any serious problems that do exist, because specific problems can become subsumed within a vague and general disapproval of students' jobs.

This paper therefore sets out to examine the actual problems and challenges in school student-working. This is approached by identifying the characteristics of young part-time workers, and

the workplaces in which they work, that are associated with potential difficulties and challenges, and then drawing on data to illustrate the actual incidence of such problems and challenges. The paper uses data from an Australian Research Council research project on student-working careers to answer these questions. The data used in the paper were collected in 2006 and 2007.

Background and literature review

It is difficult to ascertain the exact percentage of young people who work while still at school, partly because they may move in and out of work at different times (for example, withdrawing from the workforce during the last few months of Year 12 to focus on studying) and because "working" may mean different things to different researchers. For example, babysitting and newspaper delivery or working in the family shop or cafe may or may not be counted as work. However, most writers agree that around half to three-quarters of school students over the age of 15 work formally. For example, estimates of the extent of student working include 66% of Year 10 to 12 students (Smith & Green 2001), with a lower rate for Year 10 students than Year 11 and 12 students, and 56% of Year 7 to 10 students (NSW Commission for Children and Young People 2005). School students are generally reported to work an average of nine or 10 hours a week during term-time (Smith & Green 2001; Robinson 1999) and to begin their formal working life between the ages of 13 and 15.

As the NSW Commission for Children and Young People (2005) points out, there are two major schools of thought in relation to school student-working. The first sees part-time jobs as beneficial, while the second sees them as problematic. The main arguments for student-working are that a great deal of learning occurs through work, that part-time jobs develop self-efficacy in lower-achieving students, and that career paths exist into management roles (Smith & Green 2001). The main problem areas are seen to be interference with studies and impact on other areas of life such as sport or family time and the fact that the work itself may be regarded as "menial and exploitative" (NSW Commission for Children & Young People 2005, p.1).

Exploitation can be associated with a lack of understanding of rights at work and with safety risks. Some research into these issues (e.g. Tannock 2001 in North America, and Mayhew & Quinlan 2002 in Australia) relates to young workers in retail and fast food rather than school students only, but still has applicability to this paper. Mayhew & Quinlan found that young workers' injuries in the fast food industry were no higher than those of full-time workers, and awareness of safety issues was high. They attributed this to the Fordist work organisation that is a feature of this industry. They found, however, a limited understanding of worker rights, and, in addition, Tannock (2001) identified a lack of union responsiveness to the needs of young workers. Tannock pointed out that the industries in which student workers are employed tend to be regarded more generally as low skilled and second rate. It is assumed that few people would want long-term careers in such work (Leidner 1993). Considerable variations in skill requirements and job interest among typical student jobs have, however, been noted (Bailey & Bernhardt 1997).

Almost two-thirds of school student workers work in retail or fast food (Smith & Green 2001). The retail and hospitality industries form the largest sector of Australia's economy. The retail industry faces a number of unique challenges which, together with the low productivity and profits on turnover generated in comparison to other industry areas (Maglen, Hopkins & Burke 2001), explain the industry's need to minimise labour costs, and hence, to some extent, their need for student worker labour. Employers have, however, cited a number of additional reasons why they like to employ young students (Smith & Comyn 2003), including the opportunity to recruit good-quality permanent staff, including future managers (e.g. Canny 2002). At the time of the research reported in this paper, there were major labour shortages in these industries, as in most of the Australian economy, with national unemployment rates varying between 4% and 4.5% (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2007).

Further literature relating to each of the themes identified in the analysis is discussed in conjunction with these themes in the 'Findings' section of the paper.

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Research method

The interviews formed part of a major study on student-working, which spanned three years, and was funded by the Australian Research Council with contributions from four industry partner organisations. The aim of the overall study was to examine the part-time working careers of full-time students in the 15 to 24 age group, both in themselves and as precursors to the rest of the individual's working life.

The overall research study included longitudinal surveys of school students during the final three years of schooling, focus groups and interviews with university students through their first three years of university study, and in-depth case studies involving managers and student workers in two companies at head office and branch levels. The fieldwork took place in three states: New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland.

The data for this paper are drawn from the case studies collected in the first two years of the project: 2006 and 2007. The companies were two of the industry partners: an Australian discount retail company, referred to in this paper as Discount Co., which was rapidly expanding with around 140 shops in 2007 in the south-eastern states, and a multi-national fast food chain with around 745 outlets in Australia, many franchised, each employing around 60 staff. The latter company is referred to in this paper as Burgers Inc. and, at the time of the research, was in a consolidation rather than expansion phase. For each employer, interviews took place with the national human resources manager and, at Burgers Inc., with two regional managers also. There was no regional structure in Discount Co. At the branch level, three sites were visited in each case, in late 2006 and again in late 2007. Within each store the following people were identified for interview:

- store manager
- assistant manager
- two or more student workers (interviewed either individually or in groups).

In Year 2 of the project, the same people were targeted. In some cases, turnover of staff meant that new people in the appropriate roles needed to be accessed; in others, the original interviewees had taken on new roles (for example,

having moved from student-work to full-time work) and they were interviewed in their new roles. Almost all of the interviews took place during the site visits, generally in staff rooms, but occasionally in the customer area. In a small number of instances, telephone interviews were undertaken. Table 1 shows the number of participants.

Interview protocols for each type of respondent were prepared, focusing for managers on their use of student workers and the particular ways in which they managed them, and, for student workers, on their student-working careers, learning from work, and the relationship of their jobs with their other activities. Interviews/focus groups lasted between 15 and 40 minutes and were taped, with permission, and transcribed. The resulting data were analysed for themes that related to risks associated with student-working and measures that could address these risks.

TABLE 1 Total number of respondents interviewed in Years 1 and 2 of the project, by company

	Discount Co.		Burgers Inc.	
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 1	Year 2
National/regional level	1	1	3	1
Store level	18	14	22	15
Total	19	15	25	16

Total number interviewed: 75 (includes some 'duplicate interviewees' who were interviewed in both years)

In addition to the interviews, interactions among student workers, between student workers and managers, and between student workers and customers were observed informally during breaks between interviews and while the researchers were waiting for store managers to become available. The researchers also obtained and read induction materials and manuals.

For the purposes of this paper, only data that related to student workers who were at secondary school were analysed in detail. Transcripts of tertiary students were analysed to extract information that related to their time with the company while at school, or their views about other workers that were school students.

The limitations of this paper are twofold.

First, the paper utilises only data from the case studies and does not include research undertaken with other stakeholders, for example union representatives, as they were not part of the case studies. Second, the research was undertaken to examine student-working careers and was not specifically designed to examine challenges and problems. Data relating to these themes have been extracted from the broader data, which was collected for a broader purpose. It should also be noted that the paper does not address effects of working on schoolwork, except the issue of time off for study; it deals purely with within-work issues.

Findings

A number of relevant themes emerged during the analysis of the data in conjunction with the research literature. These themes have been divided between those that relate to the nature of student workers and those that relate to the nature of the workplaces visited, which are typical of those in which student workers are employed. The nature of student workers and the nature of the workplaces both suggest possible challenges and problems.

The nature of young part-time workers

In summary, four major themes were identified: the nature of development of adolescents, organisational skills, power imbalances, and adolescents' engagement with their workplace. Each of these will be discussed in turn.

Two issues are important when thinking about school students as workers. First, they are very young; second, they work a low number of hours each week. School students tend to take their first formal jobs somewhere between 13 and 15 years of age. The psychological literature (while not uncontested) tells us that young adolescents tend to exhibit certain characteristics (Santrock 2007) that may have consequences in workplaces. Young adolescents tend to believe that they are invincible and so may be prone to taking unnecessary health and safety risks. They tend to be "egocentric" (Elkind 1967) – to believe that everything revolves around them – and thus may not deal well with criticism or may not fully appreciate the "big picture" in workplaces, focusing instead only on their own work. Thus,

while being sensitive to criticism, they can be quite judgmental about others. So conflict with supervisors could arise quite easily.

Safety risks are discussed in the section on the nature of workplaces. Potential difficulties arising from lack of social skills associated with maturity were not, in fact, frequently mentioned in the interviews. Managers sometimes referred to the lack of maturity of younger workers, but always in a reasonably respectful and under-standing manner. For example, one Burgers Inc. store manager said:

The older people have a bit more, more common sense. Right? Which I'm not saying that the younger people don't have common sense, but obviously the older people, you know, they're more mature, they think like … an adult pretty much, they will know what the customers would need and things like that.

These remarks were echoed by the National Human Resource Manager at Discount Co. A Discount Co. manager referred to occasional conflict with supervisors, but stressed that it was not a major issue:

Kids are rebellious, or not rebellious, but like, they've got to test the boundaries sometimes … Like taking longer lunch breaks and things, like, we only allow 15 minutes for a normal break and sometimes they'll be like 20, 25; [they test] how long they can go before you come and ask them.

However, managers stressed that these types of incidents were unusual.

More generally, it has been reported that young people are unlikely to have well-developed organisational skills because they lack previous working experience; for example they might muddle up their shifts and not turn up to work at the correct time (Smith 2004). While it is within the rights of young people to choose their priorities, inevitably there could be a conflict of interests if work becomes the last priority. This could hypothetically lead to the possibility of disciplinary action or dismissal. However, while there was some discussion in the interviews about student workers' organi-sational issues, the workplaces seemed to have systems built around acceptance of these low levels of skills and accommodation for them. In general though, the companies felt that it

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was their role to develop organisation skills in their student workers rather than expecting young teenagers to arrive with those skills. For example the National Human Resources Manager of Burgers Inc. said:

[The training] really develops people for life skills because they come in at 14, 15, they learn … they learn the real world and it's hard work as well, it has also proved that you know it's not an easy job and it kind of proves that people are prepared to work in a team environment, how to operate in a team environment, there's time management in terms of the rosters and so on, self-discipline that goes hand in hand with that and also the fact that they balance that with their studies which at the age of 14, 15, I think that's quite a big call.

While part-time working is an increasingly substantial part of the Australian labour market, with proportions increasing from 10% of total employment in 1966 to 29% in 2007 (Abhayarantna et al. 2008), it remains a minority segment of the labour market, and thus part-time work could hypothetically be a problem as many workplaces are structured around the expectation that people work full-time.

In the workplaces that were researched, however, part-time labour was, in fact, the norm. Therefore, communication processes were specifically aimed at involving those who worked a limited numbers of hours and with varying shift patterns. For example, any new procedures and products were explained by signage at the appropriate workstations, as well as in the crew room, which meant that all workers were aware of changes. Discount Co. had deliberately begun to employ more older workers at weekends to leaven the mix of workers so that there was better communication of issues to the student workers.

It seemed, however, from talking to the student workers that there was quite a wide variation in the extent to which students participated in consultation processes at work and were aware of the "bigger picture". Student comments indicated that some managers appeared to make strenuous efforts to be inclusive while others were more haphazard in their approach. In some workplaces there were organised social events aimed at integrating the workers with managers and each other, while in others there were not.

Some managers were highly informal in their relationships with their workers while others maintained a greater distance. A student worker in one Burgers Inc. store said:

When [my friend] asks about my managers I'm like, "they're cool"… Like when they're serious, they're serious, but they are part of a joking community and they like to make fun of you; you just pick on each other and it's like in a fun way … it's just funny.

It is possible of course that such an atmosphere might suit some student workers, but others might feel uncomfortable. It was clear, though, that there was generally respect among managers for their young workforce. Managers appeared to deal well with issues such as errors. At Discount Co., one student worker said:

If we don't do it very well, Dean just comes and explains what's wrong and stuff. He doesn't yell at you or anything.

The nature of workplaces for young part-time workers

Key themes identified include health and safety risks including verbal abuse, work organisation, and the mainly adolescent nature of the workplaces. Each will be discussed in turn.

While student jobs are distributed across a wide range of industries, around two-thirds of school student workers are employed in retail and fast-food workplaces. In many cases these jobs are well-covered by comprehensive human resource management policies and unionised, but in some cases they are not (NSW Commission for Children and Young People 2005). Even in those workplaces that have good policies and procedures in place there are certain characteristics that create risk. All industry sectors that employ student workers carry their own risks. Working in food service always carries safety risks associated with lifting, heavy machinery and hot fat (NSW Commission for Children and Young People 2005; Mayhew 2006); and the fast-moving nature of many student workplaces leads to pressure and could result in a temptation to cut corners. It also creates a relatively high risk of being verbally abused by customers (NSW Commission for

Children and Young People 2005). Most student workplaces operate with extended hours meaning that students may work late at night, with fatigue naturally creating increased risk of injury. These factors lead to different safety risks from those experienced by very young workers half a century ago where many young workers worked in apprenticeship arrangements where working hours were regular and staff were closely supervised (Mayhew 2006).

Evidence from the current research showed that comprehensive human resource management policies and practices included in-depth induction, training and buddying systems. Written training materials, procedural manuals and visual training aids assisted workers' integration into workplaces and alerted them to issues such as bullying and safety risk. As one student worker at Discount Co. said:

When I first came I didn't actually go on the registers, I did the orientation side of things with [the manager] … we came and we did a test and looked through the OH&S papers and did all that and made sure we could pass the test … OH&S … so we knew what we were doing, we learnt about customer service, the registers too, fire drills, that kind of thing.

Burgers Inc. induction materials were observed to be particularly well developed in their coverage of bullying and safety issues, and were written in language that would have been easily understandable to mid-teenagers, which is not surprising since student workers comprised the vast majority of the company's store-based workforce.

Burgers Inc. had instituted a system whereby workers could report any instances of unfair treatment directly to the Head Office, although it should be noted that in one store visited there were no supplies of the relevant form in the crew room. There was no evidence from the research that student workers felt stressed in their work. While some of the students mentioned that Burgers Inc. was busier than other workplaces where they had worked, they referred to this favourably as it meant that working hours passed quickly. It was likely that students did not necessarily fully understand the reasons for pressure at work and this may have been a reason why they did not worry as much as managers

did. For example one Discount Co. manager, an ex-student worker himself, said:

In terms of urgency sometimes they don't understand, they don't exactly care about it … they don't understand how much it needs to be done … Like I started as a casual, I know exactly how it is, like the managers are going "Come on, come on!' and you're like, "Yeah, I'm working, man."

So in a sense the student workers' distance from the managerial position insulated them from feeling stress too acutely. Similarly, a few participants referred to angry customers but only in reference to learning how to deal with them rather than in terms of stress caused to themselves by encountering such situations. For example a Discount Co. student worker said:

Yep, definitely customer service I reckon, you have to have that from everything and dealing with angry people, you have to do that well. That helps having experience in that.

The interviews did not reveal any instances of serious safety risks. Risks could be inferred through gender division of labour as reported by the student workers. For example, at Discount Co. the students said that boys tended to handle stock and dispose of rubbish, work that was described by one female student worker as being "very heavy"; and at Burgers Inc., boys tended to worked in the kitchen where there were more serious safety risks. A female student worker at Burgers Inc. said:

It's just because, you know how the manager said that it's not safe for girls in the back area … When you are working in there, you have to lift something heavy, it's easier for boys.

However, there was some mention of work generally being tiring and creating minor aches and pains, particularly after long shifts. A female student worker at Discount Co. said:

Sometimes it gets really tiring… shifts like Thursday night are all right, but when you are working behind the register it's like every time you go to sit down and do another job it's like, you have to get back up straight away and you are standing for a long period of time, so it's just painful.

Similarly, a male student worker at Burgers Inc. said:

It can be tiring, the hours can be long, and if it's a hot day, it's swelteringly hot.

While the fast food workers evidently found enough attractiveness in their jobs to keep them there (one said that she liked the teamwork and thought that it would be isolating, although cleaner, working in retail), it could be that safety and working environment issues discouraged some student workers from working in fast food. For example, one student at Discount Co. said:

I've got friends that work at like, [Burgers Inc.], and they don't really like it that much. You're constantly on your feet, getting the food and stuff like that, it gets hot in there.

Burgers Inc. crew rooms all contained numerous posters and notices about safety, as did those at Discount Co., albeit to a lesser extent. Burgers Inc. also had clear policies in place to prevent school students from working late at night. Its 'Responsible Student Employment policy' (which was detailed in employee handbooks and on the company website as well as in company manuals) forbade full-time students of 17 years of age and under working past 11 pm on school nights and recommended a maximum of two shifts a week. Therefore, for example, in stores that operated on a 24-hour basis, night shifts were always covered by university students. Late hours were not an issue at Discount Co. because there was limited evening opening at the time of the research.

Work organisation in the fast food and retail industries is primarily based on a pattern of short shifts, meaning that roster-filling becomes a major problem for managers. This leads to student workers frequently having to manage requests to work extra shifts at short notice. Because of the fast-moving, customer-focused nature of the workplaces, shifts cannot be left unfilled. This could potentially lead to conflict between students and managers.

It has been reported that the power imbalance between school student workers and their employers is great, and that many student workers feel unable to negotiate terms and conditions as equals (NSW Commission for Children and Young People 2005). However, at both Burgers Inc. and Discount Co., managers rostered students around their availability, and the students' wishes were respected. School times and term dates were well known and all stores had a book in which students could write the dates and times when they were unavailable for extra work. Some comments, among many, from students included:

Yeah, yeah, you just let them know when you need time off and they'll write it in the book, so then when they do the roster, they know, that you can't work on that specific day. (Discount Co. student worker)

Also the managers are very understanding, they'll give you the time that you need, you say like you know I've got something to do and they will be like, okay just put it in the book. (Burgers Inc. student worker)

In most cases no questions were asked about these "NAs" ("not availables"); there was no interrogation about reasons for unavailability. In some cases, managers said that they expected a reasonable explanation if students were unavailable. For example, one Discount Co. manager said:

It can't just be for Joe Blow's 16th party where they want to go and have a few drinks.

Managers were supposed to make sure not to roster them on at NA times, although student workers reported that occasionally errors occurred. One student worker who had two jobs said that his other employer (not Burgers Inc.) often phoned him during his scheduled holidays and asked him to work, and that was "a bit annoying." Another Burgers Inc. student mentioned that he could phone the store even an hour before his shift and say that he could not work, and that his manager did not mind; while this seemed flexible and favourable to him, it was easy to see the problems that this might cause other workers, who would presumably be asked to work his shift.

Managers constantly referred to the fact that time off was allowed as necessary for studying for exams and even for assignments that were due. As most managers had been student workers themselves, (in the case of Burgers Inc.,

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all of the managers had worked for Burgers Inc. as student workers) they were sympathetic to students' needs. One Discount Co. manager said:

I can relate to them quite well; I think I understand what they're talking about when they're saying, you know, with homework and managing their time and how many hours their parents want them to work as well because that always comes into it, so I can relate to all that because that was exactly what I went through as well.

It is common for young school students to work in workplaces that mainly employ teenagers (Smith & Green 2001). While this practice can make them fun places to work, it also means there is the potential for problems. For example, there is a danger that social exclusion may exist for some students just as it does in school playgrounds (Smith & Comyn 2003, p.97). Positive social interaction with peers could lead to inattention to tasks, which could lead young workers to behave inappropriately or unsafely. Greenberger, Steinberg and Ruggiero (1982), for example, found in an American study of teenage part-time workers' interaction with others that "horseplay" was much higher in food service jobs than in other jobs. Many of the Burgers Inc. workers mentioned the social aspect of their work as being a major motivator. Several said that they knew they could achieve better pay elsewhere but preferred to stay at Burgers Inc. because of the opportunity to chat while they worked. These comments came mainly from those who worked in the kitchen area and could possibly indicate a safety risk if excessive talking meant they were inattentive when undertaking dangerous tasks. However, such an issue was not raised by any interviewees. None of the student workers referred to social exclusion; indeed, one Discount Co. worker said:

There's never any staff arguments or anything like that or everyone not liking one person or anything like that, it's a very good place.

In teenage workplaces, supervisors as well as workers tend to be young (NSW Commission for Children and Young People 2005). Often, first-line supervisors are also school students

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and full-time managers may be barely out of their teens. While again this makes the workplaces attractive to many young people, it is also the case that very young managers may not always have sufficiently developed skills to manage appropriately in all situations. While the larger employers of student labour are well aware of this and train managers appropriately, students working at particular work sites and in some small businesses may experience problems (Smith & Comyn 2003, p.96). At Burgers Inc., the National Human Resources Manager stated that 15- or 16-year-olds were often appointed as crew trainers. Although the priority of this role was training new staff it also encompassed keeping an eye on other workers and addressing any incorrect work practices. Official supervisor roles such as shift supervisor were restricted to workers aged 19 years and above and were therefore confined primarily to university students or non-students. It was interesting to note from the student worker interviews that two Burgers Inc. students who had been appointed as crew trainers reported some trepidation in their role and felt unsure about how to deal with performance issues, especially when the workers they were supervising were older than themselves. One such student worker, who was a fairly recent migrant, said:

Crew trainer is like a hard job, you know, like … they want me to tell the people like what to do, and … they are older than me, yeah, it's bad. Because of our culture in Indonesia, we have to respect the older people, so like when the older people make a mistake … as crew trainer we are supposed to tell them, they make a mistake they have to do this, this and this. And because we respect them, we can't just tell them off. (Burgers Inc. student worker)

Training was heavily standardised; national and regional level managerial interviewees, especially in Burgers Inc., stated that this was necessary because at very young ages most student workers could only cope with a limited range of tasks. However the company had moved towards more discretion in work and in customer interactions. While Mayhew & Quinlan (2002) refer to tightly scripted customer responses, for example, Burgers Inc. had in fact

abandoned this method of training workers some years previously. While training is not a focus of this paper, it is worth noting that in both companies additional training was available that led to promotional positions even while still at school; this contradicts Mayhew & Quinlan (2002, p.264) who state that there is an absence of opportunities for promotion for young fast-food workers. Student workers' statements illustrating training and promotion included:

I just moved up to be a supervisor … and stuff like that. So that was like a month ago. And yeah, I couldn't (previously) see myself managing, like running shifts.
(Discount Co. student worker)

challenges and these were mostly adhered to by store managers. However, there were exceptions. For example, at one out of the three Burgers Inc. stores in the study, the school students reported being pressured to work long hours, sometimes up to 24 hours a week, even during school term. It should be noted, however, that by the time of the Year 2 visit the manager in question had been replaced and the problem was not mentioned by any students in Year 2.

Table 2 lists the major potential problems and challenges identified in the research and the ways they were addressed by the companies.

Issues that did not seem to be fully addressed were appropriate preparation and training of those in junior supervisory positions;

TABLE 2 Potential problems and challenges that can be associated with school student working, and remedies adopted by the case study companies

Potential problems and challenges	Remedies
Safety risks such as heavy lifting and dealing with hot substances	Careful and detailed training; confining access to areas of greater risk to boys who are generally physically bigger than girls.
Lack of understanding of how to behave appropriately and safely in workplaces	Careful and detailed training; employment of managers who are ex-student workers.
Tiredness due to excessive working hours and working late shifts	Policies regulating hours worked by younger workers; recruitment of sufficient staff to avoid excessive demands on existing workforce.
Balancing work and study, especially at peak study times	An acceptance that students need to have the time off to study and undertake school assessment tasks and exams.
Lack of integration with the workplace because of limited working hours	Good communication via noticeboards and other media; social activities; mixing of students and other workers over the working week.

Discussion

The research showed careful attention by the two companies to most of the challenges associated with the characteristics of young workers and the nature of the workplaces, such that many potential risks seemed to be avoided. This is to be expected where the success and reputation of the companies depends on both good customer service, which is unlikely to be proffered by unhappy workers or where there is high labour turnover, and on their image as a "good employer". Company policies were in place to address potential problems and

and fatigue and aches and pains caused by working long shifts that involved only one activity. The latter could be addressed by more attention to job rotation. Interestingly, a group of student workers at one Burgers Inc. store reported that they had taught themselves to undertake a range of roles within the store in order to increase interest in their work as well as their attractiveness to managers in terms of being allocated more shifts.

While the research, on the whole, showed good practice on the part of employers, and few significant problems, clearly the data are limited because only two companies have been

examined. While there is some disparity in size between the two companies, they both fall at the large end of the size spectrum. Risks have been identified as particularly significant in smaller companies (NSW Commission for Children and Young People 2005). Moreover, it is possible that the stores selected for the case study visits could have been selected by the national HR managers to present a favourable picture.

To address the problems that may occur in smaller and less well-managed workplaces, action is likely to be needed at a national level rather than hoping that all employers might follow the example of the larger and more enlightened employers.

There is an increasing amount of legislative interest in adolescent workers in Australia (Mourell & Allan 2006), who are primarily student workers. Five states and territories – Victoria (2003), Western Australia (2004), the Australian Capital Territory (2004), New South Wales (2005) and Queensland (2006) – have introduced child employment Acts in the past few years. Regulations cover such issues as the number of hours worked in school weeks (e.g. Queensland, 12 hours), banning work within school hours (Western Australia), minimum age for formal work (below the age of 13, except for newspaper delivery, Victoria) and working split shifts (NSW). But the legislative pattern across Australia is not consistent. Mourell and Allan (2006) suggest a national "safety net" on working hours and this would not be impossible to enforce. For example, overseas students are allowed to work only 20 hours a week and it was apparent in interviews with university students drawn from this group that the rule was rigidly adhered to by employers. However, such a "safety net" rule could have its own problems; it could adversely affect school students from families that need the student's income to survive or students who lived independently. Another possible intervention could be that schools could prepare students for their part-time jobs at the age of 13 before most students start formal work. Such preparation could include health and safety issues and negotiation skills for dealing with managers.

This paper, using data gathered from student workers and managers, has discussed some challenges and problems arising from student-working. The data suggest that, at least within the companies researched, companies and managers are well disposed and try to minimise safety and other risks. In addition, students are generally allowed to work hours that suit them and that allow them to prioritise their school work and families. However, the study has identified some problems and challenges and while most have been identified and addressed by the employers studied, it cannot necessarily be assumed – and indeed others' research has shown otherwise – that all employers are as effective in their dealings with student workers.

Notes

• The Australian National Schools Network, as a follow-up to a national forum in Sydney in August 2008, has supported the development of an Intergenerational Compact for Australia's Young People to address issues associated with student-working.
• In late 2008 a Parliamentary Inquiry into school student-working was announced, which was due to report in mid-2009. The terms of reference focus heavily on the relationship of student-working with schooling (http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/edt/schoolandwork/index.htm).

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AUTHORS

Erica Smith is Dean of Graduate Studies and Professor of Education at the University of Ballarat.

Wendy Patton is Executive Dean of the Faculty of Education at Queensland University of Technology.

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