

The Vocational education and training provides valuable opportunities for young people to develop skills, confidence and knowledge of their areas of interest in the workforce, this can be done within a school setting as a precursor to the workforce or as a pathway to the workforce after leaving formal schooling. The Youth Coalition recognises vocational education and training as having equal value to university education and involves a contribution to Australian society that is of a high value.

Increasingly we are aware of the need to provide young people with choices during their schooling that encourage them to develop their strengths and areas of interest in relation to their development in the workforce and therefore, the Youth Coalition supports school based vocational learning. The Youth Coalition also believes that the most effective forms of vocational education are those that are flexible, high quality, recognised, meaningful and lead to ongoing employment opportunities.

In order for young people to begin and complete apprenticeships and traineeships, there is a responsibility placed on employers to provide appropriate, high quality training that supports young people's learning. This should also be done in an environment where employers understand and uphold their obligations as responsible employers and provide a workplace that is safe. Flexibility and adaptability in the workplace is another component that is critical to the success of young people, it is important that young people do not miss out on continuing and completing training and qualifications because of a need to address important issues in other aspects of their lives.

Training and vocational education are important pathways to employment for young people. This allows young people to contribute to the skills base of the ACT and indeed Australia as we face increasing labour shortages. Given the impact and cost of higher education reforms, apprenticeships and traineeships are an affordable means of education and training for young people. However, the Youth Coalition is concerned that in some instances young people are employed as trainees to provide a cheap form of labour, rather than following a genuine training pathway to employment. The Youth Coalition does not condone employers who exploit young people through work experience or unpaid training arrangements, whereby the promise of skills and experience development does not occur.

The Youth Coalition advocates for the abolition of youth wages and training wages on the basis that they do not represent a living wage. Under the National Training Wage Award, a young person aged 16 may earn a minimum of \$173.00 per week.<sup>1</sup> However, the Henderson Poverty Line for single people in the labour market aged 16 and up is \$346.47 per week.<sup>2</sup> The minimum wage is therefore just 50% of the poverty line.

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<sup>1</sup> Wagenet (2006) *National Training Wage Award* <http://www.wagenet.gov.au> [Accessed 10 November 2006]

<sup>2</sup> Melbourne Institute of Applied Economics and Social Research (2006) *Poverty Lines: Australia: December Quarter 2006*

Young people earning income that is below the poverty line makes traineeships and apprenticeships a difficult option for young people who are required to be self-supporting, often requiring young people to be financially supported by family or a partner. Both youth and training wages disadvantage young people and serve to keep them below the poverty line in the beginning of their working lives and this is an unacceptable form of treatment.

While there are many benefits for young people who are in vocational education and training, there are also a small number of instances where young people have experiences during their apprenticeships that are detrimental to their health and wellbeing. In particular, the high rates of workplace bullying and harassment – both reported and unreported – that are faced by young people in training. The Youth Coalition believes that bullying and harassment are unacceptable in all workplaces and that young apprentices and trainees require unique support in order to prevent and deal appropriately with such issues.

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### **The Youth Coalition is committed to:**

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- ◆ Access and equity strategies to assist young people to acquire suitable training and future employment opportunities.
- ◆ Advocating for clear pathways and appropriate bridging support between education and training opportunities.
- ◆ Advocating for the abolition of youth and training wages.
- ◆ Advocating for the provision of a larger range of post-secondary training options for young people
- ◆ Advocating that the trainee subsidy allocated to employers be conditional on minimum standards of employment and training being met, in order to eliminate the exploitation of young trainees and apprentices.
- ◆ Advocating for a wide range of appropriate, quality, ongoing support, mediation, representation and advice options for young trainees and apprentices, including information on rights and obligations prior to the commencement of a training contract; and additional support to young people experiencing disadvantage.
- ◆ Promoting young people who have completed a traineeship or apprenticeship as being skilled, experienced and valuable workers.
- ◆ Strengthening partnerships between training providers and youth services to improve understanding about youth specific issues.