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Part-time working by students: is it a policy issue, and for whom?

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This paper uses data from interviews with representatives of national and state organisations that have a policy interest in student-working in Australia. The interviewees included representatives from employer bodies and trade unions as well as government organisations. The data are used to discuss these stakeholders' perceptions of the main advantages and disadvantages of working by young full-time students and the ways in which organisations in the business and educational sectors have adapted their policies and practices for student-working. The analysis is then used to inform a discussion about whether this is a legitimate area for public policy formulation and if so, what principles might underpin such policy and what some policies might look like.

Keywords: student-working; public policy; part-time work; employers

Introduction

This paper reports on the findings of 15 in-depth expert interviews with representatives of major organisations which have a stake in the phenomenon of part-time student-working. The interviews formed part of a major study on student-working, spanning three years, 2006–2008, which was funded by the Australian Research Council with contributions from industry partner organisations.

The aim of the overall study was to examine the part-time working careers of full-time students in the 15–24 age group, both in themselves and as precursors to the rest of the individual's working life. While the majority of Australian workers now enter the workforce initially through part-time work while studying (Productivity Commission 2008), their part-time jobs have not previously been recognised as of importance except as a preparation for what is seen as 'real' working life (i.e. that which commences once full-time study ceases). Student-working careers are therefore both almost universal and also almost invisible. In Australia, student-working careers do

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not only represent the major route for workforce entry in the twenty-first century, they also bring together and exemplify some major trends in the economy such as the shift to service industries and the long-term growth in the proportion of part-time and casual jobs in the economy.

The overall research study included: longitudinal surveys of school students during the final three years of schooling, focus groups and interviews with young university students (less than three years post-secondary school) through their first three years of university study and in-depth case studies with managers and student-workers with three employers at seven sites. The fieldwork took place in three states: New South Wales (NSW), Victoria and Queensland.

The purpose of the stakeholder interviews as part of the major project was to provide insight into the role of different stakeholders in student-working and how they affect, and could affect, students' working lives. While each school or tertiary student at work makes his or her own decision about whether and where to work, there are also larger forces at play. School and qualification systems, industry associations, trade unions and government organisations which look after the interests of children and young people all have an interest in the growth of student-working, and all have the capability to affect the extent to which students are able to work, the types of work that they are able to do and the extent to which students' period of part-time work while studying impacts upon the future of those students.

This paper has two purposes. The first is to provide an overview of the stakeholders' interest in, and understanding of, the student-working phenomenon, with a particular focus on perceived advantages and disadvantages of student-working, and the participating organisations' policy agendas in the area. The second is to provide evidence to inform an initial exploration of two questions: Should there be a public policy agenda in this area and, if so, what might it look like? Since the 'school-to-work' transition has traditionally been regarded as an important area for policy interest and for academic debate, it seems self-evident that student-working, which has changed this transition for the majority of Australians, deserves close study. Despite the importance of the issue there has as yet, however, been no coherent overarching policy agenda in Australia, nor any argument for such an agenda.

Background and literature review

The context for part-time working and the links with other areas of students' lives, especially school and university (e.g. in the Australian literature, Billett 2006; Smith and Green 2001) has received some attention, but much literature has in the past related to potential adverse effects on studies, as Patton and Smith (2009) maintain in their summary of literature on working

by secondary school students. Young students' part-time jobs *per se* (as opposed to their effects on other aspects of young people's lives such as their grades while studying) have rarely been studied. And yet part-time work while studying is now the manner in which most young Australian people first enter the workforce. Most workers now have a lengthy part-time work history before leaving full-time education and this work history is likely to take place in industries which may not be the site of their eventual 'career jobs'. While the student-working phenomenon was commonplace in the US early in the second half of the twentieth century (Greenberger and Steinberg 1986), it has only recently become widespread in Australia, and in other countries such as Germany (Winkler 2009). During most of the twentieth century, early working experience in a full-time job was the major stepping stone for Australian young people to adult life, but this pathway is no longer utilised by most young people. In 2003, the proportion of people aged 15–19 years in full-time employment had fallen to 15% with an increase in part-time employment between 1983 and 2003 from 28 to 68% of employed people in that age group (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] 2004); it has remained at this level since then (ABS 2008).

Earlier research indicates that about two-thirds of Australian students in the final three years of school (Years 10–12) have formal jobs at some point (Smith and Green 2001). These data are supported by ABS statistics for 2004 (Patton and Smith 2009), and data from the larger project on which this paper is based show 64% of a Year 12 six-school cohort working in 2008 (Patton and Smith 2009). The average number of hours worked by school students per week has been consistently found to be around 9 or 10 (e.g. Robinson 1999), which also tends to be the standard working week for student-workers employed by several major Australian companies (Smith and Green 2001). Figures for average number of hours worked mask considerable differences among groups of young people. While it is normally assumed that working-class school students work more frequently and for longer hours than better-off students, and this has been shown to be the case in some US studies (e.g. Nelson and Gastic 2009), there is also contradictory evidence; for example an Australian study shows above-average engagement in paid work by school students from self-reported high as well as low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds, with lower engagement by middle-range SES students (Smith and Green 2001, 47). The latter study also showed lower levels of paid work than average among indigenous school students and students with disabilities (Smith and Green 2001, 55).

The literature on school students' part-time work is now being supplemented by literature on young university students' part-time working. For full-time university students, the average number of hours worked in both Australia and the UK is greater than that for school students, at around 15 per week (Callender 2008; James et al. 2007; McInnis, James, and Hartley 2000). Around three-quarters of Australian university students work during

semester, and 85% at some point during the year (James et al. 2007), although these figures are a little misleading as they include full-time workers who study part-time. The literature on university student-working mostly focuses on detrimental effects on grades (Callender 2008; James et al. 2007; McInnis, James, and Hartley 2000), as did earlier literature on school student-working. However, Robotham (2009) suggests that academic performance is reported by students to be little affected by working; he did however find that for some students, part-time work was reported to increase stress levels. There is also evidence (James et al. 2007) that universities do not take sufficient account of students' need to work when organising aspects of the curriculum. Some literature expresses concern over what are seen as the adverse financial circumstances of university students, particularly in the context of the advent of tuition fees financed by the higher education contribution scheme (HECS) (Australia) and student loans (UK) (Holmes 2008). More recent literature tends to be more positive about the benefits of, and enjoyment gained from, part-time working while at university (e.g. Greenbank, Hepworth, and Mercer 2009 in the UK and Winkler 2009 in Germany). An Australian study (Maher, Mitchell, and Brown 2009) found evidence that full-time students saw part-time work as a legitimate part of their life along with their studies and personal commitments. There is also a smaller body of literature (e.g. Stevenson and Yashin-Shaw 2004) discussing links between part-time work and full-time university studies.

Such literature as exists on student-worker jobs (as opposed to the effects of those jobs on other aspects of young people's lives) tends to come from the industrial relations or sociology disciplines. Implicit and sometimes explicit assumptions of such literature are that student jobs are 'stop gap' (Oppenheimer and Kalmijn 1995); that students generally dislike their work; that they would not consider such work in the long term and that those who do remain in their student-worker occupation after ceasing to be students have failed in some way (e.g. Tannock 2001). The industries in which students most often find formal part-time work in Australia as in other countries are retail and fast food, with around two-thirds of school students working in these industries (Smith and Green 2001). There is demand in these industries for workers willing to work in the evenings and at weekend – i.e. the hours when students are most commonly available. Overall, therefore, as Allan, Bamber, and Timo (2005, 3) point out in relation to student fast-food employment, the literature 'adopts a critical and negative perspective' – and yet, as they say, fast food continues to attract young workers, and their research found that young workers had many positive things to say about their jobs. Managers in retail and fast-food companies are sometimes characterised in the industrial relations literature as being uncaring and under-educated. While the retail industry, particularly among larger employers (although not the fast-food sector) is generally well-organised by trade unions, in Australia as in North America (e.g. Walsh 1993), trade unions are

often seen as unresponsive to the needs of student-workers (Tannock 2001). The industries in which student workers are employed tend to be regarded more generally as low-skilled and second-rate. It is sometimes 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 and Bernhardt 1997).

But despite their low status, the retail and hospitality industries form the largest sector in Australia's economy, and hence, offer good opportunities for promotion and careers. The large project of which this paper forms part provided considerable data to show that employers were eager to promote young people into senior positions (Smith and Patton 2011, forthcoming). There were 235,254 enterprises operating in the retail sector in Australia in 2007 (ABS 2008). The retail industry faces a number of challenges such as low productivity and profits on turnover generated compared with other industry areas (Maglen, Hopkins, and Burke 2001), which help to explain the industry's need to minimise on labour costs, and hence, to some extent, its need for student-worker labour which is relatively inexpensive due to age rates. Retail employers however, have cited a number of more strategic reasons why they like to employ young student-workers, including their higher 'calibre' compared with young school-leavers, and hence, their potential as future senior staff (e.g. Canny 2002). Labour turnover among student-workers is high and employers are typically viewed as tolerating high labour turnover and high disaffection among their workers because of the standardisation of work and supposed low levels of skill required (Lucas and Ralston 1996). High labour turnover, however, among student-workers is not simple. While many workers leave within a few weeks of commencing work, many remain in their jobs for years (Curtis and Lucas 2001; Smith and Green 2005).

As part of the low status of retail and hospitality, jobs in these industries have not traditionally required qualifications. However, changes under Australian 'training reform' in the 1980s and 1990s have allowed for more work-based training (Smith and Keating 2003), and the retail trade in Australia has been a keen adopter of qualification-based training (including training for their student-workers). Part of the industry's interest relates to the career progression that is offered by qualifications which span Certificate I to Advanced Diploma level, and in some cases (for example the major retail company, Coles) link to qualifications offered through partnering universities. Many school students train in retail as part of vocational education and training (VET) qualifications offered by schools, including working as school-based apprentices through their part-time jobs (Smith and Green 2005). While skill or labour shortages have not been identified as serious in the retail trade to date in Australia (although they have in the US, as Hughes 1999, points out) a study of the retail industry (Retail Industry Working Group 2003) identified, in large companies, middle management as an area where skills shortages were increasingly being felt. In this context, the

retention and development of student-workers is vital for companies and for the industry as a whole. Similar imperatives apply in the hospitality industry (Australian Hotels Association 2008) where the labour shortages are exacerbated by rapid expansion in the industry (Baum 2002).

Finally, student-working needs to be set within a broader context of new ways of thinking about careers. It has been exhaustively argued that workers' career patterns and attachments to employers are changing compared with previous centuries, in that workers are more likely to experience several changes of occupation and the skills required within those occupations may also change quite rapidly (Arthur, Inkson, and Pringle 1999; Poehnell and Amundson 2002). Thus, students' initial experience within industry areas that they may not choose as long-term jobs is consistent with this new concept of career, although student-working is not addressed as such in this literature. Partly because of the fluidity of individuals' working careers and of jobs themselves, employability skills have become increasingly important in both employers' requirements of workers (Business Council of Australia and Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry 2002) and in educational policy planning. Employability skills may be partly developed in educational environments but it has been argued that they may best be developed in the workplace (Smith and Comyn 2003); hence student part-time jobs are prime sites for early development of such skills (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education & Training 2010).

This review of relevant literature shows that many factors affect students' actions with relation to their part-time work and their employers' motives in recruiting and managing student-workers. It might be expected that student-working would be a major topic of discussion at national policy level and yet this has not been the case in Australia. While in the UK there have been some national recommendations about student-working (as described by Callender 2008), there has been only a limited amount of policy interest in Australia. Such policy interest that has occurred has been narrowly defined; for example there have been state inquiries in three states into child labour in the last six years, with an emphasis on health and safety issues (Smith and Patton 2009). An Australian parliamentary inquiry into school student-working, commenced in late 2008 during the lifetime of the research project, and completed in 2010, focused on 'combining school with work'; the terms of reference all related to schooling rather than to working (House Standing Committee on Education and Training 2008). The final report, while reiterating the benefits of part-time working for school students, also emphasised the need for protection of school students' 'working longer hours and later hours than ever before' (House Standing Committee on Education and Training 2010, 7).

The research described in this paper is thus the first Australian attempt to examine the phenomenon at a national level, from different viewpoints, using research with senior policy-makers. It is important at this point to

explain the boundaries of the research and of the paper. Firstly and more generally, student-working is of significance in wider policy arenas, as student-working may impact on matters such as young people's ability to, or propensity to, and complete schooling, to proceed from school to university and to sustain them while studying at university. However, these wider policy issues are not within the scope of this paper. Secondly, and more specifically, it is necessary to clarify the nature of students within the scope of the research. Many university students, in Australia as in other countries, are mature adults who work full-time and study part-time. The research did not consider these students; the project was confined to full-time students aged 15–24. Finally, the project explicitly examined school and university students only. It did not explicitly cover students in the VET system as there are many complicating issues in that sector such as a relatively low proportion of full-time students and the presence of employed apprentices and trainees.

Method

As previously mentioned the senior stakeholder interviews formed part of a larger research project. The interviews were designed to provide background information to inform the development of the project as a whole, to discover the interest that the different parties held in the student-working phenomenon, and to surface issues that had not previously been researched. The participants were selected as representatives of major organisations that had an impact on, and were impacted upon by, student-working.

They included, in two states – NSW and Queensland – school systems, school qualifications authorities and government departments and statutory bodies that managed education and children's and young people's well-being. Trade unions and employer associations representing workers and employers from the major industries employing students – retail and hospitality – were also included, as was the Federal government department most closely connected to this policy area. These stakeholders – government, unions and employer groups – are identified by Marginson (1993, 24–5) as the major players in education policy. Employer groups and trade unions, of course, have particular relevance for this particular issue (beyond their normal interest in education policy) as they respectively represent those that provide jobs to student-workers and the interests of workers. In addition, a policy officer from the national Skills Council that managed skills development for the service sector was included because the service sector is the major sector of employment for student-workers. In all cases either the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or the most relevant specialist senior official, as delegated by the CEO or equivalent, was interviewed; and in two cases more than one senior official was present at the interview.

It may be useful to provide some extra explanation of the importance of the stakeholders selected and the reason for their selection. In Australia, as in other countries, employer and employee associations are responsible for negotiating terms and conditions of employment for all workers through industrial ‘awards’ (an Australian term referring to industry-wide regulation of terms and conditions) and collective agreements; in addition they lobby the Federal and state governments for changes to legislation affecting employment and related issues. Thus student-workers’ pay, working hours and ability to access benefits such as government-funded training are heavily affected by the actions of these bodies. Individual employers, of course, employ workers, including student-workers, and employer associations, as well as their role in the industrial relations and industrial policy system, also represent the interests of those employers as individual companies and are in regular contact with them. We interviewed representatives from the two most relevant trade unions – retail and hospitality – and three of the employer associations that represent the majority of employers of student-workers. Service Skills Australia, the relevant Industry Skills Council was included as a stakeholder because of its national role in developing ‘Training Packages’ (the national VET curriculum) (Smith and Keating 2003) and promoting training and career paths within the service industries (which include retail and hospitality). In addition, Service Skills Australia (SSA) is in regular touch with employer and employee associations in its industry areas as well as with individual employers including human resource staff. As with the employer and employee associations, SSA is able to affect students’ working through lobbying and promotion and also through the inclusion in Training Packages of relevant qualifications which are available to student-workers through their work and attract government funding as the result of arguments made by SSA and other bodies.

Moving on to the education side, in Australia education is governed and managed primarily at the state and territory level, although a Federal department (at the time, the Department of Education, Science and Training) oversees both school education and VET. While at the time of the study, student-working was not on the Federal government’s agenda as a formal issue, and so there was no official designated with a role in the area, the most relevant policy officer in the Department of Education, Science and Training, was sought and interviewed. In each of the two states, the most relevant senior officer in each of the state education departments was nominated by the department and interviewed. In addition the relevant senior officer in each of the state qualifications authorities was interviewed. The importance of the latter is that these bodies set curriculum in their respective states, determine the way in which it is assessed and determine whether senior school subjects, including those with embedded VET qualifications, ‘count’ towards university school-leaver entrance scores (which in Australia, are managed at the state level). Thus these officials’ recommendations to their Ministers

determine whether school curriculum can be amended to accommodate student-working, whether student-working should be regulated in terms of its effects on school curriculum and whether students' work may attract qualifications that 'count' within the school system as well as the VET system. As one minor example, one of the researchers was involved, during the lifetime of the research project, in the steering committee for the development in NSW of a Work Studies curriculum for 14–15 year olds which allowed for the possibility of incorporation of part-time working experience into assessment. The two states from which state representatives were sought were NSW and Queensland. These were chosen because the majority of the field-work for the project was undertaken in these two states because of the researchers' own location; moreover they are useful states for policy discussion as NSW is the largest state and Queensland, at the time of the research, was the most rapidly expanding. It should be noted that in Queensland only one representative of the education system could be accessed; this interviewee spoke for both the education department and the qualifications authority, two bodies which are more closely aligned in Queensland than in NSW.

The interests of children and young people are overseen in each Australian state or territory by Commissioners for Children and Young People. These people and their support staff, forming statutory bodies, work with government departments and other statutory bodies to safeguard and promote the interests of people of 24 years and younger. The relevant officials in other states were included because they are the bodies representing, in the quasi-government sphere, the interest of student-workers within the scope of the research project, in a different way from trade unions. The Commissioners' offices make recommendations to government departments about legislation and produce reports that are utilised in a range of ways.

In addition, the relevant project officer from the NSW teachers' union was interviewed, as that union had commenced a major campaign on school student-working during the life of the project. Other interviewees recommended this project and this interviewee to us. This interviewee was selected because of the particular campaign rather than being part of a systematic effort to include education unions, the latter having no direct relationship to student-workers. However, teachers are important in operationalising education policy with students, and therefore the teacher union's position on student-working may be assumed to have some importance in influencing the acceptance of policy on this issue.

These stakeholders covered the major organisations which do and could, through their actions, recommendations and lobbying of governments, impact on student-working in Australia. In some cases (e.g. the state education) they develop, put forward for approval and implement government policy themselves; in others they form one of the parties involved in negotiating industrial relation agreements (e.g. trade unions, employer associations). The employer associations develop policies on behalf of their

members and influence their members, major employers, in developing company policies which include policies on student-working.

There was one notable relevant body that could not be accessed. Unfortunately the peak body of Australian Universities, Universities Australia, declined to be involved in the research, as discussed in more detail below. This presumably partly reflects the fact that the peak body did not at the time of the research have a policy interest in this area; the stated reason was the fact that the body has only a small number of permanent staff and was not able to support an additional activity. It could also be argued that a representative of the national university student association could have been interviewed, and this is perhaps a limitation of the research. Many other stakeholders could of course have been interviewed, for example welfare organisations that have an interest in lobbying for young people, but the interviews were deliberately confined to those organisations responsible for policy in the area.

It may also be worth mentioning that the researchers were already familiar with some of the stakeholders interviewed, or others in their organisations, and had gained their trust during previous research and policy initiatives. This not only improved ease of access to senior personnel, always a problem in policy research (Goldstein 2002) but also may be assumed to have improved the frankness with which many of these interviewees were prepared to speak.

Table 1 shows interviewees by organisation name and position. While most interviewees were happy for their position names to be used in publications despite the fact that they could thereby be identified; one participant requested that the position name to be withheld.

The major areas of questioning were as follows:

- The interest of the organisation in the topic of student-working;
- Any position that the organisation holds on the topic;
- Advantages of part-time working by students for students, employers and any others;
- How these advantages might be built upon?; and
- Disadvantages or challenges of part-time working by students; and how the organisation is addressing these challenges or how they could be addressed by others.

It may be worth at this point re-iterating that the research project was about full-time students aged 15–24 who work part-time, not about full-time workers who study part-time or about older full-time students.

The stakeholder interviews took place progressively over the three years of the project, 2006–2008. It should be noted that from 2006 until approximately August 2008, Australia was in a period of economic boom with unemployment rates ranging between 4 and 4.5% (ABS 2007). From August

Table 1. Stakeholder interview details (in alphabetical order).

Organisation	Interviewee no.	Position	Date of interview
Australian Hotels Association (Employer association – hospitality)	1	Director, National Affairs	December 08
Australian Retailers' Association (Employer association – retail)	2	Executive Director	July 07
Department of Education, Science and Training ^a (Most relevant Federal government department)	3	Industry Liaison Officer	November 07
Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union (Trade union-hospitality)	4	NSW Branch Secretary	September 08
NSW Board of Studies (School qualifications authority)	5a	Board Inspector, VET in Schools	May 06 (group interview)
	5b	Senior Project Officer	
NSW Department of Education and Training (State education dept)	5c	Team Leader for Vocational Learning, VET in Schools	
	6	Principal Policy Officer	September 08
NSW Commission for Children and Young People (a body that looks after the safety and welfare of children and young people)	7	Research Officer	September 08
NSW Teachers' Federation (trade union for school teachers)	8	Position name withheld on request	November 08
Queensland (QLD) Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian (as for NSW)	9	Project Manager	November 06
Old Studies Authority (School qualifications authority)	10	CEO	November 08
Restaurant and Catering Australia (Employer association – hospitality)	11	Industry Specialist, Personal Services	May 06
SSA (Skills Council – retail & hospitality)			
Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association (Trade union-retail)	12a	National Assistant Secretary	July 07
	12b	National Women's Officer	(group interview)

^aThis Federal government department was since re-named the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

2008 the global financial crisis began to affect economic growth in Australia, although it did not have any appreciable effect on employment during the latter months of the interviewing period. The other major relevant political changes over the life of the project were the replacement of a conservative (Liberal) government with a more left-wing (Labour) government in November 2007 and the dismantling during 2008 of Liberal industrial relations policies, collectively known as Work Choices, that were generally felt to favour employers' rights over workers'.

The interviews took place face to face or by telephone and lasted between 40 and 90 min. Most interviewees, but not all, gave permission for the interviews to be taped and transcribed. Transcripts and notes were then analysed by themes. These can be separated out as 'etic' issues (Stake 1995, 20) – issues 'brought in from outside', based on a variety of sources including the literature and the researcher's own interests; and 'emic' issues – arising from the participants' interests and responses (Stake 1995, 20). The etic themes were those covered by the questioning areas and the emic themes revolved around the strategic use of student labour by companies and industries.

Three issues may be raised here as limitations of the research reported in this paper. Firstly, the total number of interviewees is quite small, at only 15. There is a lack of consensus on the number of interviews necessary to generate useful data. Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) report authors' recommendations ranging from 5 interviews up to 30 or more. They report that Kuzel (1992, in Guest, Bunce, and Johnson 2006, 61) suggests 6–8 interviews for a homogeneous sample and 12–20 when dealing with variation. Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) themselves found data saturation occurring after 12 interviews. Thus the number of 15 interviews appears defensible. It should also be borne in mind that the participants were experienced and senior people who were able to draw on a range of working experience in different contexts as well as on their experiences serving on a range of other national bodies and committees in areas related to the project. Secondly, while our belief is that we selected the most appropriate bodies from which to request interviewees, others might argue that different bodies should have been selected. Our selection was based on the desire to interview those as close as possible to the relevant policy formation processes and also included recommendations from the project's reference group (Dorussen, Lenz, and Blavoukos 2005). One strength of our participant selection is that the sampling was purposive: bodies with particular functions within the different policy settings were selected and the inclusion of two states enabled some cross-checking of data amongst the respondents. A similar method, although on a different topic, was employed by Bartlett and Johnson (2009) in three American states with a total interview pool of 33 people. Thirdly, as respondents were carefully selected to represent particular constituencies, in some cases their expertise was necessarily unique among

the respondent group and therefore it was not possible internally to validate all statements.

Findings

While the interviewees were responding in their official capacities, they provided personal opinions as well. They also provided insights into the issues from previous working roles, as is often the case in expert interviews.

The interest of the organisations in student-working and their positions on the issue

The employer associations noted that young people, and particularly students, formed a major part of their member companies' workforces. Retail and hospitality had the youngest workforces of all industry sectors in Australia:

Of the top three areas of interest for our member, their workforce is the number one ... we've got a pretty significant reliance on young workers in our business and the majority of them are part-time and the majority of them are studying while they're working. (Employer Association, hospitality)

Labour turnover in these industries was high and the associations felt that employers needed to take a more strategic approach to labour force planning. The trade unions understood the importance of student-workers in their industries' workforces but the retail union appeared to have been more successful in engaging students in the union than the hospitality union. The latter union was concerned that there appeared to be little training for student-workers and wished to improve this situation. The retail union stated that among larger employers there was good training and opportunity for advancement for student workers and would like to see this replicated among all employers but that the union had to concentrate its resources in areas where there was maximum return. Both unions were interested in moving student-workers from casual to permanent part-time jobs although they recognised that many younger students preferred higher hourly rates of pay to the benefits such as holiday and sick pay that came with permanency. They also noted the low rate of pay in the industries in which students worked; this has been noted also in the UK (Callender 2008). Both employer associations and trade unions mentioned industrial relations issues such as moves that were underway in 2007 to consider youth wage levels as part of the Liberal government Fair Pay Commission.¹ In addition, some states had introduced rules regulating the employment of young people under the age of 18 as a way of protecting such workers against adverse employment contracts introduced in accordance with the Liberal government's Work Choices legislation. These legislative changes and potential changes were important; for examples

changes to pay differentials between adult workers and young workers or changes to the hours that students could work could have marked effects on the propensity to employ student-workers. It should be noted that there were, at the time of some of the interviews, few regulations in Australia concerning the age at which formal work can be undertaken or the hours that young people can work. This was in marked contrast to, for example, the United States where hours of work are tightly regulated by states (Committee on the Health and Safety Implications of Child Labor 1998).

The education representatives recognised the role of student-working in young people's lives and on the whole their interest was in seeing that schools recognised this role and provided flexibility to accommodate it. However, their ultimate position was that education should take precedence over part-time work – although they respected young people's choices. There was some concern (particularly from the teachers' union) that students might be working long hours and late at night, and in small numbers of cases might be exploited, and therefore had a wish to educate school students about these issues. This was also the major area of interest of representatives from the children's and young people's government bodies. These bodies liaised with other government departments such as industrial relations and health and safety departments on this issue. The second major interest area for education sector interviewees was about whether and how to capture learning undertaken by student-workers, including whether and how to link this learning to formal VET-in-schools programmes. There was a sophisticated understanding of the pros and cons of this issue, such as the lack of consistency in students' experience, the variation in students' interest in the capturing of such learning and the appropriateness of employers having responsibility for part of the school curriculum. The third interest area was how student-working could facilitate successful transition from full-time school to full-time work.

The Skills Council's major concern was the status and skill levels of its constituent industries which included retail and hospitality. The Council recognised that most young workers began their working careers in its industry areas but that many subsequently moved out. It was keen to see proper training in customer service that could carry over into other industry areas as well as career paths leading from student-working into management within retail and hospitality. Similar interests were articulated by the representative from the Federal department of education and employment.

Advantages of part-time working by students

There was general agreement on the benefits that student-working conferred on all stakeholder groups. Many of the comments were summed up well by

an interviewee from one of the State Commissioners for Children and Young People:

Well, I guess the advantages for students are the pay, the independence, interaction with other young people, and other adults, uh, new skills that they've learnt. Advantages for employers are that young people are enthusiastic and fresh workers, and that enthusiasm is often, you know, it makes the workplace more fun and open. Advantages for others, well, family members appreciate the pay and the life lessons that young people receive from work, and teachers may appreciate increased maturity or real-world experience, and future employers appreciate previous training.

There was a range of skills – technical and generic – which young people were said to learn from their part-time jobs. As interviewee 2 (employer association) said:

(they often) end up with some sort of management role before they finish, so they're getting experience in managing people, getting experience in managing finance as well as being a store sales person; so they're getting a pretty broad range of experience ... And for students particularly being able to acquire practical experience to theoretical study ... 'realistic' is the wrong word but grounded in practice rather than just grounded in theory, so it's useful to have those work experiences to being able to apply to theoretical knowledge ... Otherwise just those cultural skills you pick up that are so important – particularly in retail where there's so many young people these days, will go into office jobs, perhaps not with customer interface and so in retail you do; retail and hospitality, you do get those customer interfaces and develop some very practical social employability skills that are quite difficult I think to pick up at the same rate in a full-time job that so many young people go into.

Table 2 provides a breakdown of interviewees' views of the advantages for students and for employers, including the perceived learning outcomes. The views are sorted into themes which can themselves roughly be divided into immediate and long-term benefits, for both parties.

Advantages for others were also mentioned. For example, the interviewee from the Federal government department said that young people's presence in customer service roles in the workforce gave the opportunity for elderly people to mix with them when they might not have other opportunities to do so. The visibility of young people also improved society's view of them. Students were contributing to the economy by paying for their education and purchasing goods; and by building up the level of skills in the economy (Skills Council). It was felt that they were bringing back to their families and their educational institutions improved life skills (Commission for Children and Young People 2005). It was pointed out that the community at large benefited from the extended opening hours of retail and hospitality businesses (Federal government department), which would not be possible without student labour.

Table 2. Advantages of student-working, for students and for employers (numbers in brackets refer to interviewee numbers allocated in Table 1).

For students	For employers
<p><i>Income</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Support selves or their families (1, 3, 6, 7, 9) ● An income for discretionary spending/ independence (7, 9, 10) 	<p><i>Immediate needs</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Allows business to operate for extended hours and in a flexible way (3, 4, 5c, 9, 10, 11) ● Help meet labour shortages and skill shortages (3, 10) ● Cheaper labour (3, 5c)
<p><i>Enjoyment and achievement</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Self-efficacy, especially for those that don't perform well at school (1, 6, 10) ● Mixing in new social circles and/or understand school acquaintances better (3, 6, 7, 9) ● Have fun (1, 10) 	<p><i>Higher calibre of staff</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● An educated and innovative workforce (3, 11) ● An enthusiastic/fresh/ unjaded workforce (6, 11) ● Insight into a different generation (1, 3, 7)
<p><i>Career development and planning</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Experience of workplaces (and of different workplaces) especially for students from families with inter-generational unemployment (3, 5a, 5c, 9) ● Build a CV for future career and/or to support selves through university (11, 12b) ● Assisting a safe transition to full-time work (8, 9, 5c) ● Try out different industries (3) 	<p><i>Future workforce planning</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Benefit later from already-trained people (6) ● A pool of people for future management needs (3, 5c)
<p><i>Learning</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Learn technical skills through formal training (2, 4, 6) ● Learn generic skills (1, 2, 3, 5a, 5c, 8, 9) ● Learn management skills (2, 7, 8, 9) ● Learn life skills e.g. getting to work on public transport (5c) ● The possibility of 'counting' working experience towards school studies (5a, 5c, 9, 1) 	

Disadvantages/challenges associated with part-time working by students

Again, an interviewee from one of the State Commissions for Children and Young People summed up many comments:

And in terms of disadvantages or challenges of part-time working by students, ah, the disadvantages would be impact on sleep, impact on connection to formal education, impact on family time when work occurs in 24 hour trading environments, and part-time low-skilled jobs may become long-term careers, such as hospitality or retail industries. Um, and I guess, children might not be fully aware of their rights and responsibilities and any potential occupational health and safety risks.

The full list of disadvantages/challenges as articulated by interviewees is presented in Table 3.

Interviewees reported instances of practices to address challenges. For example, some employers had created new supervisor positions to make the work more interesting for students. Employers had learned to work around the period of examination absences; however, one respondent said that employers were less likely to allow time off for sporting commitments or for social events if time off for study was provided. In these cases, students needed to make their own decisions about their priorities. While it was recognised that there was a risk of exploitation of very young workers, there was little evidence from the stakeholders that they had heard about specific instances. The most concrete statement about exploitation was made by the hospitality union representative (interviewee 4). However this statement was quite vague as can be seen by his use of the conditional tense:

But I suppose our experience in the hospitality area, the down side of using students, and this is probably more of a perception than anything else, they would be used and abused in the industry. They'd be seen as cheap labour.

This interviewee expressed his admiration for the good practices he said he saw in the employment of students in retail and fast food; in other words, it was only his own industry area that he perceived as 'abusing' students. Table 3 provides some examples of potential practices that could be viewed cumulatively, by some, as abuse or exploitation: low pay, lack of training, too much responsibility, late working hours, lack of regard for study commitments.

The NSW Teachers' Federation provided an example of a comprehensive response to the issue. Recognising that school students wished to work and gained benefits from it but that there were nevertheless problems associated with it, the organisation began a major campaign on the issue in late 2006. The Federation commissioned a research report to provide evidence about

Table 3. Disadvantages/challenges of student-working, for students and employers.

For students	For employers
<p><i>Nature of the work</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pay is low in typical student jobs (4) ● Training opportunities may be limited/employers unwilling to share knowledge (1, 4, 10, 11) ● Students may be given too much responsibility for their age and maturity (8) ● Low profit margins may limit desire or ability to provide proper training for students (1, 4) ● Students may be 	<p><i>Other priorities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students have peaks of unavailability e.g. around exam periods (10) ● Students may put social engagements above work (1) <p><i>Limited duties</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Young age of some students means they cannot perform full range of tasks (e.g. involving alcohol) (10)
<p><i>Immediate consequences for other priorities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● May interfere with time for study (11, 7, 9) ● May interfere with specific non-standard study requirements e.g. field trips and placements (5c) ● May interfere with other commitments (3, 12b) ● Late hours may lead to insufficient sleep (6, 9) 	<p><i>Longer-term consequences</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students may not feel very attached to the workplace/high turnover (1, 4, 10) ● Students may not see the long-term potential in their industries (11)
<p><i>Longer-term consequences</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Limited number of hours and job roles may exclude students from decision-making/deeper learning about the company or industry (11, 10) ● May 'suck young people in' to low paying permanent jobs and/or leaving school prematurely (3, 6, 10) 	
<p><i>Equity</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Equity issues – students' jobs are harder to obtain in some geographical areas than others and non-participation in student-working could disadvantage young people (5c) 	

the issue, published in 2007 (NSW Teachers' Federation 2007) which then provided the basis for a website designed to act as a resource for students, their teachers and their employers. The organisation said that the major disadvantages for school students of part-time working were excessive hours, late hours and difficult employers. The website that was developed (<http://www.studentsatwork.org.au>) provided advice on all these issues including a time management tool which prompted the student to remember how many hours he or she had already worked that month and to consider whether it was wise to accept more shifts. The Federation also educated teachers about patterns of student-working. As the interviewee said:

Many teachers, are in (their) early 50s, or late 40s early 50s, when we were kids you were sort of confined to (working on) Saturday mornings, Thursday night, or well most of us remember Thursday night shopping coming in ... you know, Saturday morning was it! ... you throw the statistics at them and jaws drop and gasps emerge. A lot of people I don't think realise the extent to which their groceries are getting on their supermarket shelves on the back of this army of workers, many of whom ... are students.

The Federation was hoping that its website would be integrated into school curriculum; for example the time planner could be used when teaching spreadsheets. Similarly, some of the initiatives described by the interviewees from the State Commissions for Children and Young People involved resources, produced by different government departments that were designed for use in the school curriculum.

Strategic use of student labour

Many additional comments raised by stakeholders revolved around the way in which industries made strategic use of its student labour-force. While these comments related to the 'advantages' and 'challenges' of student-working they moved beyond a simple recounting of such issues, particularly in helping to illustrate the likely persistence of the use of student labour. While the retail industry was perceived to have embedded student-working within its human resource practices, the hospitality industry was described by both relevant employer associations as still at the beginning of an understanding of the potential of student-working. This was seen as a particular difficulty because the part of the industry (cafes and restaurants) which employed most young workers was the most rapidly expanding. It was reported that employers and student-workers alike viewed their relationship as short-term and casual, and there was little attempt to build loyalty:

It's like, 'OK we have a function coming up and get the casual workforce in' ... and it's a function where you need someone who can put the meal on the

table and somebody who can serve alcohol . . . you'd be looking for students for that type of work. (Hospitality union)

The employer and employee associations in hospitality therefore looked to the retail sector as an example of good use of student-workers, both in terms of motivating and retaining them, and in terms of grooming them for management roles. It was interesting however that the retail employer association considered that the retail industry was not uniformly effective in its use of student-workers; some larger companies and most smaller companies were seen as less effective. In all cases it seemed that small businesses had fewer processes in place for the effective utilisation of student labour. The retail trade union worked with larger employers to build rostering issues into collective agreements.

The trade unions had similar views to the employer associations in their industries. They considered that many employers were missing out on the potential of their student-workforce and this was particularly so in hospitality. Similar patterns carried over to the practices of the unions themselves. The retail union regarded student-workers as an integral part of their membership and targeted them in their magazines and other communications. The hospitality union appeared to have a less strategic approach to its potential membership from the student workforce although it was also hampered by lack of access to workers. While it was reported that larger retail employers invited trade unions to address their staff at induction sessions, hospitality employers were reported to limit union representatives' access to workers to inconvenient locations and times:

You can imagine trying to talk to the workers, they're having their lunch break and they're in the lunch room and it's in front of everybody else and there's a union official trying to talk to them about their issues in the workplace. (Hospitality union)

Training was considered an essential part of good management of student-workers. The retail sector made good use of nationally recognised training while hospitality made little use of available qualifications for its student workers:

Fast food chains like McDonalds – they have great training. Probably some of the best training you'll get. (Hospitality union)

It was suggested that training was the major way in which students were motivated and retained both as student-workers and into management roles. Some companies also put a great deal of effort into 'branding' their companies not only for customers but also for potential workers. Thus:

You don't say 'I work in retail', you say 'I work for Boost Juice' and you get a certain image associated with it. So the offering to the customer is a similar strategy as the offerings to the potential employee. And recruiters now don't talk around employment strategies; they actually talk about brand offering. So they're actually sounding like merchandisers. (Skills Council)

These strategies were all aimed at making companies 'employers of choice' and were important in industries where pay was low and therefore other motivators needed to be available. The issue of pay rates was not discussed specifically. As the interviewees and the researchers alike were expert in the area there was no need to reaffirm the fact that pay for young workers was low. Two factors contribute to this. Firstly, in Australia, most 'awards' and collective agreements have pay scales which reach a full adult rate at age 21. Moreover, the industries in which most students work have traditionally been at the lower end of the wages spectrum, although there is some differentiation; for example retail rates of pay are greater than fast food. Some concern was expressed by interviewee 2 (retail employer association) that a current government 'Fair Work' initiative might remove the ability to pay lower rates for younger workers, which would make it difficult for employers to continue to employ the large numbers of students that they did.

There was general agreement that abuse of young employees was confined to a few employers, but also that young part-time workers were exceptionally vulnerable and needed protection:

There's some rogue people out there some of which make the headlines. But there are a lot of people with goodwill and good intention in the world and I don't think that a lot of employers do down young people. Young people have a lot of faith in their employers that was a thing we found when interviewing. Generally they didn't speak ill of their employers at all. They were open to exploitation I suppose by the fact that they were reasonably ignorant and therefore vulnerable. (Teachers' union)

While the labour market was tight throughout the period of research, and student-workers would normally be able to move jobs easily, it was suggested that they sometimes perceived their power in the labour market as less than it was (retail union).

Discussion and conclusions

The findings described in this paper suggest that there is a fair amount of consensus on the issue of student-working among those that operate in policy circles. Stakeholders recognise that student-working provides advantages for students, employers and the general community and there is a reasonable amount of agreement on what those benefits are. There is also agreement on the major risks associated with student-working although, naturally, those bodies charged with the protection of young people voice those risks more

vehemently. It is interesting, though, that employer as well as employee industry associations are critical of some employers' practices. Their criticisms tend to be couched in the terms of being 'bad for business' rather than the deleterious effects on the young workers, but the practices that they criticise are the same as those of other stakeholders who are more focused on the young person's needs.

The findings of the larger project concur closely with the findings from the stakeholder interviews; this indicates that the stakeholders were in close touch with on-the-ground practices. Some data from the research project from which this paper is drawn is already publicly available, in two published works and one forthcoming publication referenced in this paper (Patton and Smith 2009; Smith and Patton 2009, 2011, forthcoming). The published works relate to the ways in which students were managed by their employers, their working experiences and some implications for school counsellors. As-yet-unpublished data describe the changes in patterns of work over the final three years of school and the first three years of university study. The findings of the larger project also indicate some effects of part-time working on the career development attitude of school students, although little effect on career self-efficacy; for university students findings indicate overwhelmingly positive attitudes towards part-time working and the ability to enumerate clearly the skills gained from that work.

Some indication emerged during the interviews, however, that stakeholders' views were not always based entirely on rigorous evidence. Stakeholders made liberal use of personal anecdotes; several used examples of their own children's experiences. While these examples were not necessarily at variance with the other evidence they presented, it did raise some questions about the evidence base on which policy may be made by such organisations. In other cases, stakeholders were simply unaware of available evidence; for example representatives of those organisations that were most suspicious of employers did not appear to have had, or to have planned, any direct dialogue with employers and were not aware of such things as employers' policies relating to student-workers. For example, one of the interviewees who worked for a statutory body that had completed a major research project on school students' employment was not aware that the major retail and fast-food companies employing school children had policies in place that placed restrictions on late-night working for under-18s.

Most stakeholder responses related to younger workers rather than the 18-plus student-workers attending university. While this was partly due to the sample base for the interviewees, it could perhaps indicate that university student-working is a matter of less concern to stakeholders in terms of potential risks. This would perhaps be legitimate since young people of 18-plus have more labour market power and more information on which to base their own decisions, compared with younger teenagers. Eighteen-plus students are also more able to regulate their balance of work and study,

while school students are more likely to be locked into conventional full-time study patterns. It could perhaps be noted here as relevant that despite strenuous efforts, the researchers were unable to interest the peak body of Australian universities, Universities Australia, in taking part in the research project. This was especially unfortunate as that body regularly carries out surveys of student finances and publishes data from those which are used to report, in rather a negative manner, the fact that most students are obliged to work to make ends meet (e.g. James et al. 2007).

There are some limitations to the research. As discussed earlier, the sample of 15 interviewees is quite small, despite its coverage of the major bodies which affect student-working. The interviews were carried out to support a large project and this paper does not report on the larger project, requiring the reader to take somewhat on trust the fact that the stakeholders' comments are grounded in the actuality of students' experiences of work, which the larger project bore out. The researchers had the advantage, during the period of conducting and analysing the stakeholder interviews, of constant comparative analysis (Glaser and Strauss 1967) with the extensive fieldwork data in the broader project, which are not available to the reader of this paper except in an abbreviated form earlier in this section. Finally, there were no discrete research questions for the stakeholder phase of the project as it was not designed as a stand-alone project.

The report of the 2008–2010 government inquiry into student-working (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education & Training 2010) allows some of these potential criticism to be addressed. This inquiry received 62 submissions and held seven public hearings; among those invited to the hearings were groups of school students as well as the same groups of stakeholders, and in some cases individuals, that were included in the research reported on in this paper. The inquiry also surveyed over 1765 school students through an online survey. The findings of this inquiry support the findings described in this paper in all major respects with no substantial points of difference, suggesting that the data in this paper can be seen as reliable and trustworthy. A submission by the authors to this inquiry, based on the larger study, was cited three times in the government report.

Data provided earlier, showing that over two-thirds of both senior school students and full-time university students have jobs, indicate that student-working is probably a permanent phenomenon in Australia which would only decline were there to be major changes in the economy. Despite the impact of the 2008 global financial crisis towards the end of the research, there were no signs of students' jobs disappearing during the period of the research, and the impact of the recession in Australia has been short-lived. The interview findings – particularly as expressed in Table 2 where many of the stated advantages were mentioned by a large number of the stakeholders – tend to suggest that the interests of young people and of

employers coincide to an extent that other stakeholders have become, if not enthusiastically supportive, at least accepting of the phenomenon.

The question then needs to be asked whether this is a legitimate arena for public policy and if so, what type of policy? An argument for government policy interest is that many student-workers are young people aged under 18 whose actions in other areas of life are expected to be monitored and overseen by governments. The offices of the commissions for children and young people, for example, are set up for just that purpose. As Jann and Wegrich (2007, 45) state, 'policy-making presupposes the recognition of a policy problem'. Problems come to public attention through the process of agenda-setting; groups compete to put issues on the agenda or to keep them off the agenda (Birkland 2007, 63). Student-working has remained, at least in Australia, off the major policy agenda until very recently. This may well suit the various stakeholders, as they have thus far managed to address emerging issues within the confines of their own organisations, whether they be education systems, employers or bodies representing employers or employees. However, the fact that a Federal government inquiry was set up into student-working suggests that a group, or groups, has decided that problems exist which may have a policy solution. Birkland (2007, 63) maintains that the group which successfully describes a problem is the one that provides solutions to it. It is important therefore to ensure that the 'problem' of student-working is correctly described.

What are the possible policy issues associated with student-working? The data gained from the stakeholder interviews, and the research literature, suggest several principles that could conceivably help to form a policy agenda. These principles are threefold. They are:

- (1) The need to ensure that students who work are treated fairly by employers and by their educational institutions so that they are not exploited (see Table 3 for potential difficulties) and so that they are able to give due attention to both sets of responsibilities.
- (2) That the learning gained from part-time work is seen as important, can be articulated by all stakeholders and may possibly be accredited in some way.
- (3) That due attention is paid to equity issues so that neither those who work nor those who do not work are unduly advantaged and those who have jobs providing rich experience are not unduly advantaged compared with those who have jobs that are relatively impoverished in the experiences available. It is acknowledged that issues such as social class or geographical location may in turn affect access to part-time jobs and more specifically to good quality part-time jobs; however these matters were only mentioned by one interviewee.

Flowing from these principles, some policy issues that could warrant attention are listed below. Some might more readily be applied to school students, as it could be argued that university students, who are generally 18 years or older, have more ability to 'fend for themselves', although the collective national interest could be served by facilitating the nature of university students' engagement with part-time work to aid course completion. Some of these issues can be dealt with only by government policy, others by internal policies that can be introduced by other bodies (e.g. schools or employers) and others could best be addressed by government and education and/or industry working in tandem to introduce complementary policies.

Relating to principle 1

- Greater government regulation of working hours for student-workers.
- The right for student-workers to time off for specified school and university-related activities.
- A referral service for under-18 student-workers needing advice about employment difficulties.
- Timetabling flexibility at schools and universities within reasonable bounds.

Relating to principle 2

- The right to qualification-based or part-qualification-based training as part of student-working.
- Consideration of standard forms of recognition in school and university qualifications for learning from part-time work.

Relating to principle 3

- A 'compensation' programme organised through educational institutions for those students unable to access part-time work. This would be designed to provide the experiences and skills development more usually gained through part-time work but could also provide actual paid work.

Relating to two or more principles

- The need for pre-education at school about rights and responsibilities of part-time working at ages 13 or 14 before formal student-working life begins.
- Structured dialogue about part-time working between educational institutions and employers at local levels.

- Structured dialogue about part-time working among educational institutions, employers and unions at State and national levels.

These issues are confined to those which fit readily within existing institutional and governmental spheres of responsibility and activity. For example, those policy issues relating to principle 1 would be primarily handled through industrial relations ‘awards’ and collective agreements, and through school systems which are managed at the state level. Moreover, since the suggested interventions grow from interviews with relevant policy-makers it is likely that they would be acceptable.

The list also reflects what may be acceptable to employers; many employers already have internal policies about hours, time off and training, sometimes developed during negotiations with trade unions, as well as dialogue with local educational institutions, and those that do not may be readily persuaded of the business case for such provisions. In other areas of regulation related to employment and training, employers report that enlightened practices assist them in providing evidence of quality, gaining government contracts and attracting labour (e.g. Smith, Comyn, Brennan and Smith 2009). It is likely that similar consequences might flow from somewhat more regulated use of student labour. However, there is also a danger that employers could be discouraged from employing students if any regulatory framework was perceived as being too rigid; or that students could resent perceived governmental interference in their working lives. So while there are some areas in which policy intervention could be regarded as useful, there are also arguments for leaving student-working off the policy agenda. The research, and other data, indicated that the strategic importance of student labour to employers and to industries means that student-working will be an enduring feature of the twenty-first century labour market, regardless of the presence or absence of policy interventions.

Note

1. This body was superseded by 2008 ‘award simplification’ processes that also affected pay rates in retail and hospitality.

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