

# Chapter Two –

## Children and young people at work

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## 2.1 Child employment trends

International research shows there is growth in child employment in the retail and service sectors in areas such as accommodation, cafes and restaurants, in contrast to more traditional areas such as baby sitting and paper rounds. This coincides with increased opportunities for casual work, allowing work and study to be combined.<sup>6</sup>

Australia has a high rate of employment for children and young people aged 15 to 19, compared to other developed countries,<sup>7</sup> and more students are now working and studying in Australia.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, while there is limited information available on children under 15 who work, the rate of children working aged 15 has risen from 10 percent in 1966 to 35 percent in 2001.<sup>9</sup>

Consistent with international experiences, the type of work is also changing for Australia's young workers. The overall growth in youth employment is being led by an increase in casual and part-time work.<sup>10</sup> More young people are now working in casual work, in particular in retail and services, replacing traditional areas of work in family businesses, farms and in odd jobs.<sup>11</sup>

A 2001 survey of 1,451 students in Years 10, 11 and 12 found that 60 percent had had formal part-time work. Around 15 percent of students worked more than 15 hours a week. Two-thirds worked in retail or fast food outlets, and work types included:<sup>12</sup>

- 47% other paid work for an employer
- 26% voluntary work
- 24% unpaid work: family business
- 22% paid work: family business, and
- 21% paid work in own business (predominantly babysitting).

Work provides many potential benefits for children and young people, including financial gain and work experience, development of communication skills and social networks, and contributing to the family business or farm. Research shows that generally young people enjoy their work,<sup>13</sup> and the main reason most students work is to earn discretionary income, although a minority also work to support their studies or their family.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Industrial Relations Victoria. (2001). *Children at work: Issues paper*. Melbourne: Author, p. 12. See also Dorman, P. (2001). *Child labor in the developed economies*. Geneva: International Labor Organization, p. 34.

<sup>7</sup> 45.6 % of the 15-19 year old age group in paid employment (compared to a mean of 26.2 % for OECD countries). Dorman, P. (2001). *Child labor in the developed economies*. Geneva: International Labor Organization. One limitation here is that most official employment measures are categorised into the 15-19 year old age group. This obviously includes some young people aged 18 and 19, however this will be used in this paper for some purposes to give an indication of general growth trends for younger employees and for comparative purposes between jurisdictions and across agencies.

<sup>8</sup> Up from 29% in March 1987 (a school attendance month), to 43% in March 2004. Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2004). *Labour force Australia spreadsheets*. (No. 6202.0.55.001). Canberra: Author.

<sup>9</sup> Industrial Relations Victoria. (2001). *Children at work: Issues paper*. Melbourne: Author, p. 8.

<sup>10</sup> Australian Industrial Relations Commission. (1998). *Junior rates inquiry*. Canberra: Author, p. 6. See also Wooden, M. (1998). *The labour market for young Australians*. Adelaide: National Institute of Labour Studies, Flinders University of South Australia.

<sup>11</sup> Industrial Relations Victoria. (2001). *Children at work: Issues paper*. Melbourne: Author, p. 3. and Robinson, L. (1999). *The effects of part-time work on school students*. Melbourne: ACER. This study found that 55% of student workers were employed in sales.

<sup>12</sup> Smith, E., & Green, A. (2001). *School students learning from their paid and unpaid work*. Canberra: Australian National Training Authority. Not mutually exclusive categories.

<sup>13</sup> Robinson, L. (1999). *The effects of part-time work on school students*. Melbourne: ACER

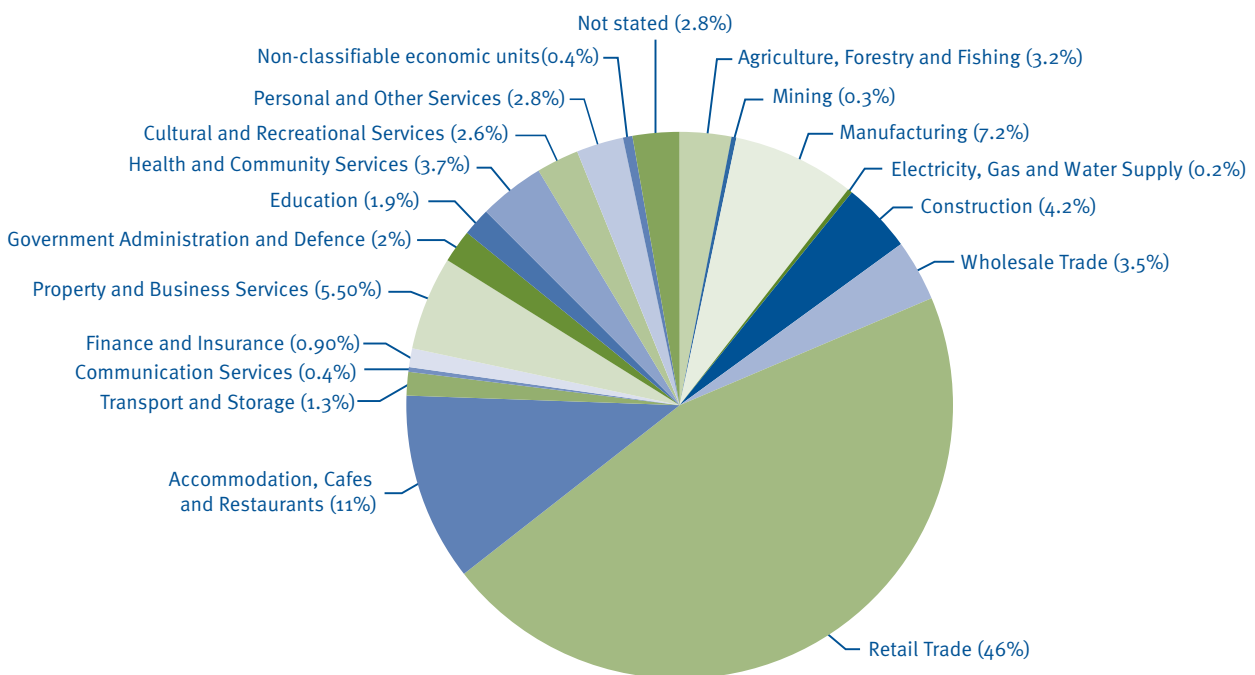
<sup>14</sup> Industrial Relations Victoria. (2001). *Children at work: Issues paper*. Melbourne: Author, p. 12. and Smith, E., & Green, A. (2001). *School students learning from their paid and unpaid work*. Canberra: Australian National Training Authority. This study found that around 9% of the 1451 students surveyed worked to support themselves or their families.

## 2.2 Child employment in Queensland

Australian Bureau of Statistics data demonstrate that a large number of children and young people aged 15 to 19 in Queensland are working.<sup>15</sup> A high proportion are casual employees, with casual work increasing markedly over the past ten years, particularly in retail areas, where many young people are employed.<sup>16</sup> For many students, the opportunity to perform part-time and casual work provides important financial assistance and flexibility which assists students to continue their studies and complete Year 12.<sup>17</sup>

Figure 1 below represents children working by industry in 2001, highlighting the variety of work being done.<sup>18</sup>

**Figure 1**  
**Participation of children and young people aged 15 to 19 by industry, Queensland 2001.**



An increasing number of Queensland students are also now balancing employment and study:<sup>19</sup>

- In 2004 there were 47,300 Queensland school students in part-time employment (up from 34% to 48% between 1987 and 2004), and
- 200 school students were in full-time employment

<sup>15</sup> There were 150,300 working students in March 2004 (57% of the 15-19 year old population). Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2004). *Labour force Australia spreadsheets*. (No. 6202.0.55.001). Canberra: Author.

<sup>16</sup> Queensland has 31.1% casual employees compared to a national average of 26.9%. Mangan, J. (1999). *Casual employment in Queensland: Current situation and implications for public policy*. Brisbane: VETEC, pp. 15–24. Labour Market Research Unit, Department of Employment and Training.

<sup>17</sup> Green, C., Loon, A., & Mangan, J. (2000). *Youth labour markets, education and employment destination destinations: Results from the Queensland survey of youth*. Brisbane: Labour Market Research Unit, Department of Employment and Training.

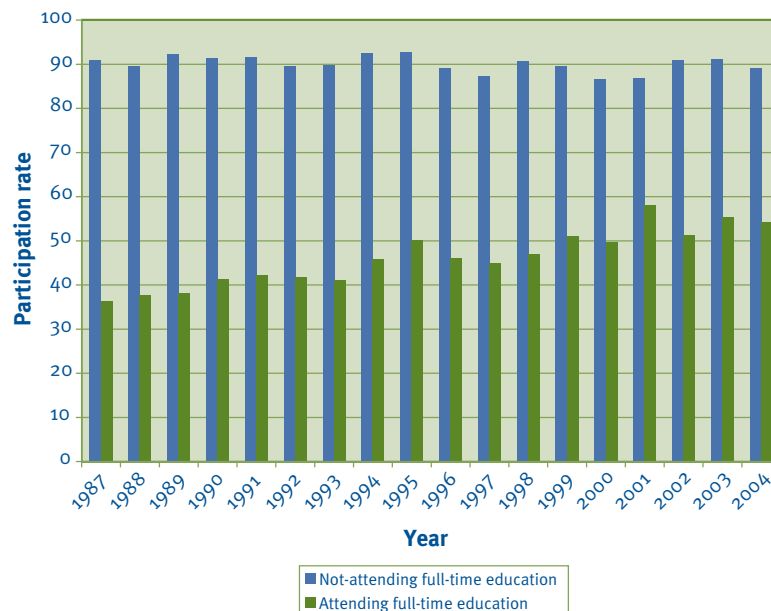
<sup>18</sup> Australia Bureau of Statistics. (2002). *Census 2001, basic community profiles*. Canberra: Author.

<sup>19</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2004). *Labour force Australia spreadsheets*. (No. 6202.0.55.001). Canberra: Author. Figures are for March, and are compared to a rise from 29% to 43% nationally for participation in employment by school students.



The figure below shows increases for students (of all types) aged 15-19 working between 1987 and 2004.

**Figure 2**  
**Participation of Queensland children and young people aged 15-19 in employment, by educational attendance, 1987 – 2004.**



To contribute to our knowledge of the experiences of Queensland school students under 18, the Commission has also conducted surveys with 359 students aged 14-16 across South East Queensland.<sup>20</sup> Seventy-two percent of the group were employed and of those:

- 56% were involved in paid work for an employer
- 15% worked for their family business
- 13% were involved in their own business
- 67% were employed on a casual basis
- 36% worked in fast food/hospitality and 30% in the retail industry, and
- 24% were working to save money, 14% for something to do, 14% to buy something in particular and 13% to support themselves.

This shows that for this particular sample group, there were a large number of students working, often in casual paid employment, predominantly in retail and fast food areas (including a minority that were working to support themselves). It is important to also note that 72 percent of the working students reported that their treatment by employers was either 'good' or 'very good'.

<sup>20</sup> Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian. (2003). *Student surveys regarding child labour*. Unpublished raw data. 96% were aged between 14 and 16. Limitations upon this data include the fact that the sample is metropolitan based students. Further surveys are planned in rural areas which will also enhance the sample size.



The survey attached (in Appendix One) will help add to our knowledge in this area. The following question may prompt your consideration of this issue if you wish to provide a more detailed submission.

### Consultation Question 1 – child employment

What do you know about the extent and type of paid and unpaid work children and young people under 18 in Queensland are engaged in, including:

- the age of children working and balancing work and study
- the hours worked, type and appropriateness of work and conditions
- the reasons children and young people are working
- the benefits for children and young people of working, and
- any factors relating to cultural or gender differences which affect participation in particular types of work.

This chapter has described the modern child employment context in Queensland and other jurisdictions. The following chapter presents information on potential child labour risks identified in the research.

