



# Improving youth employment outcomes an important job

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IT IS hard to fathom the logic of parking ambulances at the bottom of cliffs, particularly when those taking the fall are our young.

In employment terms, young people are in a very bad state, with unemployment among under-25s at the highest rate since the turn of the millennium. For those aged under 20, things have not been so dire since 1997.

Perhaps most alarmingly, this month it was revealed that the underemployment of young Australians has hit its highest level in nearly 40 years, at more than 15 per cent.

More than 300,000 young Australians have casual or

part-time jobs but want either more hours of work or full-time positions, research from the Brotherhood of St Laurence welfare group shows.

More than half of all jobs held by people aged under 25 in our fair land are casual positions.

And too many of even the most capable and qualified find themselves in a world of unpaid internships and voluntary work experience.

Figures are always slippery, but things are tough all over, no matter which way they are stretched.

In seasonally adjusted terms, unemployment in Australia went up 15 per cent between July last year and July this year.

But young people are being hit particularly hard and there is worse likely to come.

The federal Budget proposed taking the big stick to several areas that help young people get on their feet

and set them on their way – making education, income support, training and employment harder to access.

The Federal Government also axed funding for the national School Business Community Partnership Brokers program as part of the tough Budget in May, despite 600 businesses, schools and charities begging for the program to continue.

It linked schools with employers and industry and had a particular eye on young people in disadvantaged areas or who were regarded as particularly vulnerable.

The logic behind this and other programs was and is that in communities with high joblessness and where parents were lowly paid and unskilled, a young person is not likely in their daily life to meet people who can help them see another future.

In this way, the cycle of poverty and joblessness

continues across generations. So important was the Partnership Brokers program across Howard, Gillard and Rudd governments that heavy-hitting companies such as NAB, Qantas and Woolworths were on board.

The Partnership Brokers

program will be dead by year's end – and we will head down a path deemed dumb-headed in the light of the evidence.

The reasons for the jobless scourge are broad and deep, but surely looking at what works in other nations makes sense rather than have the patch-and-repair teams at the ready for when our youth take a dive.

Dr Anthony Mann is the policy and research director at the Education and Employers Taskforce, an independent UK charity dedicated to ensuring every British school has an effective partnership with employers

as a means of addressing youth unemployment.

His charity connected 12,500 employers with 2500 schools and generated discussion with 100,000 youth in its first 20 months and has gone from strength to strength since.

He has been brought out to Australia – and will be in Brisbane today – to discuss ways Australia can improve the school-to-work transition, engage our young and lift employment rates among young people.

Mann's research has established that a young person's future employability and earning power is linked strongly to employer/student interaction. In communities characterised by high unemployment, it is all about with whom young people interact and putting real people from real workplaces in their path. Inspiration and realistic ideas about what that



line of work is like can carry a young person to new places.

Mann says trends in the labour market are hostile to young people and trends in education have lagged behind what is needed at the coalface.

He says people in nations such as Australia are told by governments to get as many qualifications as they can, but more qualifications rarely equal a job offer. Other characteristics such as courtesy and communication skills are just as important but are neglected.

Mann and charities such as the Smith Family want a national program to replace Partnership Brokers that will bring schools, employers and community organisations together and to take a grader to the employment road.

Our young people – our working future, our societal soul – surely are worth our exploring every one of these preventive measures.