Is Anyone Listening?
YOUNG PEOPLE SPEAK ABOUT WORK AND UNEMPLOYMENT

CATHERINE BLAKERS

ACER RESEARCH MONOGRAPH No 42
IS ANYONE LISTENING?
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ABOUT WORK
AND UNEMPLOYMENT
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CATHERINE BLAKERS
Dear Sir,

I am 22 years old and have been retrenched. I am enclosing a poem I wrote which explains what being unemployed means to me. The despair at having no money and moving home with a girlfriend who was to be my fiancee. How friends that are working took her out and showed her what it was like to have money and not to have to live in the environment of my Father’s house. She has now left me because I couldn’t give her the privacy and security she needed.

A woman, nothing more,
How much she hurts,
More than any physical pain,
To love her is more than I can bear,
Having a door you keep hidden,
Unlocking it for her touch,
And watching it melt away,
No more can it protect,
Or stop the pain that floods through,
WHY
She says ‘don’t hurt’,
But without meaning,
The pain comes again,
Never ceasing or growing tired,
Striking stronger every time,
Paralysing my thoughts,
So I think of nothing else,
Gnawing away at my emotions,
And not realising the damage,
The feeling for everything gets numb,
But still she pumps my veins,
WHY
To me all beautiful,
The scent of spring in the wind,
The person who opened my heart,
But she’s changing,
She listens to them and gets high on the aroma,
Wanting to be the same,
And she is changing,
The respect and compassion,
Loving and caring,
All beginning to fade,
As if she thinks its better,
WHY
Now I have nothing,
Except four walls and time.
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It has been a rare privilege to work on this material in which young people, responding to an ACER open-ended questionnaire in 1983, describe their experiences in education and working life and give their views so frankly and directly on a variety of issues. To read and re-read what these young people have written about themselves has been an enthralling task - often sobering, sometimes humorous, never dull. Their writing is the core of this book and its reason for being. My first acknowledgement and thanks therefore go to them for responding to the ACER questionnaire and for allowing their responses to be used publicly. I hope they will feel that this report at least tries to do justice to the quality and range of their writings.

I am very grateful to the Australian Council for Educational Research - in particular to Dr Trevor Williams, Director of the Youth in Transition study - for offering me the opportunity to undertake this task. During the writing, I have depended heavily on the advice, support and, not least, the patience of Dr Williams, and I have appreciated his help very much indeed. There are many others in ACER to whom thanks are also due, among them: Hilary Miller, who spent a great deal of time providing background statistical information on the respondents; Mandy Falkingham and Gloria Locock who organised and produced the final draft of the manuscript and who, together with other long-suffering persons in ACER, translated my handwritten pages into fair and legible script.

Finally, I want to record the contribution to this book of Brenda Nicholson who has worked with me on the whole project. She has read all the responses many times and has sorted and re-sorted them - also many times - according to various requirements. The bibliography is also largely her work. Without her help in these ways and her input on matters of substance and presentation, the task would have been longer and more arduous.

Catherine Blakers
Abbreviations

ABS  Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACER Australian Council for Educational Research
ACTU  Australian Council of Trade Unions
AGPS  Australian Government Publishing Service
ALS  Australian Longitudinal Study
ANOP  Australian National Opinion Polls
ASTEC  Australian Science and Technology Council
BCA  Business Council of Australia
BIE  Bureau of Industry Economics
BLMR  Bureau of Labour Market Research
CAI  Confederation of Australian Industry
CEP  Community Employment Program
CERI  Centre for Education Research and Innovation
CES  Commonwealth Employment Service
CRAFT Commonwealth Rebate for Apprentice Full-time Training
CYSS  Commonwealth Youth Support Scheme
DEET Department of Education, Employment and Training
DEIR  Department of Employment and Industrial Relations
EPAC  Economic Planning Advisory Council
EPUY  Education Program for Unemployed Youth
NES  Non-English Speaking
OECD Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PEP  Participation and Equity Program
SYETP Special Youth Employment Training Program
TEAS  Tertiary Education Assistance Scheme
TDC  Trade Development Council
VEF  Victorian Employers Federation
YACA  Youth Affairs Council of Australia
Introduction

Unemployed Youth: A Chance to Speak

At present I am unemployed. I have never had a full time job and though I have been willing to do almost anything, and have applied for over 100 I have been unable to find one since completing my degree last year. Most of my time I spend in preventing myself becoming too neurotic about it, and of course, in looking for a job.

I'm very pleased to be part of the survey - even just to know that there is at least one person who thinks like me participating and putting forth my point of view. I hope you don't mind that I get a bit carried away with answers. There is one thing though - what is this ultimately to lead to? Do our answers finally have any bearing on government decisions about schools, education, training schemes, all the subjects you want our opinions on?

[Unemployed for nine months]

Work is O.K. and I liked it when I had a job. But I thought the age for retirement was 65 not 18. I was in a supermarket it was good hours and a reasonable pay. The work was varied. But I have been unemployed for six months. It's got the better of me. I am very thrilled that I am one of the people who have been chosen for this survey. It makes me feel as if I'm important. So many things are for the high working class (clubs etc.). I might have made some mistakes and sounded like a hobo but I hope you will not be offended; but so many things make me feel so hopeless and depressed about the politics carrying on about stupid strikes, wars and so on. It is hard to say how I feel but as you can probably tell by my answers I just won't care about much no more because it's just not worth it. And believe me I would like to but if you're unemployed no one cares about you so why should I.

[Sacked at 18]

I like expressing my feelings and frustrations so that maybe you can convey these problems to politicians or any other people so that they can realise where society is heading. You can always read about unemployment but you don't know what it's like unless you experience it. Tell them that!!

[Student teacher; previously unemployed for 12 months]
In the last fifteen years or so, the transition from education to work has been a difficult one for many young people. In circumstances of industrial and economic change and declining employment opportunities, many of them have experienced unemployment, sometimes for considerable periods. This report is an attempt to take up the challenge of the comments quoted above and many others by young people who have known what it is to be unemployed. It seeks to let young people speak for themselves about their experience of unemployment, about their views on unemployment and about the issues which unemployment raises for them personally and for governments and the society.

The aim of the study has been to provide detailed information on the experiences and perceptions of young people as they move through schooling into post-school life and work. Thus the information collected by the study over the years has been wide-ranging, covering not only experiences and achievements in education and work but also the background factors which are likely to affect these such as family background, sex, ethnic origin and geographical location. The yearly questionnaires, generally sent out in October, have used a ‘tick-the-box’ format, designed to reduce the labour and time required to complete the survey. This, together with the deliberate efforts of ACER to make and keep the survey contacts friendly and personal, has resulted in a high retention rate for the young people involved and an unusual degree of commitment and interest. Regular reports about the progress of the study and its findings have also contributed to this. A more detailed account of the Youth in Transition study is given in the Appendix.

THE OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE

In response to comments by many of the young people that the usual ‘tick-the-box’ questionnaires did not provide opportunity to write as they wished about their experiences, an open-ended questionnaire was sent out by ACER in mid-1983 to the (roughly) 10 000 young people still in the two samples of the survey, then aged about 22 and 18 years respectively. This preceded the regular
questionnaire, mailed in October each year, and was designed mainly to give those who wished an opportunity to write about their experiences and views. A similar questionnaire was mailed in 1987 to the third sample of young people, then aged 16-17 years. Because this last group of young people is not comparable in age and experience with the older groups and because the 1983 material was extensive and time limited, this report concentrates on the responses of the two older groups.

The open-ended questionnaire, in contrast with the 'tick-the-box' format, invited the young people in the survey to write whatever and as much as they liked on matters and issues of importance to them. To provide a framework for replies, five main headings were suggested:

- reflections on schools and schooling;
- reflections on learning and earning;
- working;
- the future;
- on being in a survey.

Under each heading, a number of informally phrased questions provided a spur to ideas.

Of the 10,000 or so young people remaining in the first two national sample groups in 1983, about one in eight (1250) returned replies to the open-ended questionnaire. The low response rate (compared with a response rate of about 80 per cent for the regular survey in 1983) was not unexpected for a number of reasons. ACER, concerned to preserve the high response rate of the main questionnaire in October, had deliberately refrained from following up the open-ended questionnaire with the usual reminders. The labour and time required to write on the issues raised in the questionnaire were obviously also a considerable factor in the low response rate.

Nevertheless and somewhat surprisingly, the 1250 young people who did reply did not diverge too greatly in background and characteristics from the 10,000 of the national sample. As might have been expected there were more responses from the literate and educated than from those who had less education and few achievements to report; there more replies from those in post-compulsory and higher education and those whose parents' education and occupation were in the higher range of achievement. Yet oddly enough, in wealth and school type the distribution of responses to the open-ended questionnaire was almost identical with that of the larger sample. In neither sample, of course, are the homeless and desperate adequately represented.

The replies to the open-ended questionnaire are therefore the individual views of the comparatively few young people who chose to respond. Consequently, this is an impressionistic and not a statistical report. It is an attempt to let young people in their own words generate some of the insights and understanding which they so clearly regard as both important and rare. Such an approach has its
strengths, but it also has limitations. Its main strength is that the material is fresh and first-hand and needs no apology for the quality of young people’s thinking and views. On the other hand, the responses are self-selected and therefore, as previously mentioned, somewhat biased in favour of the educated. They cannot by themselves be used to draw general conclusions about what young people were thinking and feeling in 1983. For valid generalisation one must go to the main ACER longitudinal survey.

What the responses to the open-ended questionnaire can do is illustrate and give depth to the evidence provided by other research. This is particularly the case since the range of young people who did reply is wide enough to cover most categories of young people, including many who were unemployed at the time of writing or who had experienced unemployment. Overall, the responses provide unique insights into what a wide range of young Australians in 1983 thought and felt about education, work, unemployment and their lives and prospects generally.

**FOCUS ON THE UNEMPLOYED**

It would be impossible in one report to do justice to the wealth of fascinating material available in the responses to the open-ended questionnaire of 1983. The material represents the views and experiences of a wide range of young people: students in schooling, higher education and TAFE; young people working as nurses, teachers, lawyers and accountants; a few self-employed; some on farms and in the arts; a considerable number in trades or apprenticed to a trade; some in government employment; a great many in banks, shops and offices; some whose main occupation is house and family; single parents; and a significant number in casual or temporary employment or unemployed. Their replies range in length from a few words to many pages of typed copy.

Since a choice of material had to be made, this report focuses on those young people who were unemployed at the time of writing or who reported experience of unemployment. Of the 1250 young people responding to the open-ended questionnaire, about 150 were unemployed and a further 280 or so had experienced some period of unemployment. These are the young people who, time and again, grasp the opportunity to give their views on ‘just what unemployment means’ and to explain ‘what they feel about it’. The discussion also draws liberally on the comments of other young people who have not been unemployed to provide contrast or comparisons.

Among those with experience of unemployment, the range of young people responding is wide enough to embrace not only the temporarily unemployed but also some who have withdrawn discouraged from the labour force, others who have been unemployed for years and some who have found an outlet in a minor way in drink, drugs or crime. The extremes of the unemployed - the homeless and those who have succumbed to despair, drugs or serious crime - are not
represented, but the material as it stands provides some considerable insight into how these extremes might develop.

The report presents the material in a framework which relates to the important issues raised by unemployment in our society. Work on the research which provides this framework was undertaken mainly during 1988 and 1989 for two publications which provided an overview of research during the 1980s on young people in work and education. Discussion of the research in this report has been kept to the minimum necessary to put the comments of the young people into their social context. However, in each chapter references are given to more detailed discussion of the research and issues which can be found in previous publications (Blakers, 1990a; 1990b). In this report, Part 1 (Chapters 1-4) outlines the social and industrial circumstances of 1983, using the comments of a wide range of young people to indicate the attitudes which the community takes to unemployment, the reasons why these attitudes are so deeply rooted in the society, the effects which current technological and industrial changes are having on the patterns of employment and the reasons why young people - or some of them - are particularly affected by social change.

In Part 2 (Chapters 5-7), young people describe their experiences in looking for work and give some very frank comments on employers and their practices. Their responses also illustrate the fact that young people became unemployed for a wider variety of reasons than apply to older workers. The effects of unemployment on young people are shown vividly and sometimes dramatically in Part 3 (Chapters 8-12), indicating that unemployment means not simply inadequate income but just as importantly a deprivation of place and purpose in the society. It undermines the unemployed person's confidence and self-respect and colours expectations of and views about the future among many young people whether or not they have experienced unemployment.

In Part 4 (Chapters 13-15), young people give their views on what should be done about youth unemployment and who should do it. They comment on matters such as the competition for jobs, job creation and the role of schooling. Part 5 (Chapter 16-18) looks at the question of whether concerns about employment and unemployment expressed by young people in 1983 are still relevant in the early 1990s; whether young people are still vulnerable to unemployment as they were in the recession of 1983, and what policies and programmes have been or could be taken to improve the situation of young people in a changing society.

Each chapter of the report incorporates an overview of what the available research says about the issue in question. On this framework, the comments chosen for inclusion are as far as possible a fair representation of the range of responses on the issue. Some indication is also given of whether particular views are expressed by many, some or a few. Because the typing of the original mostly hand-written and often hard-to-read responses was a difficult task accomplished by a number of different people under some pressures of time, errors of spelling, punctuation and interpretation inevitably appeared in the typed text. It was
impossible in most cases to separate these errors from those which may have been in the original paper. For this reason, spelling and punctuation in the extracts quoted in this report have in most cases been corrected. Mode of expression and sentence construction however, except in a few cases of obvious misreading, have remained as originally written. Beyond these adjustments, the report tries simply to do what one of the young women - a nurse - demands:

Let me the individual speak. I become more than a number or a tick in a box!

For the unemployed and the lonely the chance to speak is a valued one:

This is the only chance I get all year to talk to someone who'll listen about things that matter.

I love it. It gives me an opportunity to let it all out. It's funny but you people are the first people I could really talk to, and I don't even know yous!

I enjoy being part of the survey and reading about what the other people think but I wonder if they really help? They find out how young people think and what they do and don't like but they don't help the unemployed get work.

BUT - IS ANYONE LISTENING?

There is one thing though - what is this ultimately to lead to? Do our answers finally have any bearing on government decisions about schools, education, training schemes, all the subjects you want our opinions on? My boyfriend has been looking over my shoulder as I have been writing this and said he hoped that someone in the government would have a chance to really hear the opinions of young people. Well, I hope this survey is actually helping decisions to be made, policies formed. It is good to feel that I may have even a remote role in getting things done for young people.

[Unemployed nine months]
Part I

The Circumstances of Youth Unemployment in 1983

The government get blamed for all unemployment but I feel it is not really their fault. It is the fault of the times. More married couples are staying in the workforce longer, thus younger people are not being taken on as before. More companies are going away from manual labour to robots, computers, and the like. This puts those people who used to work in factories, mines, big companies on the dole. The cost of labour is too high to keep a large workforce so the companies have to be mechanical. Job creation schemes are a good idea in theory but in practice put a lot of inflated ideas into a bunch of people who have no hope of getting and keeping jobs - they would rather be somewhere else. Job creation schemes train people for the wrong jobs at the wrong time. The government youth employment schemes are made for those people who really could not care less. It keeps them occupied between dole cheques. I believe people cannot survive on the dole (many do) but if they made it less than it is now it gives them some incentive to work or at least find part-time work.

It will be harder to find jobs in the future. In 10-20 years time one will need at least a degree to be able to dig the ditches in the road. People of my age will get used to unemployment, so much so it will be an accepted thing. Only the lucky and those who know someone will get jobs. Politics will fumble on its way as it has been doing since 1901. Government of tomorrow will promise to decrease unemployment, taxes, increase wages but will find out like its predecessor that it’s a dream.

[Pharmacy student]
Unwilling or Unable? 
Attitudes to the Unemployed

I plead ignorance on my part. Being an employed person (and I’m not rubbing it in) I don’t really understand the predicament of the unemployed youth. Who are they anyway? University graduates? Year 10 school leavers? Whinging bludgers who couldn’t care less as long as their dole cheque keeps coming in? All of the above? None of the above? The question ignorant people like me ask is ‘If I found a job, why can’t they?’

(Clerk in the public service)

COMMUNITY ATTITUDES TO THE UNEMPLOYED

For most people in industrialised societies work is a major part of life. People expect to enter the workforce after their years of education and to leave it only when released by age or illness or when family responsibilities intervene. Consequently, unemployment - which deprives many of their opportunity and right to enter and remain in the workforce - is a social issue of wide concern. People are apt to hold strong and differing views on the reasons why some people are unemployed and on the motivations and characters of those who are unemployed, especially if these are young people who, because of their youth, do not have a proven work record.

Community attitudes to unemployment are based on a wide range of different assumptions. There are some who believe that the unemployed - particularly if they are young - are entirely to blame for their own predicament: they do not really want work and prefer a life of ease and even luxury on the dole. On the other hand, there are people who, for a variety of reasons including direct or indirect experience of unemployment, are convinced that youth unemployment is a real and continuing social problem which has little to do with deficiencies in the young themselves. For the most part however, the community generally prefers not to think too strenuously about unemployment if not personally affected by or reminded of it. Often, attitudes are an uneasy blend of sympathy and suspicion, so that even among the most sympathetic there is the hint of an underlying belief that the jobs are there if young people look hard enough and are willing to work. Young people themselves, being part of the community, show a similar wide range of views and attitudes.
Something of the ambivalence in community attitudes to youth unemployment comes through in a survey conducted early in 1984 by Australian National Opinion Polls (ANOP) to ascertain the views of young people under 25 years on issues of concern, including unemployment. The responses indicated that 82.0 per cent of the young people surveyed saw getting a full-time job as very or fairly difficult. At the same time, they rated 'the apathetic attitude of young people' and 'the economic situation' as of equal importance as a main cause of youth unemployment. This was in a period when general unemployment was recorded at around 10.0 per cent and youth unemployment between two and three times higher than that. It was also a period when youth unemployment as an issue in its own right had become the focus of media headlines and public policies.

Young people responding to the 1983 ACER open-ended questionnaire confirm that community views about the young unemployed are shared in their full range by young people themselves. Their comments are frank and despite the qualifications which must attach to responses to this kind of questionnaire, it is possible to gain some impressions of how various groups of young people view unemployment and the unemployed.

**WHAT UNEMPLOYMENT?**

What is immediately striking in the responses is that a very large number of young people apparently have no thoughts at all about unemployment. For many of those whose jobs or futures seem secure, unemployment is simply not an issue which touches their lives. They respond to the questions on unemployment with an implicit shrug. A few like the following do comment briefly:

"Perhaps it is selfish to say, but unemployment is not an issue I think about often in my position - there are always plenty of jobs for physios and all my family, friends etc. are working. The Government never seem to do anything positive except talk about it so I gave up taking any notice."

* [Physiotherapist]

"I’m feeling fairly confident of completing my degree and as such, unemployment is not a big threat. As far as my opinions on unemployment go, I don’t really have any knowledge of what it’s like. I know that may sound funny in this day and age but fortunately, I suppose, I haven’t any friends who are unemployed, nor any family members. I can appreciate, however, how demoralising unemployment could be, but it’s not something I tend to think about an awful lot."

* [Medical student who went on to university from a private girls’ school]
UNWILLING OR UNABLE? ATTITUDES TO THE UNEMPLOYED

THEY'RE ALL DOLE BLUDGERS

Among those who do comment on unemployment there are a considerable number who see the unemployed as being generally work-shy dole bludgers. On the whole (and with many exceptions of course) those who comment in these terms come from among young people (like the above) who have had no direct or indirect experience of unemployment and who have little fear of being unemployed themselves. They include some young people in secure employment; others in higher education whose family circumstances, choice of career and expectations of employment insulate them from the bleakness of the competitive labour market; others again who have been fortunate in the ease with which they found jobs or in the contacts which made their job-seeking successful and painless. These people express their critical attitudes in a variety of ways.

Some show resentment that their taxes go to support people they regard as dole bludgers:

My accountant had to juggle my claims for taxation this year just so I didn’t have to pay more tax! So what’s the point of working my butt off and have to pay more tax. I also have to pay full price for public transport, also full price to HBF etc. and any training course I have to pay full price. But if I was single and unemployed I’d have the dole plus be able to earn a certain amount over that plus have free medical and cut rate in transport, admission fees and all sorts of things.

[Manageress of a supermarket; married, studies two nights a week and works as a waitress one night a week; never unemployed]

I think young people have it made. All they do is nothing and collect the dole and then expect the CES to find their work. So here we are paying tax to pay the bludgers who sit at home smoking pot and drinking booze. They seem to find money for that all right - I’ve seen it all.

[Works for his father at a lawn bowls club; never unemployed; at age 22 owns ‘my own house, car, 3 motor bikes’]

The government should cut back the dole and enforce two years on national service. My father pays tax, nearly half of his salary as he earns a good deal of money. Men like him pay for bludgers who can’t be bothered with work. Yet when it comes for his son to apply for tertiary assistance, he is kicked in the teeth and told his father earns too much money.

[Mining Engineering student in Bachelor of Engineering course; never unemployed]

Some are convinced that the unemployed have a good life ‘living it up on the dole’.

A fair percentage of the people on the dole get a few people together in a house and don’t intend to work. All they do is drive up and down the road at our expense and I think it stinks. What they should do is make them do community work for the towns they live in for at least 5 hours a day. If they don’t do it they should not get paid and let’s face it there’s plenty of work for them to do in shires, towns and cities.

[Employed on a cotton farm; wife works in a nearby town]

I was unemployed for several months having deferred my course for 1½ years. With a part-time job and the dole, I was better off without a full-time job. I really believe ration
behave as if they are really anxious for a job:

Many of these young people are sure that there are plenty of jobs available:

I obtained the job as they were friends of the family. I think that many people really don't put enough effort into finding work, there will always be a job for people with a bit of initiative.

Many of the so called young unemployed are dole bludgers because those that really want to work can find it.

They believe that people are unemployed because they are too choosy ...

I feel the unemployed are better off now than they have ever been. Half of them don’t want to lower themselves for particular jobs, if they were that desperate they would go for them. My sister found it hard to find a job after being retrenched. Six weeks went by but she tried and now she has a great job and enjoys it. I feel a means test should be applied to the unemployed. A lot earn extra money on the side and are better off than a lot of others.

... or too lazy

I think there’s lots of jobs. I just think people are choosy or lazy.

I would also like to say that a lot of unemployed youth are just too lazy and unprepared to work at anything. I have met many young people who have dreams of doing tertiary study or taking up an apprenticeship, but when they find they have to do some work in order to achieve their goals, they give up, and use the excuse that they are not ‘brainy’ enough, when all they had to do was try a little harder. I am not saying all or most young people are like this.

Some consider that many of the unemployed do not take the trouble to dress and behave as if they are really anxious for a job:

Have you seen some of the lineups for advertised jobs, employers do not employ people who look as though they have just climbed out of the gutter with filthy clothes and unkept hair.

It (unemployment) is a factor that is alien to my life and to the lives of my friends. However travelling past Parliament House and seeing people camped on the lawns protesting for increases in under 18 dole does affect me. Without being critical of the
individuals many of them are unemployable; i.e. shaved heads, green spikes and poor command of the English language.

[Graduate clerk in the public service]

UNEMPLOYMENT IS A REALITY

Contrasting with the kinds of comments quoted above are many others which show awareness of unemployment and some sensitivity to the difficulties faced by those who are unemployed. On the whole, these comments come from young people for whom unemployment has, for one reason or another, become a personal issue, though they have not themselves experienced unemployment. Such people include those who have seen the effects of unemployment on family, friends or acquaintances; those whose work or study has brought them closely into contact with a range of unemployed young people; those who, because they are still in education or have insecure jobs, fear the uncertainties of the future. Their views on unemployment are very different from those of people who have been untouched by the issue. Many of them know or believe that jobs are scarce:

I don’t think the government can do much about youth unemployment as there just aren’t enough jobs.

[Shorthand/Typing student at a TAFE college]

I know many unemployed people and they would give me anything for my job. It makes me sad to see my friends who are very capable people depressed and frustrated through lack of work.

[Storeman/salesman; never unemployed]

I really don’t think there is too much that the government can do about unemployment now as there are so many people out of work and just not enough jobs to go around. These people who say the kids don’t want to work annoy me because I have two brothers on the dole and they’re both hard workers when they have a job and it gets them so depressed having nothing to do when they’re willing to work.

[Shop Assistant]

Many express their sympathy for those who are unemployed:

I’ve never been unemployed so I can’t really comment on youth unemployment fairly. I feel you need to experience it to really believe the anguish and despair young and in fact all unemployed people feel. I think the feeling of failure must be strong and therefore intense frustration must follow. My husband and in fact myself have applied for other jobs while still employed. The disappointment of the 'Thank you, but' is enough for us. How must the unemployed feel?

[Nurse]
With some young people, concern about their own futures gives them some understanding of the feelings of the unemployed:

I could not possibly see myself as unemployed, but I’ll bet half the people on the dole today thought the same thing. It is a very real fear for me to be unemployed as I know I would hate myself for not being useful to myself and/or others, even though it may well be beyond my control. That is why I give all the work that I do all that I’ve got, (whilst keeping my sanity).

[Computer operator in a fruit processing company]

I sometimes dread the future. I hope that I won’t be one that can’t get a job. It must be so demoralising. I’m lucky I’m not looking for one at the moment. I used to really look down on dole people thinking what a bludger but now I just feel sorry for them.

[TAFE student]

I am now suffering my first letters of rejection. The first of many. I feel deeply sorry for those whose life depends on an acceptance, but my sympathy won’t put money in their pockets.

[Student finishing a Forestry degree]

AND THE UNEMPLOYED SAY

For a variety of reasons apart from the high rates of unemployment in 1983, a wide range of young people responding to the questionnaire reported some experience of unemployment. Many of them were still unemployed at the time of responding. For these young people the stigma attached to unemployment has become a real and painful experience, as their comments indicate.

Those who have found jobs look back with resentment at community attitudes to those who are unemployed.

I have been unemployed. It wasn’t very pleasant and people tend to look down on you as being lazy and a misfit and a no hoper.

[Now a disc jockey in a radio station]

I was unemployed for 4 months before this job and it was the worst feeling I’ve experienced. I began not to care even after many interviews. It’s very degrading when people are cursing the unemployed and you know that you’re trying.

[Trainee ranger]

Yes I have been unemployed. It is very depressing when you have your hopes set on a job and then you don’t get it and how other people see you as a dole bludger and very nasty remarks from older people.

[Factory machinist]

And those who are still unemployed make their own, often bitter, protests:

The public has the wrong impression of unemployed people. We are not unemployable - we are not bludgers and we are not so dumb that no-one would want to employ us. I know I used to think that when I was employed.

[Previously a dental nurse]
I have found there are some people that say being unemployed you’re a dole bludger and it’s their tax money we are getting. That bugs me because we don’t ask to be unemployed.

[Early school leaver]

I am currently unemployed. It’s the worst experience I have ever endured. People (particularly the old) tend to view me as a public nuisance, a no-gooder, a reject of society.

[Has ‘tried just about everything to get any job’]

Being on the dole is very depressing. Especially when you enter a shop, office, department store etc. and the people that work there ignore you until they’ve chattered about their fantastic weekend etc. or are very rude. You know you could do that job, if not better than they, and you wonder why they have got the job. I think most employed people - especially those who have never been unemployed - take their jobs for granted.

[Unemployed 18 months]

UNWILLING OR UNABLE?

The comments in this chapter indicate how widely in 1983 young people differed in their views on youth unemployment and their attitudes to the young unemployed. In many cases, personal experiences obviously led to quite contrary interpretations and opinions about the basic facts of unemployment. The views expressed in such divergent terms raise a number of questions. Were jobs scarce in 1983 or were many young people simply taking advantage of the safety net of the dole to be idle and lazy? What kinds of young people became and remained unemployed, and for what reasons? How enjoyable did they find life on the dole? In short, were the young unemployed of 1983 unwilling or unable to find work?

The economic and industrial circumstances of 1983 (outlined in the following chapters) and the frank comments of the young people themselves on their experiences go a long way towards providing answers to such questions.
The Shifting Scene

The next 20 years will see rapid change in economic and political structures because of the accelerating impact of new technology. This will be both frightening and exciting for people my age, who by that time will hold positions of leadership and responsibility. The real challenge (as always in history) will be to preserve basic human values - love, family, simplicity and creativity. I think we are so familiar with change at present, that the next 20 years will hold no real problems for us. The real problems will be those revealed by modern communications - the possibility of global war, and the swiftly developing world neighbourhood. In this new world we will no longer be able to ignore oppressed and underdeveloped nations - satellite communication will not allow it. The challenge to preserve basic human values will become world wide.

[CYSS Project Officer]

THE EXTENT OF UNEMPLOYMENT

The year 1983 was the year of the highest unemployment so far experienced in Australia in the post-war period. After more than two decades of unemployment rates under 2 per cent, 1983 marked the peak of a rising trend in unemployment which had begun to give cause for concern in the early 1970s. As Gruen pointed out, 'the spectacular four-fold increase in the recorded unemployment rate from mid-1974 when it was 1.5 per cent to the mid-1978 figure of 6.0 per cent has been unprecedented in Australia's post-war history'. By August 1983, the unemployment rate had risen again to about 10.0 per cent.

To find levels of unemployment in Australia comparable with the 1983 rate (and indeed with most other years since then), it is necessary to go back into the first half of the century. Even so, the numbers of people represented by the rates of unemployment have been much greater post-war than in the earlier periods. In 1903-04, the peak of 9.4 per cent of unemployment represented about 155 000 people without work; the peak of 19.7 per cent in 1931-32 saw about 512 000 people unemployed. In August 1983, the 9.9 per cent unemployment rate represented about 687 000 persons recorded as unemployed.

These are the rates of officially recorded unemployment. They take no account of the hidden unemployed or the under-employed, estimated by some to be almost as many in number as those officially recorded as unemployed. If all these were put together, it would mean that in 1983 unemployment was affecting
well over a million people. The resulting difficulty for job-seekers is underlined in this comment from a young typist-clerk:

A couple of weeks ago our firm advertised for a position of Storeman/Labourer. The phone calls I received were unbelievable and a week later I was still getting phone calls.

Australia has not been alone in its experience of high unemployment. Indeed the entrenchment of unemployment has become a constant theme of reports and discussion papers by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) of which Australia along with some twenty-three other countries is a member. One OECD paper, for example, comments:

Concerns about unemployment have been close to the centre of the stage in most OECD countries' policy-making throughout most of the post-war period, but at present, with the jobless rate in many industrialised countries at, or near, its highest level since the 1930s the political sensitivities associated with the issue are particularly acute.

In most countries, these high levels of unemployment have been one of the marks of social and industrial change.

THE CHANGING SOCIETY

In Australia, recognition that the society is changing rapidly and fundamentally has been slow in coming. In 1983, there was still a reluctance, particularly among the more conservative sections of the population, to recognise and accept the structural nature of the changes which had already been under way for some time. Among the more obvious and important of these were the changes affecting the social institution of the family, to be seen reflected in the statistics of divorce rates, later marriages, deferred and smaller families, single parent and blended families; in pre- and extra-marital relationships and in social groupings different from traditional family patterns.

For individuals in the society, for young people and for families, rapid change can bring tensions which are bewildering and frightening as tradition and stability are eroded. There is no longer the security of long-established customs and values nor any certainty about future directions. The network of social support and services on which individuals have depended has itself been changing and becoming in many respects more impersonal and less adequate. The support and concern provided by small and relatively stable communities, by the extended family, by the church and even by the family doctor have either disappeared or are diminishing. Hence a growing stress on individuals and the social consequences of stress apparent in the incidence of mental illness, suicide, some forms of crime, alcoholism and other drug abuse.

That individuals were already in 1983 feeling the adverse effects of rapid change was indicated in many research papers and other publications of the time.
A 1983 study by Beed and McNair\(^5\) for example showed a deep concern among Australians about the state of the society and its problems, particularly unemployment, and a sense of being unable to affect developments and provide solutions. The unemployed themselves were deeply worried by their situation, and many of the employed feared for their jobs.

The responses of young people to the ACER questionnaire show similar feelings of anxiety and helplessness in the face of the social changes and the problems they see around them:

The family unit has broken down in Australia and I can't see it reforming in the future. The political situation in Australia is ridiculous and with Australia so keen to keep friends with USA 'the goodies' against the USSR 'the baddies' I can't help but feel that Australia is both politically naive and has an extremely simplistic view of the work situation. Somehow I cannot see a long and pleasant future for myself since I cannot see a long future for our planet. The human gene pool is weak and growing weaker, war has become very real on a global scale, people want better standards of living, more pollution, more desecration. I am not a conservationist in the accepted sense - I am a realist and a happy and satisfying future with full employment and everybody happy doesn't appear very realistic.

[University student]

I think unemployment will never be solved as the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. The government is trying hard to get things going but there is always some-one, or a group of people to put a spanner in the works and knock a positive idea. Thinking of themselves and not the country.

[Police officer]

These nuclear weapons that are always being talked about are really frightening. I often wonder when the next war is going to break out. The last war took enough lives and it only had guns and so forth. What's a war going to be like with all this nuclear gear they have now. I myself really cannot imagine what the world is going to be like in 10-20 years. It seems pretty bleak now. Can it get any worse. I hope Australia can become a better country. The old Australia we all know and love.

[Bar attendant]

Some of them look back nostalgically:

I think because society has changed it has brought on unemployment. If things were the same as about 20 or 30 years ago things wouldn't be anywhere near as bad. I think it would be better if women stayed at home, until they married or got a boyfriend who could support them. There would be more opportunities for men. Men are the ones who need to work because that is their nature; it's the way they're made. Women are there to help them and support them.

[Unemployed; previously a baker's assistant]

A few see the challenge:

I'm optimistic, I have no reason not to be. There's so much to do, and it's going to be challenging. The future is going to be interesting, I think change is going to be extremely rapid, but hopefully in 10-20 years there will be peace and we'll have respect for nature,
Behind much of the present change in the society lies the influence of technology. Throughout history, technology acting both directly and indirectly through inventions and discoveries - in communications, transport, science, medicine and industrial machines - has been a strong influence on the structures, social divisions, culture, economy and governance of societies. When technological change comes at a pace beyond the capacity of human beings, and even more of their institutions, to absorb and adapt to, then the society is likely to go through a period of disruption. The eighteenth/nineteenth century was such a period. The industrial revolution was a culmination and a concentration of processes which had been in operation for a long time beforehand. It differed from what had gone before in that the process became a conscious and deliberate adoption and encouragement of invention, with a consequent snow-balling effect. A similar cumulative process of technological change has been in operation in most countries in the post-war years, fundamentally changing the patterns and way of life in the society.

Aware of the changes which they have seen within their own life-times, the young people without exception take for granted the increasing influence of technology on their lives. Some of them are intrigued by the prospect:

Life in 10-20 years will be even more automated and people will be working much shorter hours than now but everyone will be employed because space exploration and resettlement on other planets will be a 'world' wide project not just different countries. Don't laugh! In 100 years we have gone from the horse and cart to a reusable space shuttle and the more we progress the faster we progress.

[Locomotive electrician]

I see a society run by a few people, with even fewer machines. The high taxes paid by the highly skilled people will be upkeep at an acceptable level of 30-70 per cent unemployed. Australia will specialise in a very limited range of high technology goods. This specialisation will be necessary because of our relatively small population. It will also be a multicultural society with a wide-ranging but small market to satisfy. I see myself married with a small family and very grateful that the third world war did not (yet) eventuate. My children will turn on their 'TV' to go to the school and study topics of their and my choice.

[Computer operator]

But overwhelmingly their responses show their fear of technology; in particular, of its effects on employment and therefore on their lives and futures and those of their children. The links between technology and unemployment are for them close and threatening:
I know unemployment is an appalling problem and I don't have any answers. Short-term job creation schemes seem very dead-end. To my mind, this unemployment is here to stay. Politicians should stop blaming the recession and talking about the American economy picking up, and realise that many of the jobs lost will never be regained - they have been 'automated' away.

[Science student]

The computer is taking over and unskilled workers could find themselves fighting with 1000 others just for one job. Twenty years who knows? Will we still be here? In the year 2003 they'll probably be saying - Remember the good old days - 1983 - when unemployment was only 11 per cent. For example, who would have predicted hard times like these in 1963.

[Telecom clerk]

I feel that in the future, year after year, things are only going to get worse. I don't even want to think of how bad things will become. I have the feeling that not many people will be working, especially because of technology and there's not much the government can do about that. I think that rich people will only become richer and poor will become poorer and end up living off the richer.

[Unemployed]

Their comments echo the more informed and considered views expressed in many OECD reports in the last decade, of which the following is an example:

The issue of structural unemployment takes on added urgency in the light of widespread fear that the current wave of new technology may lead to permanently high joblessness in all OECD countries.6

NEW JOBS FOR OLD

Technology has always been a significant factor in changing industry structures and occupational opportunities. As industries change to take advantage of new technology, new skills and jobs are in demand and old skills and jobs disappear. Developments in the eighteenth/nineteenth centuries, for example, produced demand for factory workers and reduced opportunities for those employed in agriculture and cottage industries. With the coming of electricity, there was no longer a place for the street lamp-lighters of the gaslight era, and with new forms of transport the corner garage has relegated the blacksmith to a specialist craft occupation.

In this process of change, people are inevitably displaced from their employment. If the changes come rapidly, a great many people may find their jobs disappear and their skills redundant. New jobs are created by new technology, but they are likely to be in different areas and to require quite different skills and qualifications. The comment of a young engineer indicates his view of the outcomes:

A scheme would include the phasing in of automatic machines. Although this would mean that many jobs would be lost, the increase in productivity would help to employ more. Of
course it would take many years before this increase would help the unemployed, but it will have to happen sooner or later. There is one major problem however, the jobs which would be created would not be the average. It would demand higher skills. For instance a street cleaner would be replaced by a machine. This machine may be maintained by two or more people who now have that job to maintain a group of them. The street cleaner loses his job to two highly trained staff.

Summarising the effects of technological change on the nature of work, a 1983 report by the Technological Change Committee of the Australian Science and Technology Council (ASTEC)\(^7\) noted (among other effects): the elimination of many unskilled jobs; the transition to science-based technologies in which the tasks of the production worker are essentially instrument-monitoring and maintenance; an increasing polarisation of skill levels so that highly skilled people are involved in management, while the work of many other employees has been deskilled.

Shifts in industrial and occupational demand have been apparent in Australia throughout its short history but recent years have seen an acceleration of the process. Employment demand has moved progressively from primary industry to manufacturing and thence to the service industries, producing structural changes in patterns of employment and in job opportunities. A 1986 review by the Economic Planning Advisory Council (EPAC)\(^8\) noted that the two main features apparent in the labour market between 1973 and 1983 were the fall in manufacturing employment (an average decline of 1.2 per cent a year), and the strong growth of employment in service industries.

Service occupations in turn are being fundamentally affected by the use of technology. The employment effects of introducing word-processors were tentatively calculated by the ASTEC Report:

It has been calculated that between 30 000 and 40 000 staff would be displaced by 1981, if the suppliers' forecast of 20 000 word processors proved correct and if employees were displaced on a similar scale to that suggested by an earlier Australian study. Such a reduction would be equivalent to approximately 20 per cent of clerical/typing employment in 1976.\(^9\)

Many of the young people report these effects from their own experience:

I found my present job through my uncle and I really enjoy it though like a lot of jobs at the moment it is not very secure. Due to a computer being installed our office has gone from 8 girls to 4 in 12 months and it seems to be getting worse. In this job which has a title of 'stock clerk' I do the controlling of goods out and in of a state-wide furniture store. Also, preparing hire purchase contracts for customers and the receipting of payments for these and cash customers. My job has changed considerably since I started 6 years ago. Particularly since the introduction of the computer. Instead of keeping all our own records on ledger cards, with just the flick of a switch it shows on a microfiche machine. Although this makes things easier I would rather work with people than machines any day.
The shifts in industry towards the service sector have contributed to one of the most noticeable changes in patterns of employment in the post-war years. This is the growth in part-time employment and the corresponding decline in full-time employment. The trends were already clear in 1983. In the decade 1973 to 1983, the proportion of people employed full-time fell from 88.1 per cent to 82.5 per cent; the proportion of people employed part-time in the same period rose from 11.9 per cent to 17.5 per cent.

Part-time work (despite its often poor conditions) has its attractions for some groups in the work force; in particular, for school and other students and for women who, for family or other reasons, do not want full-time work. As a consequence, part-time work has become overwhelmingly the preserve of these groups. In 1983, nearly 42.0 per cent of women workers 25 years and over were in part-time employment compared with 4.6 per cent of males in the same age group; 16.6 per cent of females in the labour force aged 20-24 years were in part-time employment compared with 6.4 per cent of equivalent males; and 33.3 per cent of female teenagers in the work force were part-time compared with 23.0 per cent of male teenage workers. Of all teenage part-time workers in 1983 only about 28 per cent were not students.

The availability of part-time work has been a boon for many women who have given up jobs of their own in order to look after home and children. Work which can be fitted in with these duties offers many advantages. It can provide satisfaction, some financial independence and a sense of individual identity beyond being a housewife and mother. Some of the young people express their feelings about this:

I am presently a housewife and parent and for the first time since leaving school have been totally at home with no job since my daughter was born. My daughter is 9 months old. Although I love my daughter very much there are times I feel tied down, my life is not as active as before and once again my whole life has turned about (first time when I left school). I sometimes work for my husband (once a month for a few hours) and find I miss work very much, a price you have to pay if you want children. I enjoy my parenthood but having never been unemployed, I sometimes feel depressed, like I'm not doing enough for myself. Also, although my husband earns good money I miss the independence of earning and spending my own money.

[Ex nurse]
I enjoy being a housewife but I also work part-time casual as an enrolled Nurse in a geriatric nursing home, which I also enjoy. I did at one stage work full-time shift work but it eventually became a strain as I found full-time shift work and being a housewife were incompatible. I find what I am doing at present a little more relaxing because I am under less pressure. Yes, I like what I do. Overworked, underpaid, under appreciated. Under a great deal of stress all the time. I enjoy the work overall, I find it both satisfying and rewarding because I'm helping these elderly people and being a friend and almost like part of the family to them in their last few years of life.

The money earned in a part-time job is often necessary and always useful.

The cleaning job is necessary to supplement our income as my husband is a student.

At the moment I am a housewife and am also working so's we can pay for things for the house etc.

Part-time work also has considerable attractions for school students, as the following comments show:

The present job, milko, came from a newspaper ad. It's not a bad job - Saturday mornings or rather I start on Friday nights, getting up about 11.30 pm; get picked up by the milko about 11.45, go to the depot, start road work delivery around 12.20, finish about four hours later, back to the depot again, and I get home in the wee small hours of Saturday morning, 4.45 on a good day, maybe 5.15 am if we've been a bit slow. Sleep for a few hours again, and get up maybe 10 am. The bad parts are getting out of bed to begin with, and the pay isn't fantastic, but it's got to be done and it keeps me fit for football and such sports. I get free milk, discount dairy products, and some of the booze at Christmas. All in all, it's not too bad. I plan to leave when I begin Uni - March '84 and by then I'll have been doing it nearly 2 years. It's all right for a part-time job, but not as a career - I don't mind being a milkman at 17, but I wouldn't want to still be one at 90.

I also am a casual worker at a supermarket. We are currently working on Saturday afternoons (some of us) and I think it's great because I get $56.00 a week compared with the $20 I used to get when we weren't open. All of us who work are volunteers and I think it's great because I can buy what I like without having to save up for weeks as before. That's bound to create more employment. I just got my licence about 7 weeks ago and with the money I've saved and my parents' help I've bought myself a brand new car. I really enjoy work because I've got something to show for it.

THE ECONOMIC CONSTRAINTS

The trends outlined in this chapter were by 1983 already combining to reduce job opportunities, particularly for those without skills, qualifications or experience. Superimposed on these structural changes and exacerbating their effects was a severe economic downturn.

Compared with earlier years, the decade of the 1970s was marked by slowing economic growth. The EPAC Report mentioned above comments that 'growth in real non-farm product declined from an annual average rate of 3.9 per cent over the decade from 1962-63 to 1972-73 to 2.5 per cent a year during the ten years
from 1972-73 to 1982-83. The economic downturn resulted in large-scale retrenchments of staff and discouraged investment by employers in enterprises or expansions which might have led to new employment opportunities. Further deterrents to employing more people were seen by employers to include costs such as payroll tax and workers' insurance. Some of the comments by young people reflect employers' perceptions:

I recently organised Workers Compensation Insurance for a building contractor for his son who was apprenticed to him. His original quote had gone to $7000 per annum. There had been no claims during that past year. I managed to arrange insurance for $3800 per annum. Still a very costly item above wages, holidays, allowances, schooling etc. If this could be regarded as typical, is it any wonder that employers are not interested in training Apprentices.

[Insurance salesman]

By 1983, the failure of the optimistically predicted resources boom to return Australia to post-war prosperity was beginning to be recognised; the effects were being experienced in terms of restricted job opportunities and soaring unemployment. The concern and bewilderment of young people faced with the consequences of structural change of this degree come through vividly in comments like these:

Sad, there is no miracle cure for unemployment that I can offer. Australian industry is in the first stage of complete stagnation. Australian agriculture and mining are capital-rather than labour-intensive. Repetitive clerical and other white-collar work is being superseded by computers. I notice that the label on the front of this questionnaire is printed by a computer printing system, with my computer file number on it. Why not employ a few unemployed young people to file questionnaires, type address labels, and do general office work like that? It may not be much, but at least it's a start. Technologically, a great leap backwards - socially a blow against unemployment and against multinational computer corporations.

[University student]

I think that the source of the problem lies in the economic situation. Although Australia is an extremely lucky country we don't seem to be able to compete well enough with other countries. We seem to import a lot of goods that could and should be made here and often if they are made here they are far more expensive than those imported.

[Customs officer]

It seems that we're well and truly in a recession and it's not going to be easy to get out of it. I can see it becoming so bad that kids my age, or younger, may never have a job - their whole lives through. Not very optimistic am I? You learn pretty quickly to expect the bad and rejoice at the good. I hate being so pessimistic but I was already pretty pessimistic before going on the dole and I've become worse.

[Unemployed for 18 months; has a part-time job as 'a check-out chick']
And sometimes bitterness creeps in:

How many people who answer this questionnaire propose a Marxist solution to the problems of the economy? At least, it seems clear to me, unemployment can't be treated as an isolated problem. If the system is such that decreasing the active workforce will maximise profit (for the minority in control of industry) then this is what will happen of course. The policies of the government seem aimed at making it attractive to industry to increase productivity; i.e. to maximise profit by decreasing the workforce employed. Anyway, it's one thing to say the system's up the creek, but I'm afraid I don't have a constructive alternative to solve the problems of the world! My friends and family (and probably myself soon) have forced unemployment; if the only way you have to make a living is by selling your labour, and if no one wants to buy your labour, then obviously this leads to hardship and demoralisation.

[Graduate in Mathematics (Hons); part-time tutor and research assistant]

One young man - an aircraft engine fitter in the army - summed up the views of many young people on the employment situation:

I have never been unemployed. But plenty of my school buddies have been. From talking to them I have some idea of their frustration. I think the unemployment situation can be looked at this way: 1. Unskilled labour readily available but not required. 2. Skilled labour required by industry but not available. 3. Overseas interests seeing the opportunity; e.g. Utah. 4. Overseas interests reaping Australia's Resources. 5. A cumbersome public service system which is parasitic. 6. Employed people wanting more pay for less work. 7. Worker output of a low level.

Taken together, the industrial and occupational trends presented a very bleak prospect for many young people seeking work in 1983.
The Vulnerability of Youth

Life for my generation I do not think will ever be the easy life it seems to have been for those who were graduates of the 1960s. It is obvious that as the tail end of the baby boom we'll pay more taxes than our parents to support all the people on old age pensions. Unemployment will always be with us as our industries become more technically aware. I'm sure we will emerge from this depression soon but it has left scars on the community and our expectations have changed. I would like to have a job with satisfaction and security but I am not hopeful.

[Archaeology student]

YOUNG PEOPLE AND UNEMPLOYMENT

Very few of these young people are optimistic enough to believe that unemployment will decline, at least in the short-term. They expect that jobs will be increasingly hard to find. The following responses are typical:

I don’t see a bright future for anyone. Jobs are harder to get and the state of the economy is the pits. Taxes go up all the time, people aren’t spending as much, therefore not many jobs can be kept open - many have to be put off. I was put off work for a week because people weren’t buying - trade was slack.

[Shop assistant]

However in the future I don’t expect things will get any brighter; job prospects will lessen, it will be a natural fact for unemployment rates to be high. With many countries having high deficits it seems likely that the world financial system will remain in poor shape or worsen; and the governments of many countries will become more unstable.

[Computer programmer]

Their assessments are not so different from those which the OECD has been making in various papers and reports during the last decade. Unemployment is seldom distributed evenly throughout a community. A general rate of unemployment of about 10.0 per cent conceals the much higher rates of unemployment borne by some groups in the community. It also conceals the relative immunity to unemployment of other groups. Young people have for a long time been among the groups in the community most vulnerable to the kinds of labour market change which produce unemployment. As far back as the 1950s when full employment reigned and the general rate of unemployment was
under 2.0 per cent, the rate for teenagers was about twice the rate for adults. Labour markets tend to discriminate against those with few skills, no experience and an unproven work ethic.

In 1983, a panel of examiners from the OECD visited Australia at the request of the newly elected Labor government to review the major economic and social problems affecting young people in Australia, and to suggest policies and programs to meet the needs of young people. They commented in their report:

Young people in Australia face an immediate unemployment problem and the prospects of a more chronic and ominous underemployment problem.

The unemployment problem will benefit from better macro-economic conditions that improve employment in Australia overall. But Australian authorities should recognise that, for two reasons, a healthy economy is not enough to solve the problems of young people in the labour market:

(i) The sheer number of unemployed youths is so large that under even the best growth conditions, it will take an intolerably long time to create the needed jobs; and
(ii) new technology and shifts in the world economy are contributing to structural changes in the Australian economy that are sharply reducing employment opportunities for those young people with only limited education and occupational skills.¹

Summing up, they warned:

Right now Australia does not have enough jobs for young people, and, increasingly, the jobs that are available are part-time and marginal, many of them in declining industries and shrinking occupational areas. As the Australian economy recovers from the current recession, it appears that, at the margin, employment growth will be in areas that will not favour young people.²

These assessments are borne out by the effects on youth unemployment of the various industrial and occupational trends outlined in the last chapter.

**YOUTH EMPLOYMENT**

For reasons discussed in the concluding chapters of this book, young people, especially teenagers, have been particularly affected by the decline in full-time work. Sweet estimates that ‘the proportion of all 15-19 year-olds involved in full-time employment has roughly halved between 1966 and 1986. In 1966, 59.2 per cent of all 15-19 year olds held a full-time job. By 1986, this had fallen to 31.1 per cent, or less than one in three of the age group.³ Summing up developments, Davis, in a 1983 study based on Sydney’s western suburbs, reported that ‘the last ten to fifteen years have witnessed major changes in the nature of new jobs being offered in the labour market. At the lower end of the scale, affecting 15-19 year olds especially, there has been the disappearance of thousands of early school leaver full-time jobs while there has been the appearance of a large number of part-time jobs’.⁴ For the early school leaver,
Davis argued, the job market is not only bad, but it is in irreversible decline, and this decline is quite apart from that due to economic recession. The result has been, as Sweet points out, that 'since the mid-1960s the full-time labour force has accounted for a steadily declining proportion of teenagers, full-time employment has declined in importance as an activity for teenagers, and part-time employment, unemployment and full-time education have occupied a steadily increasing proportion of the age group'.

Part-time work, offering as it does few hours of employment, no security and little prospect of career, is considerably less attractive to the young unemployed than it is to school students. Such work, it now appears from recent research, is unlikely even to provide a stepping stone to more stable employment in the primary labour market.

Moreover, limits on the amount of money which recipients of unemployment benefits can earn without reducing the benefit are a further disincentive to the unemployed to engage in inadequate part-time work. Until 1983, earnings of more than $6 per week resulted in progressive reduction and eventual loss of unemployment benefits. Thus, the proportion of unemployed young people working part-time showed little increase in the decade between 1971 and 1982, though it jumped sharply in 1983, indicating that 'when the labour market is depressed ... teenagers not at school are prepared to take the part-time jobs normally filled by school students'.

The responses of the young people employed part-time but wanting full-time work show how some of them felt about their part-time jobs:

I have a part-time job as a waitress and I am also on unemployment benefits. I enjoy my job but unfortunately cannot get more work as it has to be done evenly by the staff.

I work as a part-time shop assistant in a grocery store. I mostly pack shelves and groceries for customers. At the moment I feel as if this job could be the only one I'll get and I'm not real happy about doing that for the rest of my life. I was unemployed until I found this job.

At the moment I am lucky enough to have a job even though it is only casual. The work I do isn't really all that exciting (I work in a food processing factory) but then it gives me something to do and money I otherwise wouldn't have. This is the first and only job I have ever had. Before I got the job I was unemployed for over a year.

**YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN 1983**

The year 1983 demonstrated the degree of disadvantage in the labour market that young people bear when unemployment is high. Of young people registered as being in the labour force in August 1983 when the general rate of unemployment was just about 10.0 per cent, 22.6 per cent (over 165 000) of 15-19 year olds and 14.7 per cent (over 157 000) of 20-24 year olds were recorded as being unemployed. Estimates of unemployment for young people, particularly those aged 15-19 years, are somewhat distorted by the fact that so many of them (an
increasing number in recent years) are still at school and not in the labour force. The higher unemployment rates for teenagers then reflect the smaller numbers, especially of the younger age groups, who enter the work force.9

There are other complicating factors also, including the numbers of school students who are in the labour force as part-time workers, and the hidden unemployment represented in those who return to school and those who drop out of both education and the work force because they cannot find jobs. Nevertheless, of those teenagers recorded as being in the workforce in August 1983, more than one in five were unemployed. The 165 100 teenagers (15-19 years) and the 157 200 young people aged 20-24 years recorded as unemployed at that time represented close to half the total recorded unemployment of 686 800 persons.

As the rate of unemployment rose in the decade 1973 to 1983, so also did the average duration of unemployment for all age groups. In 1983, 15-19 year olds were on average unemployed for 32 weeks and 20-24 year olds for 42 weeks. Nearly 66 per cent of unemployed 15-19 year olds and nearly 70 per cent of unemployed 20-24 year olds had been unemployed for 13 weeks or more.

Since these are averages, some people are unemployed for shorter periods and others for longer periods. Before 1975 most people were unemployed for short periods only. Since 1975, long-term spells of unemployment have been increasing. In 1983, long-term spells of unemployment accounted for 73 per cent - nearly three-quarters - of unemployment months, indicating that it is the long-term unemployed who have borne the greatest burden of unemployment in the last decade. In these circumstances it is not difficult to believe the statement of one young man in mid-1983, over six months after the end of the previous school year:

No bull - out of 30 kids in my form last year 24 are still unemployed.

**EDUCATION OR WORK?**10

The labour market conditions of 1983 were very much in the minds of young people deciding whether to enter the job market or to continue their education. Arguing for continued education was the fact that in the post-war years educational qualification has been seen and valued as a means to employment of a kind which is likely to bring benefits in terms of income, status and personal satisfaction. In other words, the more education, the better the job and the less the likelihood of unemployment. Secondly, in a tight job market staying at school or returning to school (with the possibility of better employment in the future) may seem preferable to unemployment or unsatisfactory employment. The following comments illustrate:
I liked school but I suppose I was like every teenager. By the age of 15 you can not wait for the year to end and not have to worry about going back to school the next day. But because my brother found it hard to find a job, my parents said I had to go through to the end of Grade 12. My brother left after Grade 10. I believe I benefited from doing Senior. If I had left at the end of Grade 10 I think I would have been very difficult to live with. I would have been difficult to live with because I do not think I would have found a job so soon after leaving school.

[Juice Chemist in a sugar mill]

I'm a full-time student, doing a secretarial course. It's not a bad course, but I'm only doing it because I know I'll be able to find a job when I'm qualified. Before I decided to do this course I spent a few months looking for jobs and going to interviews.

[TAFE student]

This year I returned to school but changed schools. I attended school for 13 years but because I didn't get really (or very) good results I decided, after being unemployed for a couple of months, to go back to school, this time to a government matriculation college.

On the other hand, there has been a growing realisation that staying at school or even completing tertiary education is no longer the absolute guarantee of a good job that it was in the 1950s and 1960s. This is particularly the case where the qualifications are not specifically vocational. In these circumstances, some young people who might in easier times have continued their education choose instead to take whatever opportunities may offer in the labour market. These considerations are reflected in the following comments:

I feel angry about unemployment for graduates - I am always over-qualified and under-experienced for jobs I go for.

[Honours graduate in English; unemployed for about eight months]

Though a BA person always feels more qualified for a job than desk work or a filing clerk it's a fact that the BA degree does not enable you to walk straight into a specific job. One always has to do further specialised training to go somewhere specific. So while knowing I should not expect to get a high prestige job once I finished Uni I was disappointed. However jobs are few and far between. Also - everyone at work expects I'll move elsewhere within a few years - I suppose for a better job. And I really needed to start at the bottom of the working world to be introduced to it and to work out what I'm best at.

[Filing clerk and relief receptionist]

Although I didn’t complete Year 10, I feel I should have stayed and at least completed Year 11. I now find quite a few jobs, which I can’t apply for. Year 11 is compulsory or they won’t bother to even accept an application. On the other hand, if I did stay on, I think it would have been a lot harder to obtain employment, things were starting to get tougher. I did a commercial course in Year 10 and most girls who left in that year had better jobs than those who stayed the extra year.

[Office secretary]

The uncertainties of the choice between education and work are expressed by the young woman who spends her time in a grocery shop packing shelves and filling bags for customers:
I don’t like to think about the future at the moment. There seems to be nothing to look forward to. I seem to wish we could go back in time when I was in Grade 10. I should have got a job then and not done Year 11 and 12. Most of my friends have gone to college or Uni and I just wonder will they be able to get the jobs they want when they get out.

Thus different decisions about continuing education may be made by similar groups of young people at different times, depending on whether they see occupational advantage in continuing education or in taking jobs or other training opportunities when these offer. There are young people, however, for whom the choices are made by external circumstances.

I left school at 15 because I lived with my grandparents. They were my Guardians - 'parents split'. The Government paid a pension for us my brother and I; school fees, living allowance etc. and that stopped when I turned 16 so I had no choice but to leave so that I could earn money. My Grandparents didn't have enough to keep us. If I hadn't had to go to work and there was enough money I would have gone onto University to study Physiotherapy for retarded children. I did enquire about going back to school and University but I wouldn't have enough to keep me, with Government rates. I still live at home and I help out with expenses. I also do housework and my Grandmother is now an invalid, so I keep very busy.

[Receptionist in a solicitor’s office]

I was doing HSC and having no trouble (that sounds conceited) and had been going steady with my boyfriend for quite a while and got a bee in my bonnet about independence. I lived with my mother (my parents are divorced) and we were never well off. Mum gave me everything she ever could and I felt it was time to give her some comfort back, not that she ever asked for it and I doubt ever thought about it. So I rang the State Bank while still at school and asked if they had any jobs.

[Bank officer, now married]

For some young people, there is no question of leaving education before gaining tertiary qualifications. On the whole, these are students whose family background, traditions and encouragement and/or their own personal aspirations are a stimulus and support to high occupational aspirations and expectations. They tend to come from socially, educationally and economically advantaged families; they are suited by the academic emphasis and processes of schooling, achieve well and have or develop confidence in their own capacities. They take for granted the need for tertiary qualifications and look forward to an appropriately high status job at the end of their education. For example:

At the present time, I am studying 1st Year Agricultural Science at the University of Queensland. The subjects I completed at school were nearly all relevant to the work I am now doing and provided a very strong basis towards it. Fortunately, I had some idea of what I would be doing now, therefore, I chose my school subjects quite carefully and successfully. As for using my subjects to obtain a job after school if I desired to, they would have been no doubt of little use to the vast majority of jobs.

My future prospects are considerably better than what they are for many other people my age because of my educational attainments and my family’s resources.
(NB: In your previous questionnaires you tried to ascertain the living standards of the people involved by asking how many TVs and the like. On this questionnaire our family rated very poorly because we don’t believe in having numerous TVs for instance, but in actual fact we are better off than most - for instance we have a 64 square sandstone house which is filled with antiques and we own a couple of farms. Perhaps you could modify your approach to ascertaining standard of living.) Also if I did become unemployed at any stage I would have more chance of re-securing employment than most people, and in the interim wouldn’t be adverse to doing any type of work - even if it was being a gardener with the city council.

[Fifth year Medical student]

These are the kinds of young people for whom secondary schooling was originally designed and who still have most to gain from the academic emphasis and the approaches to learning of most schools. At the other end of the educational spectrum are those young people whom the school processes do not suit and who look forward to leaving school as soon as they can. These students are likely to be not only socially and economically disadvantaged but also low achievers in education. They dislike school, find it mostly irrelevant to their needs and leave early to try their luck in the job market. A 1982 OECD paper on the views of the young on education and work reported:

Youth leave school for many reasons. But when asked why they leave, two reasons are overwhelmingly given: they are fed up with school and prefer to start working right away.11

Comments by many of the early school leavers convey the same message:

School was a somewhat worthless experience for me because the subjects given might be OK if I wanted to be a doctor but when it comes to normal jobs, except for manual arts which are only offered up to Grade 10, there are no subjects available. I can very confidently say that this is the reason why I left school.

[Boner and slicer in a meatworks]

At the time I was going to school I disliked it and couldn’t wait to leave and get a job. Now I realise they were about the best days of my life with no worries etc. that I now face.

[Cashier in a supermarket]

I never enjoyed school, it was just a place I had to go to until I was old enough for work.

[Shop assistant]

School to me was a disaster I didn’t enjoy it. Each day was like having a duel. It wasn’t worthwhile at all. The teachers weren’t helpful at all. School should teach students how to survive. There to me was no good things at school only hell.

[Unemployed]

Williams, drawing on information from the ACER Longitudinal Study, sums up the circumstances which differentiate the definite school stayers from the early school leavers:

Most notable, perhaps, is the fact that half of the nation’s youth will not complete all twelve years of secondary schooling. Three factors among those we considered are
important. The first concerns doing well in school. Those who learn well what schools teach have three times the chance (of completing Year 12) of those who fail to learn. All of this makes sense. Those who learn well are rewarded by schools, find school a reasonably congenial place, and stay on. Those who do not learn well find school a less than rewarding experience and, understandably, leave. Since, in this instance, we are talking about the learning of fairly basic skills, well within the capabilities of most students, some of the blame for this situation must lie with the process of schooling. We speculate that methods of teaching and learning are not always tailored to the needs of students.\textsuperscript{12}

In times of high unemployment many of these early school leavers end up unemployed or in unskilled and insecure employment. Many of them become the long-term unemployed.

**WHO ARE THE LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYED?**

The point has already been made that general statistics on unemployment rates disguise the fact that some groups have higher rates of unemployment than others. The same applies to young people. As a group, young people are recognised as being disadvantaged in tight labour markets, but within the group the disadvantage is borne by some young people more than others and by some not at all. There are particular circumstances which contribute to making some young people more vulnerable to unemployment than others and to making them likely members of the long-term unemployed. Among the most important indicators of success or otherwise in employment and life chances are: their educational experience and attainment; the socio-economic, educational and ethnic background of the family; where they live, and whether or not they are already unemployed. In many cases most or all of these circumstances are inter-linked so that the young person who is disadvantaged in socio-economic and family background is also a person who does not do well at school, leaves early and runs a high risk of being unemployed.

Some recent analysis of data from the Australian Longitudinal Study (ALS) by McRae and Merrilees\textsuperscript{13} fills out the picture of youth unemployment. The report shows that the chances of being unemployed for a long time are increased if the young people are Aborigines or Vietnamese youth born in Vietnam, or early school leavers, particularly if they left school because they disliked it or were no good at it. The chances of being long-term unemployed greatly increase also for young people from single parent families or from families where the fathers are in blue-collar rather than professional or managerial occupations. The risks are higher also for young people in rural areas or provincial cities or country towns.

Finally, there is the fact that unemployment begets unemployment. There is considerable evidence now to show that those young people who have been unemployed for any length of time are likely to go on being unemployed, or at best to subsist on a series of temporary or part-time jobs. Furthermore, many
unemployed young people come from families some of whose members are also unemployed.

The comment of a young CYSS Project Officer from his first-hand experience gives life to the stark research findings:

The other frustrating element in this work is, of course, the broken lives which one is in constant contact with. I'm dealing with the poor, the socially inept, the emotionally disturbed, the violent, the luckless. It is so sad to see the social and family situations of some young people, and to witness them creating similar situations themselves. All this can lead to a sense of futility.

Given the circumstances and trends of the 1980s, it is these young people with their multiple disadvantages who are most likely to be unsuccessful in finding employment which is any better than short-term and insecure.

**BLAMING THE VICTIMS**

The extent of unemployment outlined in this and the previous chapter leaves little doubt that jobs were scarce in 1983, particularly for young people and, among these, for early school leavers without the advantages of educational qualification and a good socio-economic family background. This being so, it is curious that so many of the young people quoted in Chapter 1 showed so little awareness of the realities of the labour market and that so many were prepared to condemn, often in emotional terms, their unemployed peers.

The thought of high unemployment clearly arouses strong feelings on one side or the other, but it is young people who are the main target of community criticism. As unemployment for people in older age groups has increased in recent years, it is noticeable that the community as a whole is less ready to blame the older unemployed - the retrenched and redundant - than it is to condemn the young. The older unemployed tend to be seen as victims of industrial circumstances beyond their control. Young people are less certainly exculpated.

Why this should be so is only partly explained by the generation gap - the predisposition of older generations to find that the young do not measure up to the standards set by their own generation. More important is the place that work holds in the thinking and values of the community. The older unemployed are seen to have a proven work ethic and record. The young have no such evidence of acceptable attitudes and reliable behaviour. Their unemployment, however caused, challenges long established concepts of the way in which people should organise their days and spend their lives. In short, unemployment challenges the 'work ethic' which has been an integral component of industrialised societies.

For the young, unemployment means that they cannot make the crucial transition from education to work; they cannot acquire evidence of a 'work ethic'. The implications of their predicament are taken up in the next chapter.
Unemployment and the Work Ethic

... to be employed is, in our society, to somehow monetarily justify your existence.

THE TRANSITION OF YOUTH TO ADULT

Every society develops its own codes which mark the transition of child to adult. In simpler societies these are usually formal and clear-cut, closely related to physical maturity. In the more complex societies of the industrialised world, the links between physical maturity and adulthood have been gradually submerged beneath an ad hoc collection of differing concepts of when a young person becomes an adult. Adult status and rights have been granted to young people over time with little coherence. The age of responsibility and accountability differs between and even within societies, depending on whether the young person is to drive a car, vote, marry, defend the country, contract debts or be fully subject to the processes of adult law and justice. With the ever-increasing length of pre-work education, there are incongruities between being biologically an adult and financially a dependent child; between the restriction of responsibility within the school and the various forms of legal accountability outside the school.

Yet amid this confusion of standards, there has developed in industrialised societies an informal but still clearly recognised process by which young people move from the status of child/youth to that of adult. In this process, entry into the full-time paid workforce has become the crucial point both materially and symbolically. This has been the signal that young people have been accepted as adults and have been accorded place and status as members of the society.

In the process of transition from youth to adulthood, education has retained the complementary position with work that it has held throughout history as the period of preparation and qualification for adulthood, though its forms and length have differed and changed according to the circumstances of the society and the time. To the young person leaving education, it is abundantly clear that the social recognition of adulthood depends on successful entry to the paid workforce. This has been the main and ultimate end of the education process, beginning with schooling.

The experience of full employment in the decades immediately after the second world war had disposed most countries, including Australia, to take for
IS ANYONE LISTENING?

granted an unhindered transition from education to work for young people. Even then, the transition had its difficulties for young people; but the often painful processes of choosing or simply drifting into jobs or careers and of settling into a highly regulated and hierarchical workplace were problems for the individuals concerned. While jobs were plentiful, transition was not a social problem. It became one in the second half of the 1970s when the changing labour market no longer guaranteed jobs for all young people. Youth unemployment has disrupted the established process of development of young people to adult status; for many young people, it extends the period of dependency beyond education - in some cases almost indefinitely. Thus the conditions and patterns of the labour market have a significance for young people far beyond their importance for those who are already adults and recognised as such by their society.

The importance of work in the transition of young people to adult status is a reflection of the central position that the occupation of individuals has held in most societies through history, both as an economic necessity and as a definer of social structures and classifications. The prosperity of a society depends on the capacities and efforts of its people; its character is closely related to the material and social recognition it accords to its variety of occupations. In most societies, work has been an obligation, stemming from the imperatives of continued existence. In industrialised societies, it has become as much a matter of morality as of necessity. What has been termed the 'work ethic' imposes a strong social consensus that each member of the community ought to work at an activity acceptable to the society in order to contribute to the wealth of the society, to progress and to the individual's own moral and material well being. As a consequence, work is seen by most people as essential, not simply for its financial returns but because it has become in large part the base on which the individual's own sense of place, identity and self-respect rests.

In the post-war decades, rising standards of affluence and of education had begun to affect attitudes to work. The expectation that work should bring satisfaction as well as financial reward was becoming more widespread: there was less uncritical acceptance that work - in the sense of what one has to do in order to eat or maintain one's comfort - is the prime object and necessity of living. Conversely, it was beginning to be recognised that the maintenance of the way of life and living standards no longer requires the continuous hard effort of the whole population. Reductions in the hours of the working week are a reflection of this. Overall, out of the security and affluence of the post-war period came a greater emphasis on quality of living and of work together with more critical attitudes to work. These developments were symptomatic of a society which did not feel itself under economic threat; which was secure enough to question patterns of work and living and to concern itself with non-material concepts and issues.

The period of security however was not long enough to produce fundamental re-thinking of attitudes to work. Though changes in the patterns of work have continued during the last two decades and, in some cases like the increases in
part-time work, gained momentum, these changes have come as enforced effects of the recession and industrial change rather than from any widespread philosophic commitment to a more leisureed society or to improving quality of life and work. This was already being recognised by many young people in 1983. A young teacher who happens to enjoy her own job, ‘enormously’ nevertheless comments:

All my very good friends have jobs but not exactly what they would like to be doing. Job satisfaction is a fast diminishing privilege for reasons such as economic climate and qualifications required. I believe that things won’t improve as quickly as they did after the 30s depression (if they improve at all) because of technological advancements. This somewhat pessimistic attitude certainly affects my teaching philosophy but in a positive way. The development of self-esteem and character development become high priorities in my program because I believe these human qualities are diminishing and will continue to diminish in today’s society.

Despite changing economic and industrial circumstances, the work ethic remains strongly entrenched in the thinking and way of life of industrialised societies. People are expected to get a job - whether satisfying or not - and to earn their living. Unemployment is a transgression against the work ethic. Consequently, as Holbrook and Bessant (1987) point out:

The strong moral pressures to be employed mean that for adults there are few alternatives to employment that escape censure. The unemployed, and particularly those drawing benefits, are treated with suspicion and scorn. The stigma associated with this state, as opposed to the inherent rightness attached to work, is evident in the attitudes of young and old.

The sense that unemployment is morally wrong goes deep in community thinking, as the comment from a young Aboriginal girl studying to become a teacher shows:

I never been unemployed, even my family. My mother always say if you go on unemployment I would feel ashamed, that what she would say.

A university student writes in more general terms:

Unemployment is probably not a reality for me but the thought is alarming as I can’t stand being idle. I have lived with people who are unemployed with little hope of getting employment; hence any scheme to promote employment is in essence good because our whole upbringing has been geared to one day having a job.

And a girl finally enrolled in a government program after five months of unemployment writes:

I found being unemployed very degrading and embarrassing. Nobody knew I was on the dole not even my parents. I used to tell people I was living on the savings which went in the first couple of weeks that was on the dole.
The sense of social disapproval incurred by the unemployed person is an influential factor in the erosion of self-confidence and self-respect which, for most people, follows lack of success in obtaining a job. What this can mean for young people is discussed in detail in later chapters, but is indicated here in the comment of a student taking an Arts degree course at a university:

The main problem is the stigma attached to being unemployed. That is what sends many unemployed to alcohol/drugs/sleep; forms of escapism which temporarily soften the harsh reality of being in a world which emphasises being able to pay your way, with money you've earned honestly.

THE SHAPING OF ATTITUDES TO UNEMPLOYMENT

The cultural conditioning of the work ethic is the base on which community attitudes to unemployment rest, but what people think and say about unemployment and the unemployed is also strongly influenced by the expectations induced by experience of labour market conditions. Part of the communal experience of labour markets in Australia has been the period of full employment enjoyed between the war years and the mid-1970s. These postwar years were a period in which work was plentiful and unemployment (at under 2.0 per cent) negligible. Behind these happy statistics was a booming, expanding economy based on cheap energy, new technology and a wealth of natural resources and primary production. As in the nineteenth century, expanding educational opportunity became a basic requirement for national progress and prosperity. The demand for graduates and for educated and skilled people of all kinds seemed insatiable; but even for the early school leavers and the totally unqualified, jobs were there for the taking. In the belief that governments had learnt from the depression of the 1930s how to 'manage' the economy, people looked to the future with unbounded optimism.

This basic optimism was continually reinforced during the second half of the 1970s by the assurances of governments who perceived that their own interests lay in fostering the notion of unemployment as a cyclical and therefore temporary experience due mainly to overseas influence beyond Australian control, but certain to pass with an upturn in the U.S. economy and/or the impetus given by an Australian resources boom. Newspaper headlines and political speeches between 1975 and 1983 present ample evidence of this kind of hopefulness.

At the same time, a growing community concern about levels of youth unemployment was to a large extent diverted by government assurances that young people were unemployed largely because of deficiencies in their schooling and preparation for work or in their own attitudes to work. A statement by the then Minister for Education, Senator Carrick, in August 1977 is typical of many public comments of the time:
They (the students) were going out into the world incapable of handling the simplest approaches of seeking jobs, even the ability to make a telephone call or write out an application. The hard questions now being asked indicated that the educational system was seen by the community as inadequate for the '70s and the '80s.2

Comments to the same effect were heard frequently from other noted community personages. Professor Harry Messel, for example, was reported as complaining that ‘we were trying to turn out a nation of “undisciplined selfish guitar-and-billiard players”’.3 To remedy such deficiencies, the Commonwealth Government in 1979 established the Commonwealth School-to-Work Transition Program, focusing primarily on ‘the 50 000 young people who now leave school each year with poor employment prospects’.4 The need for these initiatives, said the then Minister for Employment and Youth Affairs in a press release a year later, ‘resulted from the fact that the education system had failed a significant minority of young people’.5

Over the same period, the attitudes of young people towards work were also constantly under fire from employers. A survey of thirty employers in North Queensland, for example, produced responses by no means untypical of employer comment in the media. Two-thirds of these employers saw young people as being less willing to work than their older counterparts: ‘They want jobs, not work’.6 Also indicative was the comment by the Secretary of the Victorian Employers’ Federation, reported in The Australian:

Many employers were hiring married women and older workers in preference to school leavers because they had higher academic standards.... Most school leavers faced an ‘environment shock’ in the move from school to work because they were psychologically unprepared for unemployment.7

Repeated comments of this kind about the education and attitudes of young people, given prominence in the media and illustrated by anecdote, seep into public consciousness and help to create a ‘public opinion’. This in turn becomes the context within which individuals tend to interpret their own direct or indirect experiences of the labour market, as the following comment indicates:

I have had no personal experience with job hunting or youth employment schemes. However, all my friends who pursued a job, found one if they went about it in a polite and courteous way, with a motivation to find a suitable job. Therefore I have seen no great evidence that the unemployment problem is ‘practically’ as bad as it is ‘statistically’ made out to be.

[Veterinary Science student; went to university straight from a ‘highly academic private school’]

The strength of popular conceptions of unemployment and the unemployed is such as to convince even some of the unemployed themselves:
If I could do anything about youth employment, I would get all the real dole bludgers and kick them in the army.

[Unemployed early school leaver]

As will be discussed later (Chapter 7), young people become unemployed for a much wider variety of reasons than their older counterparts, and some of them at least are seen as failing to conform to traditionally accepted patterns of work, work ethic and behaviour. It is from these that the 'dole bludger' criticism draws its strength, as the following comments indicate:

As a person who has, at times, a difficult job, seeing a good portion of my wages go to taxes is disheartening. The dole is wasted on too many people who just don't want to work. Why should they, when they can do what they want, get their fortnightly cheque and head for the nearest pub.

I feel sorry for the people that try their best to obtain employment but can't get it. They, unfortunately, have to bear the burden of public outcry. Let's face it, the ones that don't want to work don't care what is thought about them. They're laughing at our stupidity for supporting them.

[Policewoman; previously bank typist; never unemployed]

They (employers) can't get replies to their positions vacant let alone anyone to stick the job out and do it properly. Kids have changed so much ever since I left school 7-8 years ago. They need a good kick up the backside and I think the only way is by kicking them onto their own two feet not make it so easy for them.

I realise that jobs aren't easy to find these days but there are some jobs. Not all kids are irresponsible but the bad make it difficult for the good.

[Sales representative]

It is not surprising then that, while community attitudes to the unemployed differ as widely as Chapter 1 indicates, there remains an underlying community sense of unemployment as a blameworthy state, particularly for young people. Yet in 1983 (and in other years of high unemployment since then) the experience of unemployment has not been confined to the most disadvantaged. A very wide range of young people found that getting a job was a difficult, frustrating and time-consuming task. How the young people responding to this questionnaire went about looking for work and what came of it are discussed in the following chapters.
References and Notes

Part 1

(NB: Full citations are given in the bibliography at the end of the book.)

Chapter 1
1 Blakers, 1990a: 8-10, 90-91, 118
2 ANOP, 1984

Chapter 2
1 Blakers, 1990a: Chapter 2
2 Gruen, 1981: 11
3 For discussion of hidden unemployment, under-employment and the measurement of unemployment, see Blakers, 1990a: 29-31; 72-81.
4 OECD, 1986a: 3
5 Beed and McNair, 1983
6 OECD, 1986a: 4
7 Australian Science and Technology Council (ASTEC), 1983: 3
8 Economic Planning Advisory Council (EPAC), 1986
9 ASTEC, 1983: 84
10 Blakers, 1990: 33-48
11 EPAC, 1986: 5

Chapter 3
1 OECD, 1986a: 26
2 ibid: 18
3 Sweet, 1987: 2
4 Davis, 1983: 76
5 ibid: 99
6 Sweet, 1987: 14
7 Miller and Volker, 1987
8 Sloan and Wooden, 1984: 7
9 See Blakers, 1990a: 29-31; 72-81
10 See Blakers, 1990a: Chapter 8
42 IS ANYONE LISTENING?

11 OECD, 1982: 49
12 Williams Trevor, 1987: 110
13 McRae and Merrilees, 1987; See Blakers, 1990: 298

Chapter 4
1 Holbrook and Besant, 1987: 40
2 Carrick, J. (Senator), The Australian, 31 August 1977
3 Messel, H. The Examiner, 17 October 1977
4 Ministerial Statement, 22 November 1979
5 Minister for Employment and Youth Affairs, Mr Ian Viner, Press Release, 92/80, 1 October 1980
6 Sungaila, 1981: 382; See also Blakers, 1990a: Chapter 4
7 The Australian, 2 September 1977: 9
Part 2

Looking for Work

I work as a shop assistant, but I would like to be able to manage my own business. I enjoy my work. I like meeting people and being of service to them. What I don't like is the attitude of many employers in this day and age. They, including mine, take too much advantage over the fact that the workers can be replaced almost immediately. They are always away, leaving senior staff to deal with all difficulties (which is not their job), and if we complain they threaten to replace us. It is the age of the down-trodden worker and the unfairly accused unemployed (e.g. all unemployed are dole bludgers). I found my first job through walking the streets, asking at every place I passed. My present job was found for me by a past employer who (while I was working for him) sold his business and recommended me to the next owner. At one stage I was out of work for 18 months, and during those months I went for an average of 15 interviews a week with an average of 15 'no’s' a week. It is very disheartening and I found myself in a deep depression after 7 months of continual refusals. I lost all my self-esteem and all my confidence. I even contemplated suicide, (but thought more of my family to be able to carry it out). The worst thing of all was going to an interview and they tell you that they think you've got the job but that they will let you know, and you wait and wait and wait for that damned phone to ring and it doesn't; that is the worst, and they are the worst people.

Chapter 5  A Friend in Need: The Job Search
Chapter 6  Close Encounters with Employers
Chapter 7  Choice or Necessity? Why are they Unemployed?
A Friend in Need: The Job Search

I found my first job (pump jockey at a service station) through a friend, my second (electrical technician for the government) through the CES and my third in the newspaper (electrical technician for a private hearing aid company). I also had a casual job at a pub, picking up glasses, that I got through getting drunk a lot.

[Unemployed for ten months]

MAKING THE LINKS

When jobs are scarce, the ways in which young people set about looking for work may well determine whether or not they are successful in finding a job. Securing employment means the successful linking of person with job. It generally involves action on two fronts: recruitment by employers and applications by young people. Depending on circumstances, the major initiative and activity can be on one side or on the other. In times of full employment, employers are likely to take vigorous action to attract staff; when jobs are scarce hopeful applicants compete for positions. Responses to the questionnaire leave little doubt that jobs were scarce and competition fierce in 1983:

While trying to get another job, out of 8 applications I got one interview and no jobs (often there were over 100 applicants).

[Graduate clerk]

Although I have had a few part-time jobs since the age of 15 this job is my first major full-time one that I have had. I had only been unemployed for about 5 months previous to this, after leaving school (completed Matriculation). I applied for the job along with others from the local paper. After receiving a reply, I researched the job more thoroughly and liked the opportunities it offered and as a result I managed to get the job over about 200 other applicants (good ego trip!). Five months of unemployment was enough for me, as it wore me thin in both funds and entertainment ideas.

[Trainee manager]

There are two ways of looking at the question of job-seeking. One focuses on the methods employers use to recruit young employees, especially school leavers; the other, on the ways young people try to find work. Though the perspective in the two cases differs, the methods are obviously common to both. They fall into two categories: the formal and the informal. Formal methods include the use of the
Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) or other employment agencies; advertisements in newspapers; selection examinations and aptitude tests; direct approaches by letter, telephone or in person. Informal methods involve the use of networks; that is, information from or active intervention by relatives, friends, acquaintances or other trusted or influential sources such as schools, business colleges and other institutions.

The object of the employer is to find and recruit the person who best fits the job and the circumstances. In many cases what is required will be specific vocational skills and/or experience, but in most situations personal qualities also rate highly: a pleasing personality, neatness, reliability, initiative. In some jobs (as will be seen in Chapter 6) it is these qualities which most influence employers in their choice of young recruits. There are also some jobs - generally in the secondary labour market - where low wages are the main consideration and where the requirement is therefore for the youngest possible employees.

Methods of recruitment differ widely among employers and particularly between large and small employers; but the three sources of recruitment of staff most cited by employers in a number of surveys during the last decade have been: the CES; advertisements in metropolitan and local newspapers; and information through the informal networks of friends and other employers. Large firms tend to use the first two of these as well as specific examination or aptitude test, though the informal networks can also play a significant part in final selection. Small employers use the CES, but rely heavily on the informal networks. For all employers, the interview, despite its acknowledged short-comings, appears to be of over-riding importance when a final selection has to be made. The chief purpose and attraction of the interview is that it allows employers - and in some circumstances applicants also - to form personal judgements, often based on subjective criteria.

Young people respond to and use all these methods in their efforts to find jobs, most of them using more than one method at a time and often acquiring different jobs in different ways. Favoured methods of job search vary according to circumstances, but young people, like employers, use informal networks wherever they can; and recent research on data from the Australian Longitudinal Study (ALS) appears to indicate that informal networks and direct approaches to employers are likely to be the most useful ways of finding jobs for most young people.

How the methods outlined above are used by young people and how effective they are as a means of finding work are the subject of many comments by the young people in their responses to the questionnaire.

**USING THE NETWORKS**

Such research as has been undertaken into recruitment practices and job search methods leaves little doubt that the use of networks is both widespread and
Employers, particularly small employers who on the whole do not have access to specially designed aptitude and selection tests, find it useful to draw on the opinions of friends, other employers, their own employees and other trusted sources before selecting from among many applicants. Personal knowledge of the applicant or the applicant's family also weighs heavily in the selection process. Thus young people who have relatives or friends able to give them information about job vacancies or to speak on their behalf have a considerable advantage in competitive job-hunting.

That young people are fully alive to the advantage that contacts confer in getting a job is clear in comments of which the following are typical of many:

There's not enough work around. It's not what you know but who you know that will get you work. My father works there and he got me the job and I have been off and on there for years.

[Unemployed four months]

My first and only job is as the old saying goes: 'it's not what you know, it is who you know'. My boyfriend's aunty told me about it. I wrote out close to 100 application letters and went for about 10 interviews before I got the job.

[Office worker; previously unemployed for four months]

I found my job through my mother. She knew one of the managers, so I got on. As the saying goes 'It's not what you know but who you know', and believe me that is so true. I know of about 30 people who got their jobs from knowing someone in the same workforce.

[Shop assistant]

An astonishing number of cases bears out the validity of this judgement. There are few young people among those responding who have not at one time or another had recourse to a contact to find a job.

FAMILIES AND FRIENDS

Close relatives are obviously a first line of attack for young people. Families have their own businesses or know someone else who has a business or can put in a word with their own employers. For some young people then, the family's own business is an immediate source of employment:

I found my first job through my brother - He was my boss (Aren't I lucky). I found the job I have now by discussing it with my husband and we both decided it would be better if I became a housewife.

[Housewife]

I am fortunate that I have my business but I am lucky my father is in the same field and he was able to guide me in my direction. Currently I've formed a company and have one employee full time and a couple of casuals. Contacts have been made in the 25 years my
father has been working in earthmoving, which is the key to success with a bit of management sense.  

[AFTER 5 YEARS, NOW OWN SIX LARGE MACHINES]

But being employed in the family business is not always the most desired or happiest of solutions to unemployment.

I work with my father and mother in a textile conversion business. Unfortunately because of unemployment problems for the last two months I have been forced into this job. It's not exactly my life ambition but it is a good steady job. It has its boring parts as well as its interesting ones.

On the whole I like the work. Working for my father is a bad point since you are abused a bit more, and don't feel as involved.

[Truck Driver]

Then I finally got a job but the company was going bankrupt so I left there. I was sacked. That day was one of the worst days in my life. I cried and cried, went up the street to the lunch shop and they offered me a job making lunches - YUK - but I told them that I'd ring them the next day.

That night I went out with my friends and got drunk - not a very mature or smart thing to do but it was fun. That night I arrived home and my father was waiting up for me. He has his own company. Well, he asked me to work for him again - yeah I could have had a job with him all along but I wanted to do it on my own. Well I didn't want to be a sandwich maker ... so I worked for dear old dad. It's a job and a good job but I'm tired of people calling me the 'boss's daughter'. I am but I pull my weight just as much as anyone else and there are less favours for me. I'm glad I have a job but sometimes I wish it wasn't my dad I was working for. Sometimes I wish I had a challenge. I feel so dull now my brain doesn't have much to do.  

[Unemployed for 11 months]

The usefulness of relatives in providing contacts leading to employment is not confined to any particular social group.

I am a qualified motor mechanic now and I am still working at the same job I had since I left school. I first found this job out by my brother-in-law who worked in the spare parts department.

I got this job because my brother works here too and when I left school I didn't know what I wanted to do so I thought I'd try it.  

[Animal attendant in a piggery]

The job I have now came about through connections my mother had with persons in the company. It was then up to me to be accepted as an agent. My age, marital status, (single) and newness to the state created obvious doubt.

[Insurance Salesman]

My parents banked with the ANZ and knew the girl there quite well and she organised an interview for me.  

[Bank Officer]

Young people in country areas are especially likely to need and use contacts:
School work experience programs are sometimes used by employers as sources of recruitment. As well as providing opportunity for school students to try themselves out in various kinds of work, these programs allow employers to get to know and to assess potential employees. For example, a 1985 report by the Victorian Employers Federation mentions 'evidence of work experience - vacation, part-time or school programs -' as being an important factor in recruitment of school leavers, though there is little information on how many young people in work experience actually get jobs on the strength of this, and little evidence that such programs lead directly to employment in most cases. Nevertheless, quite a number of responses to the questionnaire indicate that school work experience programs can lead to employment for school leavers:

Well I work down at -- Aquatic Centre as a Pool Attendant part-time casual. Yes I do like my job as it's in the sun and I get a tan at the same time. I also meet a lot of people. It was through work experience that I got the job and I keep coming back every season.

The first job I had was in a restaurant which was offered to me after I had finished a work experience program at that place. The job I have now was through a friend that used to work there.

I got my first job as an apprentice butcher because when I was still at school I used to clean the mincer and saw and drums and trays for the local butcher on Friday afternoons. The job I have now I got from a friend's father.

THE MORE FORMAL APPROACHES

Most commonly used among less personal methods of linking young people and jobs are aptitude tests, advertising in newspapers and direct approaches. As mentioned earlier, aptitude/selection tests are used mainly by large firms and government departments. Some of the young people who found employment this way report:

I had already sat the public service entrance exam before I finished school and subsequently resigned to join the P.S. - for the traditional reasons of security, good salary, etc.

I got my job at Telecom by doing a simple test along with about 200 people. They contacted us 4-5 weeks later telling us it was corrected. Five days later I got a telegram asking for an interview. Next day I had the interview, they showed me the department and next day I started work.
52 IS ANYONE LISTENING?

Though aptitude does not necessarily mean satisfaction:

I was offered my first job after doing the Public Service entrance exams. I am now a Clerk Class 1 doing salaries work and loathing it.

The advertising of jobs in metropolitan and/or local newspapers is a routine method of recruitment for large employers. Small employers also often use advertising, especially in local papers.

I found my job in our local paper which circulates through the local hills and outer country districts.

[Assistant in seedling nursery]

I now work in a mining company in Western Australia, a job which I found by looking in the newspaper.

I am employed in the insurance industry. My first 6 months have been a period of transition and learning. I enjoy my work. I found employment by replying to a Positions Vacant advertisement in our local paper.

Advertising can work the other way also, though this seems a rare initiative:

I found the job by placing an ad. in the Sydney Morning Herald and a man phoned me, and asked me to come for the interview, and that week I got the job.

[Office secretary]

Of the formal methods of job-seeking, the most effective seems to be the direct approach. This may be because it is a method of self-selection, partaking of some of the advantages employers find in the use of the informal networks. In other words, young people who use direct approaches by doing so indicate some of the qualities which employers value: at the very least, willingness to work, initiative, perhaps persistence. Direct approaches can be made in person, by letter or by telephone. However made, they allow employers to make more informed assessments of the qualities and potential of the applicant. A great many young people of all kinds report success by direct approaches.

My present job I was given after I had systematically been to most of the salons in my area and asked to be considered for an apprenticeship and when a manager said they didn’t need anyone I asked to leave my name, address and phone number plus an outline of my qualifications and experience plus references.

[Apprentice hairdresser]

I found my first job by constantly phoning up and inquiring after a job until they got sick of me and gave me a job interview and after several tries at several places I got a week’s trial and I am still working there.

[Factory machinist]
I really enjoy my work; it’s my first job, and it’s always been my ambition to work in the bank all my life. On my own accord I wrote to the different banks even before I was intending to get a job and kept in touch.

THE COMMONWEALTH EMPLOYMENT SERVICE (CES)

Both research and the responses indicate that most people find their jobs, particularly jobs in the primary labour market, through one or other of the methods already discussed. Miller and Volker\(^3\), analysing data from the ALS, reported that only 13.0 per cent of the sample indicated the CES as a successful method of getting a job compared with 20.0 per cent each for the other main methods: using contacts, direct approaches and responding to advertising. They also found, however, that the CES was the main method of job search when young people started looking for work. Many of the responses seem to confirm this:

I found my first job through the CES and my factory job by putting my name down on their list and then continued to go back at least once a week.  

[Factory machinist]

I got my first job through the CES. I registered about 4 months before the end of year 12. They rang me about 2 weeks later for a job, I applied and got it and I am still working there. They put me off for one week but put me back on again.  

[Shop assistant]

It is noticeable however that in many cases first jobs obtained through the CES are changed, presumably for better positions.

My first job as a shipping company clerk was found through the CES. It was the first job that I was accepted for.  

[Now a public servant]

My first job I found through the CES. The job I have now, my friend put in a word for me.  

[Employed as a statistician]

Miller and Volker\(^4\) also report that the tenure of a job obtained through the CES or on a government program is low compared with the tenure of jobs secured in other ways. Many of the jobs reported as being obtained through the CES are part-time or fill-in jobs for people with other longer-term objectives.

I found the CES to be helpful as far as they could reach out of their red tape.  

[Theology student; part-time work as a kitchenhand]

I am registered at the CES for a job once I finish school during the holidays. I am prepared to do anything for I need money for next year at university to support myself.  

[School student intending to study medicine]
54 IS ANYONE LISTENING?

Certainly, many of the unemployed report having had a job through the CES:

I found my first and second job through the CES. [Unemployed]

Others are glad of their casual or temporary jobs:

My first job was waitressing which I found by doing charity work. The job I have at present was a phone call from the CES and then an interview.

[Check-out operator in a supermarket three days a week; says 'it's a job']

My first job I found by walking in off the street and asking if there was any work available. The casual work I now have at present was obtained through the CES.

[A temporary office job]

However, even with the CES, knowing someone helps:

I found my first job through a friend at the CES - I was working for Social Security as a clerical assistant. The job I have just finished was on -- Island dishwashing. I found it through the CES in --.

[Travelling round Australia, then going overseas]

My present job I got through CES. I knew one of the employment officers there. I have friends who have been unemployed for 12 months and CES hasn't found them work.

[Office worker]

Using the CES as an employment agency may not be the most successful way of getting a good job, but it fills an important role for those young people who lack the advantages of personal networks and the self-confidence and know-how needed to use direct approaches or make the most of themselves in answering advertisements. How such young people view the CES is therefore a matter of some interest.

Given high rates of unemployment and a clientele disproportionately composed of long-term unemployed young people, the task of the CES is hardly an enviable one. It would be difficult and stressful even if every CES office were guaranteed adequate staffing and training for those who come in close contact with unemployed people. The reality has been that there are seldom enough staff and never enough time to provide the help that each individual needs. When there are no jobs, the CES can hardly manufacture them; so that many young people have experiences similar to the following:

I've been to the CES and the only jobs which are there are ones which you have to be a tradesman or had experience in that type of work. Nothing at all for younger people or just the average adult.

[Retrenched apprentice; now unemployed]

Your time is spent looking for a job, filling out dole forms, visiting the CES every six weeks just to be told that there is no work at present but keep looking on the boards.

[Employed in a sugar mill]
Often those who are helped to jobs by the CES are not particularly appreciative or at any rate do not express their appreciation. Many of the responses simply record the fact:

I found my job through the CES.  

[Receptionist]

A few do acknowledge the efforts made by CES officers:

I was unemployed for 6 months and during that time I really did not accomplish much. I was enlisted with the CES since I had left school and they had helped me with interviews all they could, which was much appreciated.

[Shop assistant]

My first job I got through a friend, my second job from CES. My job now through CES. Yes I have been unemployed for 3 months, its terribly boring and very depressing. In --, the CES is terrific. They are a great help.

[Public servant]

I think it is good the way the CES contacts you if they think they have a job you might be interested in or have a good chance of getting it. Also they set up an interview for you as well which is very useful.

[Unemployed for 10 months]

It has to be a matter of major concern however that the majority of young people responding who have had close links with the CES are highly and often bitterly critical of the treatment they received. The complaints fall into two main groups. Many criticise the inefficiency and ineffectiveness of CES offices:

I found my first job by putting my name down at the CES and applying for jobs from the boards they have there and going for interviews which were rung up for me by the CES. The jobs on the board were nearly all taken anyway. One time I pulled a job off the board, had the lady ring it up for me, then found it had been taken. The next day the same advertisement was on the board again. I pointed this out to the CES as false advertising though not even an apology was given, STINKS!

[Customs clerk; previously unemployed for 9 months]

I think with the CES, it's a case of 'shape up or ship out'. They are absolutely useless. Half the jobs on the boards are taken, they're so unfriendly, they make being on the dole feel worse.

[Unemployed; retrenched from previous job]

Many other young people are bitter and resentful at the way they are treated. They complain of attitudes ranging from indifference to rudeness.

The CES to me seems to be a group of uninterested people who really couldn't care less whether I had a job or not. The Social Security Department was even worse! - they treat you like a piece of dirt.

[Retrenched and now unemployed]
I found that the CES were the most ignorant and uncooperative people I have ever met and I feel they only worried about keeping their own jobs. I am sure I am not alone in my description of these people.

[Storeman/Driver in the Army]

I may have struck it unlucky, but the branch I go to is staffed by people who are offhand, rude, unhelpful, suspicious, and inconsistent with their information. Perhaps it is a defence against the tragedy they work with, but it makes seeking help more difficult.

[First-class Honours (English) graduate]

Of these kinds of comments, the most telling is that made by a social welfare officer:

I myself was unemployed for a short period of time. During that traumatic time I experienced unfeeling social workers and CES employees who round you up like a herd of sheep or cattle. One feels humiliation, dejection, bitterness, unloved, uncared for and a downright no hoper. At least I knew I was to carry on studying which is more than what some have today.

And perhaps the following observations by an employee in the Department of Social Security go some way towards explaining why young people sometimes find bureaucracy unsympathetic:

The unemployed have just had a pay rise, and it's going up again. So that's what the Government is doing for them. The question should be what are the unemployed doing about it themselves. The Government can't do everything for them. The youth employment schemes are great, or they are in --. The future doesn't look too bright for any young ones now. There is a terrible lot unemployed. But most of these people just don't want to work. I am 18 and work for the Department of Social Security, and I know there are jobs around but on the other hand people who are 18 and unemployed have it made. They are getting about $40.

MEETING THE WORLD OF WORK

The immediate effect of looking for a job is to bring young people and employers into contact with each other directly or indirectly. As a result of these contacts, employers are constantly being asked for and giving their opinions on young people. Most of their comments either in the media or in response to surveys give the impression, rightly or wrongly, that employers have a very low opinion of young people. They criticise their attitudes, their willingness to work and their standards of basic education. The ACER questionnaire presented young people with an unusual opportunity to express their views on employers and their practices; and many of them took the opportunity with considerable enthusiasm as the next chapter shows.
Close Encounters with Employers

The worst thing is when you are really sure that you’ve killed an interview, and are certain for a job - and then it goes to someone with previous experience, or the inevitable ‘friend of a friend’. The other day I attended an interview for a job I had done previously and knew thoroughly. The interviewer apologised that I probably would not get the job (and I didn’t) and indicated that they may have already chosen who was to get it before they advertised. Well, I’m used to that, but the worst thing was when he said ‘Look at you, at your qualifications and presentation - why hasn’t someone employed you?’ Of course, he wasn’t going to either, so I’ve taken to turning the question on them ‘Why won’t you give me this job?’ Mostly they’re just doing what they’re told I think, not taking risks. The only thing one can say is ‘It’s their loss if they don’t employ me’ but of course it doesn’t matter to them at all, they can pick and choose, it’s my loss.

Graduate in Linguistics; unemployed for 9 months; has applied for over 100 jobs

THE EMPLOYERS

For young people seeking work, the requirements, the likes and the practices of employers are all-important. While the overall demand for labour is the result of social, economic and industrial developments, the particular patterns of employment demand are due to the preferences and choices of employers. It is they who determine the balance of capital and labour investment in the enterprise, the kinds of skills required, the numbers and kinds of people needed to meet the employment objectives. In their hands also are decisions about whether school leavers and other young people are to be employed or passed over in favour of more mature and experienced workers.

The term ‘employer’ is loosely used and covers a wide range of enterprises and people. Thus employers may be divided according to the nature of their undertakings into those (mainly private sector) who attempt to operate on a commercial basis for profit and those (mainly public and community sectors) whose objectives are tasks or services without a profit consideration. The processes by which employment demand is determined and choices made may be different in each of these sectors. There may be differences also according to size of enterprises. Businesses and organisations employing people range in size from the small family type business to the large national or international corporations and the large government departments and instrumentalities. They cover a range
of outputs and services and of geographical locations: in city, suburb, town or country.

The term 'employer' also covers a wide range of people. It can include owners/proprietors, managers/executive officers/personnel managers, supervisors and others who may at particular times and for particular purposes be involved in recruitment, selection and employment of staff. These are the people with whom young job-seekers make first contact with the world of work. Their perceptions and choices determine employment opportunities for young people, though in large firms the choices may be circumscribed by established company policies and processes. It is therefore of interest to know what employers think of young people, what they want in their job applicants and whether they recruit young employees.

These questions are difficult to research and answer because employers are so diverse. Even employer organisations have difficulty in speaking for all employers. For this reason as Sinclair¹, reporting on a survey of employers for the Business Council of Australia (BCA), noted 'studies examining the attitudes and expectations of particular groups in the society, such as business people have been all too rare'. There is no shortage of public comment by employers and employer organisations on the deficiencies which they perceive in young people and in their education and preparation for work, and there are constant anecdotes in media reports to lend apparent substance to the criticisms; but, as one employer organisation concedes, there is a lack of hard data as evidence:

It has been a long held view by employers that the education system is producing school leavers who have problems in adjusting to the workforce including problems of literacy and numeracy.

Fortunately or unfortunately there is no hard data to support these views apart from anecdotal evidence.²

Nevertheless, some studies have been undertaken in the last decade, particularly between 1979 and 1983, which throw a little light on what employers say about their views and practices.³ Because the studies vary considerably in aims, location and importance, conclusions drawn from them need to be well qualified. Even so, some general impressions emerge as having some common basis in the thinking and attitudes of employers. There is piquancy in putting these employer views of young people alongside the young people's views of employers as these are expressed in responses to the questionnaire.

THE YOUNG

If research into the attitudes and expectations of employers has been inadequate, opportunities for young people to express their opinions on employers and the search for work have been almost non-existent. Responses to this questionnaire therefore provide rare insights into the views and experiences of young people in
work and seeking work. There was in the questionnaire no suggested topic heading specific to the views of young people on employers or employer practices. It is significant therefore that quite a large number of those responding did take the opportunity to comment on these issues.

As might be expected, those who did comment were in general those with grievances and unhappy experiences either in job-seeking or in working, and sometimes both. Thus the weight of the comment tends to be highly critical and often bitterly critical of employers and their practices. This is perhaps fair enough given that a similar imbalance is to be found also in surveys of employers; that is, people generally are more apt to comment on what they dislike rather than on what they like and approve. In the employer surveys for example, the strong criticism of the inadequacies of young people which dominated the responses had to be viewed in the context that the large majority of employers were satisfied or very satisfied with their own young employees.

Among the young people responding to the questionnaire, there were many who expressed themselves as satisfied or very satisfied with their jobs and the people they worked with; a few who gave instances of consideration by their employers; that is, people generally are more apt to comment on what they dislike rather than on what they like and approve. In the employer surveys for example, the strong criticism of the inadequacies of young people which dominated the responses had to be viewed in the context that the large majority of employers were satisfied or very satisfied with their own young employees.

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The unexpressed approval of both employers and young people needs to be borne in mind to balance the more frequently expressed criticisms.

As the following pages demonstrate, the opinions of young people, unlike those of some employers, are based not on anecdote and generality but on their own often hard personal experiences. Their criticisms of employers focus on recruitment and employment practices and range from a lack of concern and courtesy in dealing with young job seekers, through discrimination to cases of
outright exploitation. There are enough examples given in the responses to show that the experiences they record are not isolated or rare.

WANTED: EXPERIENCED SIXTEEN YEAR OLD

The employer surveys provide strong evidence that employers on the whole prefer to recruit people who have had considerable previous experience in the workforce. Sinclair noted that ‘most companies/divisions in the survey were found to recruit the large majority of their staff with at least one year’s work experience’. There are few openings for school leavers in the mining and manufacturing industries: only 20.0 per cent of recruits in these industries come direct from education and only 10.0 per cent of these are school leavers. Most school leavers find their employment in the retail and finance industries as office workers, clerks and shop assistants. Given current trends much of this employment would be part-time.

It is not surprising then that the negative aspects of this employer demand for experience are the subject of a great many comments by young job seekers. They ask plaintively how you get experience when you need experience to get a job.

People want girls of 16 with experience. You just can’t have girls of that age with experience, it’s stupid.

[Legal secretary]

I had just left school and I had no experience. I couldn’t get a job because of lack of experience and I couldn’t get experience without a job. A typical case of don’t go in the water until you can swim. I also found that I was too old for a lot of jobs that didn’t require experience. I was only 17 and I was too old. Because of the nature of my training up till now I would be in the same boat if I had to resign. I still have no real job experience and I would be too old to start a new trade as an apprentice (they would have to pay me adult wages) so I would probably have to go on to tertiary education.

[Police cadet]

One girl, now a supervisor in a department store, sums up the apparent employer requirement:

Unemployment didn’t worry me until I read in a newspaper an advertisement that went like this: Clerical - Well groomed female of 19 years of age, completed HSC, completed first year of Secretarial studies at tech. and has had some work experience.

Even though I was quite angry at this advertisement. I thought I would ring at 9.00am at which I was told that they had already 40 people apply! What hope has anyone got?

Nevertheless, there are ways round the problem in some cases:

Well, what do employers want - people with experience - how can you get a job without experience and how can you get experience without a job. I have got a friend that works with me and she started to go to work when she was 13. Now she lied about her age to get work. Four years older she said she was. She’s worked at Hungry Jack’s full time from
8.30am to 5.30am, then at 6.30pm a job at a coffee shop till 10.00 pm then from 12.00am at a nightclub as a bar maid – at 13 years of age. Now she’s 17. She’s working with me at the salon and Friday and Saturday night at two separate nightclubs just so she can give her Mum money cause she don’t work and her Dad doesn’t want to know them. Now in between those years she has worked anywhere and has gained so much experience in her life that she acts and in her own mind is 22 at the age of 17. I really can’t or you can’t believe how great this girl is and how much she knows.

[Hairdresser]

Do you really think we have a chance when employers ask for people to work for them but they must be experienced! I know of a man who went for a job interview and he was asked whether he had had any experience and in desperation he said ‘Yes, 2 years’. Of course this was untrue. They said ‘You’ve got the job’. That was 6 months ago and he still has the job! But that’s why many young people don’t even bother to follow those ads through.

[Part-time shop assistant; has completed a secretarial course]

Yet there are times when experience is not a qualification unless the age is right:

Well I have a considerable amount of experience and I find it sometimes difficult as I’m either too young or too old.

[Retrenched from previous job after five years]

For some young people, qualifications disqualify:

I feel depressed and angry because people tell me I’m over qualified for a position when I’m trying to say – ‘Hey, I don’t mind starting at the bottom again’.

[Electronics technician with three years’ experience; unemployed for 10 months]

It’s easy to get depressed on the dole and it requires a real effort to keep some self-esteem and hope. I feel angry about unemployment for graduates - I am always over-qualified and under-experienced for jobs I go for.

[First-class Honours graduate in English; has been job-hunting for a year]

That job was my first job ever. I found it quite irritating while I was unemployed and going to interviews. Either I was overqualified (Target stockroom assistants do not need HSC Chemistry!) or I was under-experienced. The same old story. I applied for the job at OPSM because they said no experience was needed.

[Arts student]

TOO OLD AT EIGHTEEN

For a great many young people looking for their first jobs or subsisting on insecure jobs in the secondary labour market, 18 is the ‘dreaded’ age. One young woman explains:

So I eventually turned to nursing after I worked in a cafe until I reached that dreadful age of 18. It seems so unfair that you get sacked because they have to pay you more money. Then you can’t blame them. I understand that they can’t afford it. Then you go on the dole - get called a dole bludger and every where you go people say to you ‘Haven’t found a job
yet'? They don't really understand that you just can't find a job. They don't seem to understand that you would do anything just to get a job.

This matter of costs as a deterrent to the employment of young people has been the subject of much debate in the last decade. A number of the employer surveys of the early 1980s mention cost as an argument against employing young people. Such research as has been carried out in Australia seems to indicate, as might be expected, that a rise in teenage wages means a drop in teenage employment; but given the multitude of differing awards and the considerable inadequacy of information on Australian practice, there is no definitive answer to the question of how far youth wages have contributed to youth unemployment. In the public sector, where costs are not directly and immediately associated with hiring practice, youth employment has declined substantially in a period of general employment growth, indicating that other factors may be of greater importance than wages in the youth labour market.

Whether or not the level of youth wages is a determining factor in the employment of young people in the primary labour market, there is strong evidence of its influence in the secondary labour market. Byrne in her study of the Commonwealth Youth Support Scheme (CYSS) noted 'the structural discrimination by employers against 18 year olds and upwards and in favour of 15-18 year olds': She comments:

This is represented by the phenomena of seeking school-leavers of 15 or 16 years for jobs in retail distribution, supermarkets, clerical and office work and receptionists, and then sacking them at 18 years when they reach the adult wage and for no other reason than that the employer refuses to pay the adult wage. There is increasing field evidence that this is acting to the disadvantage of more young women than of young men at 18 years.

Clearly in some kinds of employment - generally the temporary, casual and part-time - the cost of youth wages is an important element in employment practices, increasing opportunities for young teenagers at the expense of older ones. Thus the phenomenon of job seekers too young for experience and too old for a job. The young people comment with irony and bitterness on their experience of this.

All going to WAIT did was make me too old to be employed by anyone in order to learn some sort of trade. The only people that employers want are those with experience, girls under 19 and boys 15-16.

[Unemployed after a Business course]

As an unemployed school leaver, finding a job is somewhat of a task. These days, employers are able to pick and choose far too much due to the large number of unemployed people about. A well educated 18 year old has less chance of finding a job, than a 15 or 16 year old with little education. In these hard times, age comes before education in many instances as employers want to save as much money on wages as they can.

I have tried just about everything to get 'any' job - writing crawling letters, through friends, door knocking, employment programs, telephoning employers, I just can't get one at all. I don't believe I have a future, after I get my business degree I will probably be unemployed.
again. I don’t see any future for people my age, jobs, families or politicians. I think I will have been retired by the age of 25 years. I’m told I’m too old now. Too young for experience, yet too old for the jobs I go for. Employers don’t like paying wages to 18 year olds who have the work experience of a 15 year old.

[Unemployed; studying part-time at TAFE]

The large number of young people who commented in these terms leaves little doubt that the practice is widespread.

AGE AS AN ASSET

If age is a liability for young job seekers, it can be a decided advantage for other members of the workforce. The ‘experience’ so valued by employers can cover attributes other than specific workforce skills. Sometimes it refers to maturity, experience of life and the qualities of reliability and motivation thought to be associated with these. Employers who look for these qualities will often prefer to recruit older persons rather than the young and untrained. There is evidence in some of the research that young people are displaced by adults, particularly adult women. Sweet in his analysis of labour market change found that in typing, for example - traditionally a point of entry to the workforce for young females - ‘moderate aggregate falls in demand for typists between 1966 and 1976 mask increased demand for older typists which coincided with quite large declines in demand for junior typists’.7

The experience of being passed over in favour of older women makes for some bitter comments by the young people:

However, I do feel bitter towards women who are the first to criticise young people for not working while they have good jobs in large stores. I’m not saying all women should not work. Of course some are in difficulties but the majority of them are over 40 with working husbands and have almost everything they need. Why not move over and let someone get the job and stop criticising the young when it is really not our fault. If I was married and my husband working, at that age I would be glad to see young people have a chance, not push them back.

[Unemployed]

At the factory where I work, and I’m sure it is the same at many other places, married women often get put on before they employ a young single girl. They say they can’t rely on the young girls as we do shift work. Recently they put on more seasonals but I remain casual. Who were the seasonals? Married women of course. So if they used the single girls more than the married ones that should lessen unemployment figures.

[Previously unemployed for more than twelve months]
THE IMPORTANCE OF PRESENTATION

Assuming that experience, costs and maturity are not an issue with employers setting out to recruit school leavers or other young people, the question then becomes what employers look for in selecting one young person rather than another. In many cases, as discussed in Chapter 5, applicants for jobs will have been screened and selected as possible employees by specific aptitude tests, by education level requirements, by examination results, by personal recommendation or by other methods. In the final choice from among several applicants, or in the case of small businesses or others where there has been no initial screening, the personal interview becomes the tool of final choice.

It is not surprising therefore that all the research indicates the importance given by employers to what they regard as desirable personal attributes. These include: presentation (cleanliness, smartness, punctuality, manners); attitudes to work (motivation, willingness to work hard); interest in the job; school and family background. The only aspect of education which attracted unanimous agreement as an essential requirement was an adequate standard of literacy and numeracy. These terms in fact mean different things to different people, covering at various times oral and written expression, spelling, communication, legible handwriting and various aspects of practical arithmetic.

The experiences reported by the young people responding to the questionnaire reflect some of these employer preferences. Presentation particularly appears to rank highly:

I have a casual job working at 'Chicken World' which is a subsidiary company of 'Big Rooster'. I have been working there for one year and obtained the job one week after I finished grade 12 through an advertisement in the newspaper. About 60 people applied for the job and only 3 were employed of which I was one. The manager liked 'smiles' so he hired people according to this, and other qualifications, but in my case I feel it was based solely on my smile because he told me that was what he liked about me.

[Student teacher]

I found this job just by answering an ad. in the paper, going in personally to fill out an application form. For me it was easy. Employers tend to look for a matriculation graduate, with good references, well-groomed, well-spoken, out-going applicant. I was interviewed by the Personnel Manager, then a Sales Manager and both asked me about all my personal interests. The Government could do more in this self-development area - many people don't know how to sell themselves in an interview. They must learn to exude confidence even though they feel nervous (as I did!).

[Student in Speech Pathology]

To a certain extent if young people were brought up better they would have a better chance of employment. Several times now I have changed my job and each time I have walked straight from one job into the next. Even when I left nursing and went to Coles New World I was a couple of years older than other girls, which was a disadvantage. I was accepted straight away. I asked the boss later why this was so. He told me that I was the only one dressed tidily and with panty hose on. This boss was a middle aged man and to him this little item was important. I have seen the same thing happen with young lad's haircuts and also with boys with earrings. Even young girls with dingle dangle earrings. Even both
Two early school leavers explain what this has meant to them:

I'm unemployed. I spend most of my days out trying to get work. I have been out of school and work for a year now. People just won't give you a chance to try out the job. If you haven't done the job before they won't let you have a go.

[Unemployed for 12 months]

Since leaving school in 1981, I've been for numerous interviews for jobs but still no luck. Lately, I've been thinking very seriously of doing my HSC by correspondence. I think I'd...
like to do that very much but these courses are so dear, I just can’t afford it. I definitely would not go back to school to do it.

[Unemployed for 2 years]

WHY DON’T THEY LET YOU KNOW?

The practice which perhaps arouses the most widespread and genuine ire of young people is the failure of employers to inform job applicants of the outcomes of applications or even of interviews. There are many many comments by young people on this lack of the courtesy and good manners which employers say they require in their young employees. The following are typical:

While I was unemployed I became very restless and frustrated. I was sick to death of going for interviews and not getting the job. I think people who have vacancies and have unemployed people apply for jobs should at least have the decency to ring them up and say they didn’t get the position. When I went to -- for a position they kept me waiting for three weeks. I rang back eight times before they said I was too old and over-qualified.

[Shop assistant]

If employers wouldn’t rubbish on about ‘We will ring you tomorrow and let you know’ and get your hopes up high it wouldn’t make you feel as if it’s hopeless.

[Retrenched from previous job at 18]

I do feel rather strongly, after countless years of job interviews, that a great help would be to educate employers. With the great many prospective employees to choose from all of a sudden, they care less and less about common courtesies of advising if the position you have applied for is yours, and instead leave you hanging on, passing up other opportunities. This is basic rudeness and very debilitating to the unemployed.

[Part-time waitress]

One young woman, now employed as a secretary, made her indignation known directly:

Many of the applications I sent out were not even replied to, which I think is downright rude and insensitive. I recently applied for a position, and they did not reply to my letter of application so I sent them a note saying that they were extremely rude and insensitive, and asked them to put themselves in the position of an unemployed person, waiting on a reply to a letter of application, but it never comes. Needless to say I still did not get a reply, but I hope it did some good.

THE DISADVANTAGE OF BEING FEMALE

By now it has been well established that women in the workforce are disadvantaged compared with equivalent males. While women’s labour force participation has increased significantly since 1947, their status, position and earnings have not improved to anything like the same extent. Hence the establishment in 1984 by the Federal Government of an Affirmative Action
Program intended to provide opportunity for women who wish to enter the labour market to participate fully without discrimination or disadvantage. The responses of many of the young women to the questionnaire show how badly such a program was needed in 1983.

Disadvantage appears in many forms. Sometimes it means that the young woman fails to get the job:

I have a degree in accounting, but, alas, I'm one of those terrible females. You know, I'm likely to get married and do something disastrous like having babies. I mean, when 15 go for a job, they narrow it down to 3 you included, and the job goes to a guy without a degree and you got a distinction in tax - you start to wonder.

[Unemployed]

I am glad I am working. I am glad that I have a job. I know what it is like to be on the unemployment line, going for hundreds of interviews and being knocked back. I've been there, done that. I am a secretary, I have responsibilities. I have a daughter of two years of age. I am a responsible citizen now. I felt like a bludger when I was not working. Probably because that is what people tend to call you're when you're on the dole or being a single supporting parent.

The most problems I have had with trying to get a job was that most employers discriminate against a single female parent more so than the male single parent. I found it very hard to get a job. They, the employers, seem to think that the male single parent needs a job more that the female single parent. I have got good qualifications and have missed out on jobs to men who have less than I. One of the questions most asked by an employer is who will take care of my child but they seem to omit this question to a single male parent.

Anyway I have a fantastic boss. Who is a very fine person. I like my job and I am very happy with my life at the moment.

[Secretary]

Sometimes it seems to mean slower promotion:

I work in a bank. I am a junior and have such duties as opening accounts, assisting proof operator, general paperwork, and answering the phone and the enquiry counter. Sometimes I hate my job. It just gets so utterly boring and tedious. Since I am female I am so much slower to get promoted than a male, and am probably stuck in this area for a while.

[Previously unemployed for 5 months]

In some jobs, the role of the female staff member is quite clear:

But banking is a very sexist industry, and trying to convince senior male staff members that I do not intend to leave in 2 years to have children is extremely difficult. I have, on several occasions been asked to make coffee for everyone because I was the only female staff member, regardless of the fact that there were 3 people below me (all male) that should do it. I might add that I did not make coffee on any of these occasions.

You ask about my first job. The work was O.K. - in a petshop - my boss was an over-ambitious bastard. He likes young girls working for him, but only if they look up to him - I didn't.

[Unemployed]
The discrepancy in rewards between men's work and women's work is commented on by one young woman who took time off from her law degree to gain work experience - and she did:

Last year in Queensland, I got sacked from my oil-exploration job, after a car accident. I was furious due to the circumstances, including the fact that I had been dumped in Brisbane, over 3000 km from my home in Perth, without accommodation etc. etc. I tried to get a similar job with other companies but later found I had chosen the ones with a policy of not employing women. (We don't have the facilities, women are 'troublemakers' among so many men, etc. etc.).

After a spell of unemployment and a variety of cleaning jobs, she comments:

By this time I had a job with 'Silver Chain' (a home nursing association) as a cleaner - going to the homes of the aged and infirm and helping them cook and clean floors and scrubbing showers, lifting heavy old-fashioned furniture (all the things old ladies can no longer do). The hours and pay were small, the work backbreaking hence my lack of enthusiasm in chasing up a bar-maid job in the evening on top of this. The people though (well some of them) were marvellous, and I enjoyed helping them. What got me was the discrepancy in pay and prestige between the 'men's' work I'd been doing earlier in the year (wiring explosives, driving trucks and pushing calculator buttons hardly seemed particularly demanding) in the vain, vague hope of finding a bit of oil, and the exhausting 'women's' work, doing something socially useful, later on. The inequities of rewarded labour in Australia were never more apparent!

The difficulties experienced by young women trying to work in male dominated occupations are described in many of the responses:

I've been working as an apprentice chef for nearly 2 years now ever since I left school. I've worked at a small hotel doing about 20 people a night and am now at a large hotel where we do over 100 people a night. The thing I find hardest is working with people (all males) who have a totally male chauvinist attitude. I always get stuck with the same work all day every day 5 days a week and the guys I work with always try to make me feel small or embarrassed. But it is all coming to a head at the moment because I'm sick of it and I get very sarcastic back.

In the short time I have been in my trade I have had many bosses and many different types of personalities. I've had young and old, drunk, drug addicts, poofers and one that would never leave me alone and was always following me around and always making advances. I love the trade that I am in but so many people have nearly made me give it up, but I get back on my two feet and say 'I'll show the bastards' and I have and now they can try what they like but they won't get me to give up what I love doing.

I have my own business as a racehorse trainer. You have to be very dedicated to be a trainer - there are no days off, no holidays, unusual hours, and the stress can be intense. I love what I do, I enjoy being the trainer and not just the 'strapper' who is ignored. I like the responsibility, but I am very aware what a male dominated industry this is, and I suspect that I am thought of as an inexperienced young girl who will give in to the pressure in a relatively short time (which I will not, may I add!).

Finally, there is the classic case of dismissal:
Though most employers are honest, fair and considerate in their dealings with their employees, there are a significant number who see extra profit to be made out of a situation in which so many young people are anxious to find work and to keep the job when found. The stories told by young people of their experiences indicate forms of exploitation by employers which range from misrepresentation to practices bordering on or partaking of the fraudulent. The following excerpts speak for many others:

Although I’ve been unemployed for 2½ years to date I have however, had several small jobs on the side; cos most employers, when they see how desperate you are for employment they use it to their advantage and call you back a day or two later and offer you a few week’s work if you want to stay on the dole and work for 2 or 3 dollars an hour and the same for overtime, then you’re pushed beyond belief as stated and you can’t do anything about it.

I was retrenched at 18 like so many others employed until they turn 18. I worked in that job as a kitchen hand for twelve months and never once got a lunch break because it was busy at lunch time. I could do nothing about this because my job was more important than the lunch break I should by law get. This stinks I feel. Because unemployment is so high people think they can exploit this. I believe mainly this happens in small offices and shops because they have no one to protect them whereas unions are always there if a small problem arises with bigger organisations and your job is not threatened by calling your union.

And then I worked for a bricklayer. He was a very hard boss. He picked on me, threatened me, abused me and underpaid me. In 1982 I worked for him for nine months straight. Once I worked for him for 6 weeks in a row seven days a week. He said for seven days a week I would receive $220.00 a week clear with tax taken out. But he lied. He gave me for a seven day week $175.00. And didn’t take my tax out. For five days a week he would give $125.00 dollars a week and I had to take tax out of that. I just recently had to pay for that. My father owns a butcher shop. He has just recently bought another one. I am going to work for dad. I have got a third share in the business. I should do very well.

My first real job was as a Salesman. I worked from 11 am - 1 pm six days a week and in 8 weeks I earned $42.00. I had to go up to people’s houses I had never met before and try to get them to buy $4000 -5000 worth of exterior wall/roof coating.

I am unemployed at the moment and have been for the last month. I have only had one job since I left school. I was at my last job for just over 3 years. When I first started I was a
driveway attendant in a petrol station. I worked my way up in those three years to where I was practically running the service station on my own. I was no longer serving petrol but was put in charge of everything else. I had people working under me and sometimes it was hard giving instructions to a person who was older than me. A lot of people didn't realise what I was going through with my job. I had a lot of responsibility placed on shoulders for a 16-18 year old. Half the time I was expected to read people's minds towards the work that I had to do for my employers. They expected me to be one step ahead all the time.

In the future years they wanted to retire and for me to sit for my management course so that I could take over all their problems concerning the two businesses. I was used by them for those 3 years but I loved my job and wanted to stick it out. I was the longest person to have stayed there. The average time a person has stayed there is about one month. They are very hard people to work for and take out their problems on poor young kids. They are only after cheap labour, I am 18 years old and when I was working there I was clearing $120 per week for 40 hours, $25 if I worked 10 hours on a Saturday and the same for a Sunday. They have been taken to court plenty of times about this matter, but nothing has been done about it. Only threats. I could write about my last job for hours but I don't want to bore you. My job had a lot of good points to it but not as many as the bad. My main concern is to find a new job and it hasn't been easy. I left my last job of my own accord and Mrs - of - Motors has made up a lot of bullshit about me and is trying her hardest to stop me from getting further employment.

That practices such as these were not uncommon is indicated in a 1983 report by the Youth Affairs Council of Australia. This report was compiled as a result of an Australia-wide consultation during the first half of 1983 with young people and workers with youth to consider issues of concern including employment and unemployment. On employment, the report sums up:

Many young people speak of exploitation in the work place, through underpayment, or through working long hours or being dismissed once they turn 18. Some claim employers are unwilling to train them. Even if they know where to make complaints, they are sometimes reluctant to do so for fear of getting the sack. Sexual harassment is also evident: One young woman told of having to perform sexual favours for her employer. She was fifteen and homeless, and therefore dependent upon the income she received from the job.

The criticism is often levelled that young people are poorly unionised, and that, were they affiliated, these wrongs could be redressed. Some young people counter-claim that unions do not make provisions for younger age groups.11

Perhaps when employers and the public generally criticise young 'dole bludgers', it might be remembered that practices such as these are not rare among employers, though they are less publicised in the media than the deficiencies of the young unemployed.
In my generation, I think youth unemployment is an accepted concept - some youth unemployment is expected. The fact is that although these people may wish to work, start their careers, there is going to be a level of unemployment.

[Student in Social Work course]

WHY ARE THEY UNEMPLOYED?

Though most young people looking for work are sooner or later successful and find jobs of some kind, there are many in times of high unemployment who in the process experience spells of unemployment. Young people become unemployed for a much wider range of reasons than those attributable simply to economic and industrial circumstances, though an overall decline in employment opportunities certainly exacerbates the problem. Some of the reasons for youth unemployment are by their nature peculiar to young people and their situation between education and work or in the early stages of establishing themselves in the labour market. These young people are starting out to find their place in the society, and for many the process is unsettling. The need for decision and long-term commitment after years of more or less externally planned and regulated life in education can bring uncertainty and self-questioning. Some young people therefore feel the need for a settling down period and delay or postpone decision-making; others take jobs, are dissatisfied and leave or change their jobs. These are among the circumstances that can contribute to youth unemployment.

It has been recognised for some time that young people tend to leave their jobs more readily than persons in older age groups. Stricker noted that 'the pool of young people in employment turns over very frequently and spells of non-employment' occur with great regularity. This high turnover, Stricker finds, is associated with the existence at the same time of a small group of young people who are unemployed for a very long time. Similar findings have been made in studies of OECD countries.

Job changing by young people may be voluntary or involuntary. The common perception is that young people mainly leave their jobs by their own choice, but such limited evidence as is available in OECD countries 'suggests that
unemployed youths are more likely to have left their previous job involuntarily than of their own accord. Indeed, it is commonly argued that, in an economic downturn, youth are laid off more frequently than adult employees.3 Whether voluntary or involuntary, job changing or leaving can produce periods of unemployment for young people, and in times of high unemployment is likely to do so.

This instability of youth employment helps to explain why the community is so apt to regard young people as unwilling to work while their older counterparts are considered victims of changing circumstances. The responses of young people to the ACER questionnaire show the many ways in which they can and do become unemployed.

**THE EDUCATION CONNECTION**

Among the variety of reasons why young people experience unemployment, their close association with education and training is of primary importance. A significant amount of youth unemployment is due to the numbers of young people entering the full-time labour market for the first time after education, or during education. Thus some young people become unemployed because they have recently finished schooling or other courses of study and are looking for a first job. The period of unemployment for these young people may be quite short - a few weeks or months - or may stretch out for years, as the following excerpts indicate:

I was unemployed for four months after I finished Year 12 in 1979.  
*Now in the Commonwealth Public Service*

When I was writing this I was waiting for a job in a shearing shed. I have been unemployed since I left school.  
*Unemployed 9 months*

As stated - I was unemployed for 9 months in 1979 straight after HSC.  
*University student*

I left half way through 5th Year. My grades weren't good. The Principal thought I should leave 'cause it was no use going any further and it will be better to get a job. Well I haven't got any job. I've been unemployed for 2 years, nearly 3.

Sometimes young people are unemployed because they are waiting or hoping for admission to further study or training:

I was unemployed for 3 months while waiting for my exam results after Year 12. I did not know whether I would have good enough marks to qualify for entry to general nurse training. Luckily though my marks were O.K. so I got the job. Since then I have completed my training and have not been unemployed since.  
*Nurse*
I was unemployed for a short time after I left high school (late November 1982) until the time I decided to accept the position at college (late January 1983) and it was terrible!!

[Now undertaking a degree in Recreational Administration]

Others have deferred entry to a course of study or interrupted one already begun in order to take a break from study or gain work experience or both:

During the last 12 months I have had a break from study (via process of withdrawal and 1st year deferment). At this stage I was unemployed for 2 months, a very frustrating and demoralising experience, and then spent 9 months working in a chauvinistic hierarchical legal office almost as equally frustrating and demoralising. I am pleased to be back at Uni and I feel for the unemployed young.

[Fourth year medical student]

Until five weeks ago I was at teacher’s college doing Home Economics. I had been there 6 months. I went there straight after Year 12. I am now unemployed and looking for a job. I only want a job for about 6 months as I would like to go back to college and study art.

While unemployed I went to the CES about every 1-2 weeks. I mean I didn’t kill myself to get a job; I just thought it would be nice to save up some money for going overseas. But even though my future livelihood didn’t count on my finding a job, I did begin to feel slightly depressed and part of the unemployed statistics figures.

[Deferred course for 12 months for overseas travel; intends to study languages and enter the diplomatic service]

Some try their luck in the labour market before deciding finally whether or not to continue further study:

I found my first full-time job through the Age, and it was working for the Age in the editorial library. Even after 9 months of unemployment I hated it and left.

[University student]

And some just need time to make up their minds:

Although I have been unemployed for several months I have been employed in other areas. During this time I have done some travelling, some for pleasure, some for business, as I have assisted my parents with their business (mostly writing letters etc.). I have also spent time investigating my own future occupation, as I decided what I really expected and wanted to do. Once I had found this out I wrote off various letters, requesting an interview and explaining why I thought I was suitable.

[Hopes to get into the public service]

SHOPPING AROUND

Comparatively few young people leaving school (and some even after tertiary education) have clear and definite views on what work they want to commit themselves to in the long-term. During the post-war decades of full-employment, voluntary job-changing had become almost an integral part of the process of
transition of young people from education to working life. Young people 'shopped around' in the job market before committing themselves to a stable choice of job or career. The first report of the Commonwealth/State Working Party on Transition from School to Work or further Study commented on the process in 1978:

Employers have been known to complain of what they consider is too high a turn-over in the job market of young people. However, if young people have not experienced different types of employment prior to leaving school, either through work experience programs or in casual labour, it could be of positive benefit in the long-term for them to explore different avenues of work. The provision of on-the-job training could assist in the reduction of turnover, but other conditions of work are also likely to be influential - such as the physical conditions and management's attitudes. This 'shopping around' in the labour market is part of a more complex process of reaching out for wider experience and a more defined identity, leading eventually to the formation of aspirations, attitudes and values. It is a legacy of more secure times. High rates of unemployment since the mid-1970s have, oddly enough, acted both to deter and to provide opportunity for this search for wider experience by young people. On the one hand, unemployment has been a deterrent to unconsidered job-changing, as the following extracts, typical of many, indicate:

I am a motor mechanic, a senior advanced diesel air conditioner motor mechanic. I get paid no more than a normal apprentice just finished his time. I have been working in the same job for 7 years. I also have tried getting other jobs, but they are not there.

I enjoy the banking system and the people within it but I am not sure if this is the career I want. I will persevere with the bank until such time as I can support myself through tertiary studies or another job. With the current trend in employment or rather unemployment I will stay put for a while. This seems unadventurous but in today's world safety comes first.

On the other hand, the existence of unemployment benefits can provide a safety net and an opportunity for exploration, at least for the frugal. One of the young people responding to the questionnaire explains:

Many kids leave school and go straight onto the dole. Take a year off and bludge around having a bit of a look at what life is like out of school. I didn't because my tastes were a little more extravagant than $52.00 a week of house-sharing and bankruptcy. I think it is a good thing for kids to get a chance to organise their priorities a little before launching off into a career. I think this interim period of unemployment is rarely abused and most people get on with looking for work very quickly.

Many young people find the jobs they have gained after leaving education tedious or unsatisfying. While most fear the likelihood of unemployment and stick with their jobs, some do still leave:
I was working as a clerk in the Public Service. I found the job and the whole public service system boring and not very rewarding. As a result I resigned after a year which left me without a job for a while. This did not worry me all that much. I felt it was better to leave a job which I found I did not like, than to stay on and hope that later on it would get better.

(Props hand in a TV Station; unemployed for only a short while between jobs)

First job bricklayer apprentice 6 months, could not stand it, too much like hard work. Second job TV antennae rigger. Good money easy work. A bit dangerous, didn't like heights much, did that for 18 or 20 months. Quit to find something more interesting, don't know what yet hope to find something I enjoy someday.

[Unemployed]

A few explain why they are not prepared to take just any job that comes along:

I am currently unemployed but I do help my brother-in-law with his business as well as completing my degree part-time. I don't enjoy being unemployed yet I do not want a job that I would or could hate. The reason being that when I took a break from Uni and worked for a year as a bookkeeper some time ago, I became trapped in a job which did not suit my temperament nor my abilities. I was unable to leave for fear of what my family would think of me as well as becoming 'addicted' to the weekly wage. (I had financial obligations which had to be dealt with first.)

[Studying accountancy]

I got a temporary job as a receptionist with a concrete firm. I've finished with them now and I still don't want to go back to nursing. I've applied for a medical receptionist job which I really want, because I found I love reception work but now I find I'm still interested in the medical field. So it's just a matter of waiting. I should be able to get a job because the way I look at it is there's 10% unemployed therefore 90% can find jobs. I'm not stupid or lazy so I'm not going to be one of the 10%. I suppose a lot of people would disagree with that.

[Went into nursing straight from school, but at the end of the course decided that nursing was not what she wanted to do]

Some of the young people describe this exploratory period in their lives very vividly:

My first job was as a garbage collector. Straight from school, it was an eye-opener working with fairly rough types, but I learnt a lot from it. Garbage collecting was good exercise but not quite my chosen career and it was only a temporary job over Xmas. I then went on the dole for a few months. The CES got me a interview with a company as a storeman. My uncle as it turned out was a chemist for this company. That probably is why I got the job. After seven months I was retrenched due to the company winding down. A few more months on the dole and after several jobs nearly got one but didn't. The CES again got me an interview, as a storeman with the company I'm now working for. I managed to get an apprenticeship with them after working there six months. Four years later I'm a tradesman and still there.

[Now a refrigeration fitter]

I work for an arts management company. The work is varied and very interesting. I work with concerts, e.g. 'Musica Viva' and enjoy working in what I suppose is showbiz. I have been an usher in a cinema. I have been an usher in a theatre. I have been a commercial artist, making movie ads for newspapers. I got this job after 6 months at art school. I went
to art school as an afterthought, after 2 years of casual work and unemployment. Picking grapes, working in a foundry, working in a bar.

At the age of 16 I left school, knocked on doors for 2 months, got a job at a Bakery (office work), learnt ledger machining and eventually taught other people. My boss was a monster (at the time). I am now very thankful they sacked me twice each time asking me back. Left and went to Perth, on the dole for about a year in between jobs. Had a real holiday. It’s possible between four (on the dole) to have a good time. Went back to Darwin, 2 days later got a job delivering telegrams, the Bakery heard I was back and offered my job back, took it. My boyfriend started his plumbing business, I went to work for --, good money, stayed a year and half there, heaps of pay rises. Because the Bakery always paid me $30 over the award my jobs always earned good money. Got into credit control there, left as it changed to --, next job was Secretary, bookwork etc. Left 6 months later as one guy was a pig, did purchasing for, got retrenched. By this time we had built our house, thought I’d have a rest and do some gardening. Applied for jobs that appealed to me. Two weeks later got another job, car yard doing creditors for 5 companies and a labour analyst for the workshop - pay rises, and more work, also did my boyfriend’s books for his plumbing business. Left the car yard, doing debtors, creditors and warranty reconciliations after about 15 months (for 5 companies). Now I am in Brisbane with my husband (no kids, one dog). He left plumbing and we now own the best Video Library in Brisbane. We still have our house in Darwin, I do the counter and everything else that needs doing. It’s great.

UNEMPLOYMENT AS OPPORTUNITY

A few young people see unemployment as opportunity rather than adversity. They are the few who are prepared to forego the benefits of orthodox paid employment in order to pursue their interests in the arts, sports or hobbies, or to undertake unpaid work in activities and issues they believe are important to the welfare of people and the quality of life in the society. The duration of unemployment for such people can be long-term, but for those among them whose occupations are fully satisfying and who are able to live frugally, unemployment benefits take the place of the noble patronage of earlier centuries.

One young woman - an Arts student with some perception of the issues of her time - comments:

I have watched many friends move into the workforce, and many who, though 'unemployed' in the words of our society which is still governed by the protestant work ethic, manage to have very fulfilling and enjoyable lives. We always seem to hear about the horrors of unemployment, and I realise that many young people suffer terribly especially through lack of confidence brought about by thwarted job opportunities; yet we never hear about those people who understand the limitations of employment and a very shaky social and economical structure, who manage to cope.

I know many who have accepted unemployment and who are not interested in pursuing further education through another institution, but are happily 'employed' in voluntary positions in welfare institutions etc., 'employed' in pursuing hobbies and perfecting gifts and skills outside institutions. These people shouldn’t be seen as dole bludgers but as people coming to terms with the limitations of our society as it is.

Some examples illustrate:
I have been unemployed and although I am ashamed to admit, it was an ideal time to do my own art. It gave me time to do what I wanted to do. Even though I was on social security that doesn’t mean to say I didn’t look for a job. I did earnestly try. I might add for the likes of me there aren’t many jobs suitable.

[Now manageress of an art supplies shop and has also undertaken some studies in fine arts]

I am unemployed at the moment as is my friend who is doing voice production with me because we both wish to pursue the same career. To me, money isn’t the only important factor in life. It’s sure handy to have but to enjoy the work you’ve really wanted to do ensures a pleasant and relaxed working life. When you receive the pay-packet it seems a bonus to you because when you are doing the work you’ve really wanted to do. Who thinks about money?

[Unemployed 8 months; studying and practising to be a radio announcer]

Choosing such unemployment is a decision not lightly taken as the following comment from a girl who has been working as a sales assistant shows:

I’d like to do an art course of some kind. There’s nothing stopping me really except my own doubts and it means that I will be without money which I’ve become very paranoid about! I’ve received a lot of derision from my parents and friends when I explain what I would like to do. ‘But that won’t get you a job’ they say. I know it probably won’t unless of course I become a female Pro Hart!! (Fat Chance!). The way I see it, it’s a choice between having security in a job I hate or doing what I want and love.

I’m trying to find a part-time job at nights so I could do an art course during the day. Now that’s the sort of compromise I like!

LEAVING THE JOB

Young people on the whole do not have the family and financial responsibilities of those in older age groups; some of them also enjoy the material support and financial backing of parents. In these circumstances, young people can often choose to leave their jobs for reasons which seem good to them at the time.

Some wish to travel and see something of the world before settling down to responsibility.

I don’t expect to stay at my current job for more than 2 or 3 years. I want to go overseas for a year long holiday and then go into business with my father making a certain type of machine which he invented.

[A sawyer in a timber mill]

I am a junior receptionist, typist and part-time cashier in the --. I do enjoy my work, and the people I work with are great, but I can’t see myself working there all my life. I have been there about one and a half years and I’m thinking about leaving when I’ve been there 2 years to go on a working holiday around Australia.
With high unemployment however, the freedom to do this is being circumscribed by the cold realities of the labour market:

I was employed as a dental nurse straight after leaving school for 3 years. Typical of the young I got itchy feet and decided to leave my job and do a bit of travelling. I took off thinking I'd be able to get casual jobs to help me out along the way. I was wrong. People do not want to employ someone that's not going to be there forever and die in the job. I have since returned home broke and am now doing the occasional day’s work in my old job which I enjoy. Being unemployed is no fun, not like what a lot of people would think.

Unsatisfactory relationships with employers or workmates move some young people to leave their jobs:

My first job was at -- mattress factory but I quit because he favoured all 'Aussie' workers and no-one else. He in a way disliked 'poms', 'wogs', 'dagoes' and other 'ethnics' which worked there.

[Unemployed]

My first job in a lab. was a disaster. The boss was one who always found fault and picked on me all the time. As a result I left and spent the next 18 months out of work.

[Laboratory assistant]

I don’t mind being a printer. It’s the attitude of some of the guys which I don’t like. They are hypocrites, back-stabbers and a pack of whingers, although they aren’t all like that. Some have none of those qualities, some have a few and others are just a pain in the ... Because of this and a few other things I am leaving in September to try my luck elsewhere. You might think I’m mad but I prefer to be happy and enjoy my life, because it is no use living in a rut. If I’m lucky I’ll get a job using a.m. printing machines; if not I guess I’ll try anything.

[Telecom employee]

A few girls leave under pressure of family circumstances:

I found my first job through contacts. My friend told me of a vacancy so I went for it. I worked there for about 3 years. Then dad fell sick so I quit to take care of him. Since then I've been unemployed. I've been unemployed for about 4 years now.

[Now looks after the house for her working mother and two brothers and feels very depressed]

I was unemployed for about a year during which time I attended the needs of a sister and her family. The sister had a major operation which prevented her the full use of her arms, and I looked after her family with her until she was fully capable to do everything herself.

[Now in the RAN (then WRAN)]

And a few - very few among these responses - simply enjoy the freedom from work or responsibility:

Well I go over to my boyfriend's 4 times a week and we do a body plan with a weight and dumbells. I feel just great because I haven’t got home work to do or school to go.

[Unemployed 2 years off and on]
I am now unemployed. I feel free. ... Well, I am making a transition like everybody changes.

[Unemployed after a job as receptionist/typist]

Sometimes however the ‘voluntary’ unemployment becomes ‘involuntary’, as in the case of this young woman now unemployed for two years:

Lasted at tech 3 days. My girlfriend and I didn’t talk each other into it. We just decided to leave and have a rest, go on the dole. My parents did not like that one bit, but I made them see it my way. That was a mistake! (No-one liked it). I decided 1 year but look what happened. I’m stuck, I’m looking but no Job! I wasn’t expecting that to happen.

While, as the above extracts indicate, some young people are unemployed as a result of choices they themselves have made, most young people who leave their jobs do so for reasons similar to those of older people. They are retrenched or dismissed and have no choice in the matter. The difference is, as previously indicated, that young people are more likely to be ‘laid off’ than older workers.

Judging from the responses to the questionnaire, a considerable number of young people are sacked or retrenched for economic reasons:

I am unemployed at the moment and have been for the past 3 months after being retrenched from my job as the company went bankrupt.

[Previously apprentice chef]

My last job was working in a bakery for a supermarket. (There were about 10 stores) The baker would be there till about 12 noon then leave. I would be there on my own doing all the work. I did it well, and top managers even told me that I did. But the bakery itself didn’t bring enough money in a week so they closed it down and that was the end of my job. Since then I haven’t been able to find one.

[Unemployed]

I liked my first and only job. It was good until recession got the better of me. I spend my time doing nothing.

[Unemployed]

At this stage 2/8/83 I am unemployed after being laid off in the building industry as my boss could not afford to keep me any longer. It is difficult to find work here in the winter as it relies heavily on the tourist trade, fishing and the cereal crops. All of which come about seasonally (November to February).

[Unemployed]

For those in the country, seasonal and market conditions can make things difficult:

After I finished my HSC, my family moved to a farm in --. I helped dad a lot with the farm, in rounding up cattle with the horse, helping in fighting the fire on the property during the Ash Wednesday bushfires, feeding, grooming, exercising the horses. After seven months I moved into the city with friends as there were no jobs available in the country. I really enjoyed working on the farm and I really like the country. I would really
like to have a job in the country, especially working with animals and most of all with horses. I have been unemployed for eight months and haven't found a job yet.

I came straight from school into a job on my father's farm. I was being paid at the award rate and was happy with the situation. Unfortunately, due to financial difficulty, my father found he was no longer able to pay my wages. I still work 6 days a week on the farm, but now I am drawing unemployment benefits. I can't say I'm happy with this and hope to go back to full-time employment as soon as possible.

Some of the young women report the difficulties of having a husband out of work:

Well it's my hubby. He works in a steel mill, shift work. He does not like his job. The fact is it's a rota shift. He was retrenched from his last job as they did not have enough work. Also his last job did not pay enough they were on 4 day a week. With a house, wife and baby $155 was not enough.

At the moment my husband is unemployed as he was retrenched and he is finding it a bit hard to find another job even though he is a tradesman welder.

In quite a number of cases, young people are dismissed by their employers for reasons less defensible than economic necessity. These aspects of employer relationships with young people have already been discussed, but the following extracts also indicate some reasons why young people can become unemployed through no fault of their own. Some become too old at 18:

I was retrenched at 18 like so many others employed until they turn 18. Work is O.K. and I liked it when I had a job. But I thought the age for retirement was 65 but not 18. I was in a supermarket it was good hours and a reasonable pay. The work was varied. But I have been unemployed for six months. It's got the better of me.

Others are the victims of inconsiderate or unscrupulous employers:

The only reason I got pay rises was because of my birthdays and then when I turned 21 I was laid off, because I'd trained a 16 year old to do my job, so why keep me on.

I had a job about ½ year ago which I was at for about 2 years. I worked my guts out, worked all night sometimes. Do you think he was grateful? Not on your life. He let the place go broke for some type of tax dodge, so now I am out of work (he was a dead-set pig!)
The company said that there would be enough work for at least 5 years so we could finish our apprenticeship. Something ended up going wrong with the company. One of the bosses sold his shares and the contract for us to make fishing boats were shared around other companies to get them finished so that the boats could go out fishing. So the company put off about 12 of us, then another 4 a week or two later. So now I am retrenched. It is the first time I’ve been unemployed and it is pretty hard to find another job.

[Unemployed]

HANDICAPPED IN THE RACE FOR JOBS

If it is difficult for the young and healthy to find and keep jobs, prospects are poor indeed for young people with disabilities of one kind or another. An occupational therapist among the respondents comments on her observations:

I work as an occupational therapist in a Vocational Rehabilitation team. The client group are largely unemployed adolescents who have been labelled ‘learning disabled’ or ‘intellectually handicapped’, or who have a physical disability or head injury. I enjoy my work but find it disheartening at times because such a large proportion of these clients will not move onto successful employment. Employers and society in general is riddled with misconceptions and prejudices against the disabled and in the present economic climate they don’t stand a chance.

Some of those handicapped by illness or in other ways report their difficulties:

My first job was as a nurse and I got that with help from a doctor who we know. I loved that job but had to give it up as my epilepsy got worse because of the odd hours. I have been unemployed ever since. I spent my time doing courses at tech but of course the certificates did nothing to help. It makes you feel as if you’re worth nothing or just a door mat for some one to step on. People younger than me managed to find a job and that made me feel very low, why couldn’t I. Most people don’t want to know you, let alone have you as an employee if you have something wrong with you. But times are changing aren’t they. I did a lot of voluntary work at hospitals and veterinary clinics. This kept me happy for 3 or 4 years.

[Now a housewife]

I do not work because I am an invalid pensioner. I do not have any kidneys and have peritoneal dialysis. I am hoping to find some small part-time job so I can fill in time.

[Sees the future as ‘pretty bleak’]

I was a public servant but now I am an alcoholic so I don’t know much about work.

Until last week I was a Uni student - now I am unemployed. At the moment I do not know what I really want. It’s hard to comprehend but again I have very little options open to me that I find desirable. I do not know what to look for in a job, enjoyment or money. Right now my life is in a bit of a mess and it is very hard to say what I’m feeling. But one feeling does override all the others - helplessness.
WHO ARE THE DOLE BLUDGERS?

If the term 'dole bludger' is less frequently heard today than it was in 1983, the suspicion it represents lingers ambiguously behind some public statements and approaches to policy-making, leaving undefined the question of which unemployed young people can be fairly identified as 'bludging on the system'. Perhaps the responses of the young people themselves in this chapter help to clarify the circumstances in which young people are or become unemployed.

Most young people want work and get work. For the variety of reasons indicated many of them experience some unemployment particularly when jobs are scarce. Most are unemployed because they have had no choice in the matter. Some do choose to be unemployed or to risk unemployment by job changing. The situations of the voluntarily unemployed differ widely. Some are fully occupied with career preparation in fields such as music and the arts or in welfare or other work related to social issues. In these circumstances, the period of unemployment may be quite long, but remains satisfying and productive.

There are those who relish the freedom from responsibility and study which unemployment brings. These are generally either young school leavers enjoying a break before settling down to job and career or other students interrupting their courses of further study. In both these groups many of the young people appear to come from well established families and/or to have fairly secure job prospects. In both cases, the period of unemployment is limited and generally fairly short. Finally, there are the long-term unemployed, many of whom have lapsed into apathy and more or less abandoned the unrewarding pursuit of a job.

A young student taking a doctorate in Psychology puts this view of unemployment:

"Unemployment" is one of those taboo words that people can talk about but never in relation to someone they know. The best thing that the government can do is to make unemployment more acceptable for people, and realise that there's no such thing as a 'dole bludger'. Often going onto the dole is a viable alternative for some people. Whether the people, who are content to accept the government's money for doing nothing, realise it or not, they are making a contribution to society. By not accepting a job they are making it possible for someone else who really wants, who needs, that job to apply for it. There is a real need to remove the stigma of 'unemployment' because with the way the technological boom is going, taking away traditional labour intensive occupation areas, the future looks bleak with fewer jobs for people. And we can never go back. Many people will be unemployed, or work may be distributed so that people will work for less hours a week. Either way unemployment will be a big fact of life for a long time to come.

The essential myth about youth unemployment is that there is a single experience which can be labelled unemployment and that all unemployment is a drain on the society. As will be seen in discussion in later chapters, the experience of unemployment and reactions to it differ depending on circumstances, including the reasons why the person is unemployed; the duration of the unemployment and the support and resources available during unemployment.
References and Notes

Part 2

Chapter 5
1 Blakers, 1990a: 53-54
2 Victorian Employers Federation (VEF), 1985: 13
3 Miller & Volker, 1987
4 ibid

Chapter 6
1 Sinclair, 1986: 2
2 (ACT) Confederation of ACT Industry (CONFACT), 1987
3 Blakers, 1990a: Chapter 4
4 Sinclair, 1986: 6
5 Blakers, 1990a: 64-67
6 Byrne, 1983: 5
7 Sweet, 1983: 20
8 King, 1983: 77
9 Davis, 1983: 103
10 Blakers, 1990a: Chapter 11
11 Youth Affairs Council of Australia, 1983: 77

Chapter 7
1 Stricker, 1984: 12
2 OECD, 1984
3 ibid: 17
Life is a constant struggle for all, but for the unemployed, it becomes a constant on-going ever-present battle. A battle, in which many have minimal or no ammunition to fight with; i.e. lack of educational qualifications, lack of specialised skills, lack of and ignorance of training and trade institutions and lack of personal pride and self-confidence in one's self and ability. It is these persons who eventually lose the battle. Hence family relationships crumble, physical and psychological pressures, suicides, and a dreadful feeling of uncertainty prevail, with society being its target. Unemployment is a difficult issue to solve. It is difficult for all who are in this predicament trying to make a living but more so, for the young. Youth unemployment has steadily risen over the last decade. Young people are especially badly off in that they are just out of school, or out of their tertiary institutions with hardly any job prospects for the future. They are at a most impressionable age, have a very limited experience and outlook on life, uncertain what direction to take and many can not face up to responsibility of any kind. They are disadvantaged from all aspects and all areas. It is hardly unexpected then, why so many break under this stress and why so many pitfalls befall them; i.e. drug addiction, alcoholism, various psychological and physical diseases, suicides, sexual permissiveness, prostitution etc.

Chapter 8 Unemployment: Losing the Benefits of Work
Chapter 9 Surviving or Living: The Financial Effects of Unemployment
Chapter 10 Time - And to Spare
Chapter 11 Neither Place nor Purpose: The Psychological Effects of Unemployment
Chapter 12 Tomorrow and Tomorrow
Unemployment: Losing the Benefits of Work

Occupation is a way of measuring a person's worth and use in society - a person's status. It has probably always been that way from when a hunter's status was determined by his hunting skills in primitive society, up until now.

[PhD (Psychology) student]

YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE WORK ETHIC

As previous chapters indicate, the work ethic remains strongly entrenched in the attitudes and expectations of most individuals and of the society generally. Yet at the same time the economic circumstances and industrial structures which have underpinned the work ethic in industrialised societies are themselves undergoing rapid and fundamental transformation. It is this dichotomy between the new industrial realities and the old established social processes and attitudes to work that embitters the experience of unemployment for many people. While human labour in the traditional sense is declining in importance for the society as a whole, it remains of central importance for most individuals. Those in employment are concerned to keep their jobs and improve their positions; those without employment see the getting of a job as the necessary entry to a place in the community.

The young person leaving school epitomises the difficulties inherent in a society which is itself in transition. Young people are between two worlds. Their expectations, self-concepts and self-esteem have been formed by a process begun in their earliest years and shaped - positively or negatively - by schooling, by family background, by social mores and pressures transmitted through family, peers, friends, associates and, not least, the media. For most of them a job remains the natural outcome of their study and a necessary prelude to their participation in the Australian way of life.

That some young people do recognise the fundamental nature of the changes which are taking place in society and its work patterns is indicated by some of their comments:
In the previous generation, the work ethic was strongly pushed and thus taken as law. People set their sights on a career and this was to last for the time until they retired. In talking to many of my friends I have found a feeling of horror at the thought of doing one thing for 30 or 40 years. With increased technology, we have lived in an existence of excitement, fun, recreation. The idea of stepping into a set pattern for a long period is inconceivable for many of my peers.

I honestly believe that gone are the days of full employment. From now on I believe that leisure time will take on more importance (due to high technology). Thus I see myself having to reassess the values given to me by my parents and community as a whole (i.e. you must have a full-time job or else you are lazy and even worse a dole bludger!).

Nevertheless for all but the most independent-minded young people, expectations and self-esteem are related directly and indirectly to the jobs they get or hope to get at the end of their education.

**THE BENEFITS OF WORK**

The key to survival and a place in the changing society is work - income generating activity - which brings with it not only material but also psychological benefits. Having a job means, as well as financial independence, community respect and a sense of identity and self-worth. The job itself provides an activity with a defined social (and even moral) purposes. It is a means of ordering time and distinguishing leisure, and it brings opportunity for social contact and a sense of belonging. These are what Jahoda has called the ‘latent’ benefits of work. Unemployment deprives the individual of these benefits as well as of the financial rewards of paid effort. These latent benefits are often as greatly valued as the more tangible rewards.

The goals and purposes of the work they do become of great importance to many people. They like - in fortunate cases ‘love’ - their work and identify with it; and the range of work which appeals is as wide as individuals are different:

I love my profession (primary school teacher). I love the children I teach and my role as teacher.

I am a fisherman I work on the deck of the boat and have to do everything except steer (7 out of 10 times) and fix a mechanical break down. All deck work is my responsibility. Yes I like what I do otherwise I wouldn’t do it.

I am a boner and slicer at --. I work from 7 in the morning to 3 pm. Since me and my family left the country life, I’ve dreamt of being a meat work worker and it has met with all my expectations. My father helped me get the job and I will never have any regrets about leaving school.

I love my work. Totally. In this job (hairdressing) if you can get through the first year, you’re flying all the way from there on.
People enjoy their jobs for many different reasons. Important among these is the improvement in psychological well being. Responses to the questionnaire employment, the researchers concluded, appears to be associated with an decreases in negative attitudes among people with satisfying jobs compared with indicated in recent research which showed larger increases in self-esteem and satisfying job does have benefits of this kind for the person so employed has been opportunity afforded by a satisfying job for the individual to develop both as a worker and as a person through challenge, experience and learning. That a satisfying job does have benefits of this kind for the person so employed has been indicated in recent research which showed larger increases in self-esteem and decreases in negative attitudes among people with satisfying jobs compared with the unemployed or those who were dissatisfied with their work. Satisfying employment, the researchers concluded, appears to be associated with an improvement in psychological well being. Responses to the questionnaire would seem to support this funding:

I started in the bank as a junior and was quickly transferred to the country. This transfer and the experience I have gained since then was one of the biggest things in my life. I made a whole new life for myself and saw an entirely different community at work. The 3 years I spent in the country were some of the best in my life.

I am a spotwelder, making hanging baskets. I like what I am doing because they gave me a chance to show that basic level studies aren't as basic as school says and so on.

As an electrical tradesman, I usually work on my own. The work is generally clean and interesting. I enjoy what I do. I have also learnt to make up my mind without undue hesitation. I am also meeting people all the time so I've gained self-confidence.

My job at present is an officer supervisor for a branch of 16. I check most of the work and also take interviews for loans and enquiries. It is a pretty demanding job, at times the branch is busy. I like my job because it is demanding and requires various talents. I handle it reasonably well but there is lots of room for improvement and learning which is good. It means my job is not stagnant.

I am based in the audit department of my firm and to date I have found the work interesting. The things I like about work are: the experience I am gaining in business principles; the challenge of being given problems to solve by certain times; the independence of having money to support myself and the interesting people I meet in the working environment. Another advantage is experience in a computer environment which will probably be necessary for advancement in years to come.

I am a full-time sister in a psychiatric hospital and a full-time housewife since March 1983 when I married. I have been lucky in that I have had a job in that area since leaving school.
and am always assured of employment. It is not that assurance that makes me happy and secure in my work. It is the constant learning about human behaviour and interactions, seeing life's joys and sorrows, sharing with people in their highest moments and more often than not, their lowest moments. It is the assurance that people have benefited from knowing me, and that just as importantly, I have gained benefit from knowing them. It is these things that make me happy about working. I think being happy at work has helped me in being happy as a housewife, also. Home life seems to be happy and secure for me and I think this is because I myself feel at peace. I feel 'well rounded'.

The satisfaction and fulfilment which an individual derives from work depend to a large extent on conditions which allow challenge, responsibility and learning, and there are not so many jobs which do this. The young people provide a great deal of evidence that many jobs are dead-end, tediously routine and unsatisfying. Two examples will suffice to illustrate the many:

I'm a sales assistant. Well, I only work Friday nights and Saturday mornings now, but I was working as a full-time casual for about seven months. There wasn't enough work though, so now I'm only very casual. I honestly detest my job. It is incredibly boring. In the store where I work we are never very busy. I spend my working hours serving the occasional customers and cleaning up my department, but as you can only clean a department so many times I usually have nothing to do. This is a terrible thing to say when others would have really appreciated my job, but I've never been as happy as I was when there wasn't enough work for me to continue working there full-time.

I'm a public servant. They call me an Administrative Assistant I. It's another word for Stenographer. I'm in the State Department of --. I work the switch, type, file and very occasionally do shorthand and dictaphone. It is a pretty good job, but it also has its bad points. The things about it that I don't like are - there is no real responsibility in the job, you don't get to follow a job through to the end like you do in private enterprise and to me, it just seems like you are just a file number.

Yet the complexity of the elements which go to make up 'work' in its broadest sense means that, even when the job itself is unsatisfying or un congenial, satisfaction may still be found in other ways such as social contacts, money and, in times of high unemployment, just the fact of having a job. As the public servant quoted above goes on to comment:

But, the people I work with are really nice, there are a lot of people my age that work there, you don't really have to work flat out and I like working in town. I wouldn't mind getting another job because I'm getting sick of doing the same things everyday but I would be silly to, because my job has security.

Many others also show that they find substitutes for intrinsic job satisfaction:

The work I do now is lumping for a grain bagging plant. It is hard work and long hours but hard work doesn't hurt anyone. I like it because it's good money and you make a lot of new mates.

My job isn't very interesting, but I'd prefer it to a normal secretarial job because it gives me time to think about everything. We all sit at a keyboard all day long and key chemists'
The degree of certainty about the future is probably the main determinant of how people became unemployed for a wider range of reasons than apply to people in appointment to a position or of entry to a desired course of study or training, the circumstances in which he/she is unemployed; in particular, on the reasons for the unemployment and the hopes or expectations of ending it. If someone is assured of work ethic, how a young person reacts to unemployment depends essentially on older age groups. In the circumstances of a generally strong adherence to the work ethic, how a young person reacts to unemployment is not the same for everyone, and people react to unemployment in different ways. The previous chapter has shown that young people became unemployed for a wider range of reasons than apply to people in older age groups. In the circumstances of a generally strong adherence to the work ethic, how a young person reacts to unemployment depends essentially on the circumstances in which he/she is unemployed; in particular, on the reasons for the unemployment and the hopes or expectations of ending it.

**HAVING EXPECTATIONS**

The degree of certainty about the future is probably the main determinant of how a young person views the experience of unemployment. If someone is assured of appointment to a position or of entry to a desired course of study or training, the...
period of unemployment may be more properly seen as a period of waiting: its extent is finite and the future predictable. The same applies to those who, because they have saleable qualifications or for other reasons, are confident of securing employment when they want it. Unemployment is then likely to be of less concern to the individual, even if the period of waiting is prolonged. Status and place in the society are assured and the time can be used with an easy mind for holiday, travel or casual work experience. This does not mean that some people unemployed in these circumstances do not still find the experience upsetting and disorienting. Nevertheless, there is plenty of evidence among the responses to show that unemployment in such circumstances can be carefree and enjoyable:

I was unemployed for 2 months after leaving school in 1979. It never really bothered me because it was only for a short time and I was not really concentrating on getting a job. Feeling more like having a holiday after finishing my HSC than working. However had I been unemployed for much longer I would probably have become bored and unhappy.

[Program aide in a primary school]

For about 5 months I was unemployed but it didn't particularly worry me as I had finished my apprenticeship and felt like a break. But also I was able to do odd jobs which helped me collect extra money. What also helped me not to worry was the fact I had a trade which gave me qualifications over quite a few of my friends who were also unemployed.

[Electrician]

In similar circumstances, a break between jobs can be welcome:

I have been unemployed and I enjoyed it but only because it was summer and because I knew I could get a job if I wanted to.

[Teacher]

When I was unemployed it was more of a holiday for me, I had just finished at a Bakery working a 14 hour day for 10-12 weeks, 6 days a week and only averaging 5-6 hours sleep a day, I needed a break. But I got very bored, so I did a lot of voluntary work at the local primary school taking activities, coaching sports teams, etc.

[Now an apprentice chef]

For some young people with more or less firm expectations of the future, the dole can be an incentive to a prolonged holiday:

I don't feel anxious about my ability to secure a job. I spent a year on the dole straight after school and before work. It was great! I travelled, met people, had experiences. It was a good opportunity to get a particular perspective.

[Science student]

I found my job through a friend of a friend. Before I found this job I was 17 and unemployed for 10 months. At the time I was unemployed it was great, no work, some money each week and it can be very easy to get used to it and I guess that's why we have so many unemployed.

[Panel beater in a small crash shop]
THE EFFECTS OF UNCERTAINTY

As certainty about the future diminishes, the effects of unemployment are likely to be more deeply felt. For example, those waiting for the results of examinations or selection tests which will determine career opportunities may well begin to feel some of the anxieties associated with the general experience of unemployment. For young people in these circumstances, the waiting period means both hope and anxiety:

It was a very worrying, frustrating and anxious time while I was waiting for my marks as I had no idea what I would have done had I not passed my exams.

[Nurse; unemployed for three months before admission to training]

Although it was only for a period of 3 months I found it a very unstable period of time because I didn’t know what was going to become of my life. I spent my time looking for part-time jobs and having a little bit of a holiday from study and work.

[Student in General Nursing]

I was unemployed for about 3 weeks. It was scary in a way because the only future you can see is a bad one. No money no nothing. But luck came my way.

[Missed getting a promised apprenticeship; now works with a friend as a bicycle mechanic]

For most young people, the enjoyment of leisure without responsibility begins to dim as the consciousness of being unemployed grows and questions about the future begin to raise themselves. For these young people the sense of holiday soon slides into a feeling of aimlessness and anxiety:

I was unemployed for several months. At first I really enjoyed it, just lazing about after so many months of hard study, it was a relief. But then I became restless - unstimulated.

[Employed by electricity authority]

I’d been unemployed for about four weeks before the position was advertised. Even though I was only unemployed for about 2 months I felt my self-worth slipping as the prospect of not getting a job became real. I spent the time as a holiday - socialising etc. with the view of it being a temporary situation.

[Occupational Therapist]

I was unemployed for over 6 months. The first couple of months were a bit of a holiday for me. I admit to dole bludging for that time. One morning it struck me that my life was going no where in particular so I started in earnest looking for a career. Having nothing to do was not the life for me.

[Clerk with Telecom and driver/signaller in the Army Reserve]

Where there is no certainty about the future, unemployment for most people is hard to take:

I was unemployed for 4 months, and they were 4 months of hell! Feelings of being useless, depressed, and whether or not the last 12 years of school were worth it or not. People’s
thoughts and words didn't help any. Much of the time was spent being bored and working casually at a supermarket.

[Student nurse]

Yes I have been unemployed - twice in fact! The first time was for what seemed to be forever, but in fact was just over 6 months! There is only one word to explain unemployment and that is hell!

[Office secretary]

I was unemployed after my HSC for approximately 5-6 months - I hated it!! Boring, boring, boring!!!

[Dental nurse]

THE LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYED

Those most likely to feel the deepest effects of unemployment are young people consistently unsuccessful in the job market: the long-term unemployed and under-employed. For these young people, the duration of unemployment becomes of increasing importance, encompassing as it does the experience of repeated rejections and the consequent erosion of self-confidence and community respect. These are the people - old as well as young - about whom a Bureau of Labour Market Research Report commented:

Clearly, the long-term unemployed have borne the greatest burden of unemployment over the past decade. This finding is significant for several reasons: it suggests that the nature of the current high levels of unemployment is particularly damaging, both in terms of immediate personal hardship, and because of possible adverse, long-term consequences for the labour market. This has a number of important implications for the formulation of appropriate labour market policy responses to unemployment.

As Chapter 3 indicated, these young people are likely to be the educationally, socially and economically disadvantaged. They are young people - often not highly visible to the society generally - who face a future with no certainty and little hope. Some of them responded to the questionnaire:

Since leaving school in 1981, I've been for numerous interviews for jobs, but still no luck. I'm one of them unemployed people. I've tried so very hard but as usual unsuccessful. I hate being 'on the dole' but that money has been helping me find a job for two years.

Being unemployed is no fun. I spend my time helping Mum around the house. You could call me an 'apprentice house-wife'. At the moment it is very depressing being unemployed because there doesn't seem to be a 'light at the end of the tunnel'.

[Unemployed for several months; would have liked to train as a nurse but did not qualify]

I see the future a dead loss as unemployment is getting higher every year and as for the years to come it looks like we'll be having robots to do our work.

[Unemployed]
There is no future for me. I have ruined myself by not learning enough and putting tattoos on my hands, legs and arms. If I had my life from high school I would of took more notice and I wouldn’t have been so naughty.

[Has had only a few factory jobs]

At the moment I see my future life as a financial battle because I don’t think I’ll ever get a good enough job to be able to get married have kids and be able to support them the way I’d like to.

[Unemployed]

Contrast these with the response of a young man - also unemployed - who has just completed his Diploma in Health Surveying and regards his unemployment as a well-earned break;

Being at home at the moment I generally work around the house. At the moment I am involved in constructing a cellar which keeps me pleasantly occupied. Of course in the traditions of our family’s way of doing things we have some 15 projects going at once. The pool filter being relocated to a more suitable position. The workshop being converted to a recreation room. The front garden being landscaped. A path along the back wall of the house, etc., etc.

FEELING THE EFFECTS OF UNEMPLOYMENT

The responses quoted above have shown that people react to unemployment in different ways depending essentially on the degree of certainty or hope that the experience will be a temporary one; that there are alternatives chosen or offering in further education or employment; in short, that the future is under control. As one of the young unemployed put it: "The key word for most is ‘hope’".

For those without certainty or hope, unemployment is likely to be at best an unpleasant and worrying experience. The more prolonged the unemployment, the more likely that most people will suffer a deepening sense of rejection, of being useless, without purpose or place:

After leaving school I was unemployed for 6 months till joining the bank. Those 6 months were the worst of my life. My life entered a rut of dole queues and rejected job interviews. If someone is really looking for work then unemployment is a time of depression when you feel useless, frustrated, angry and unwanted.

Being unemployed makes you a non-person in many people’s eyes - a dole bludger who should get off their arse and grab one of the ‘tons’ of jobs going. You must have so much determination to keep getting up and out there. It’s like having a sickness after a while - no self worth. Actually getting a job - any job - after time out of work puts you on a high - You are a person with a motive, some purpose again.

Some insight into the progressive deterioration of people under the stress of prolonged unemployment is offered by some Australian research studies. Brewer, for example, reporting on his studies of unemployed people in Victoria, outlined a pattern of reaction:
Generally speaking, people are shocked that they should be rendered jobless or that it should take them so long to complete successfully the transition from school to work. Vigorous job-seeking eventually gave way to dejection and a sense of hopelessness. A temporary display of bravado in the midst of this pattern was often evident. There were also intermittent periods of creative use of one's time and formulation of new plans. But, as job hopes grew dim, so boredom and aimlessness became more salient. In the case of protracted unemployment, quite alarming social psychological repercussions were often noted. Although some people grew angry about the cause of their situation, despair and depression were much more common symptoms. Fear about their own (and their children's) futures, without work, often reached acute levels.4

The extent to which a particular person conforms to the pattern depends on circumstances. Perhaps of primary importance is the duration of unemployment, less in objective terms of weeks, months or years than in the subjective assessment of each individual experiencing unemployment. The same period of weeks or months for one person may be a well-earned holiday; for another it may bring all the stresses of unemployment. Thus the question 'How long is prolonged unemployment?' will be answered differently according to individual circumstances; and the differences in what is seen as an acceptable period of unemployment are wide. For some even a few weeks of unemployment are intolerable, as was the case with the young woman who even when unemployed had a part-time job as head trainer of a football club:

I was only unemployed for about 4 weeks from a full-time job (I was still at the football club) and that nearly drove me mad after being used to always having a lot to do.

At the other extreme are those comparatively rare young people (some of them described in Chapter 7) who accept unemployment - for some years if necessary - because it provides opportunity to pursue their own interests or to engage unpaid in socially useful activities.

For most unemployed young people however, unemployment - while it might be a financial concern from the outset - becomes a psychological burden when it is prolonged beyond the period first of their hopes and then of their expectations; when they begin to lose a sense of purpose and when the question of how to fill in time raises itself each morning. It is this realisation of unemployment which starts the cycle described by Brewer.

How deeply and how adversely young people are affected by their experience of prolonged unemployment depends largely on how long they can retain a sense of place in the community and purpose strong enough to overcome the disabilities of their situation. Their capacity to do this depends again on a number of personal factors. Among these are the individual's own attachment to the work ethic and attitudes to work; the financial and moral support available from family, friends or other social groups; the person's own self-confidence and independence of mind; the capacity to use the enforced leisure in constructive and purposeful ways. Those who have the educational, personal and social resources which enable them to make good use of time in unemployment are on
the whole unlikely to be condemned to indefinite unemployment, except by choice.

For most unemployed people, their unemployment signifies rejection by the society; and young people in their lack of confidence and experience are particularly vulnerable. The unemployed person loses or, in the case of the school leaver, never gains an adequate assured income and the sense of independence and control of circumstances which goes with it. Time, which previously in education or employment was structured and used according to external obligations, now stretches out as an emptiness to be filled. And the knowledge of community disapproval combines with disappointed expectations of job, career and money of one's own to erode self-confidence and self-respect. In these circumstances, getting a job - any job - is a matter for rejoicing.

I like work better than being unemployed. At least I have something to do. When I was unemployed I used to walk the streets everyday, doing nothing which makes you feel depressed as if you're a reject, not good enough to get a job.

I felt as though I had become a part of the world again and you really feel like a new person.

I really enjoy my work and find that I am slowly regaining the confidence which I lost during the time I was unemployed. It is really demoralising writing away to apply for a job, knowing you can do it and waiting in vain for a reply.

The following chapters explore what not getting a job means for many young people.
Surviving or Living: The Financial Effects of Unemployment

On being unemployed, you spend your time trying not to spend money. The dole is only enough to survive on, not live on.

[Unemployed for ten months]

UNEMPLOYMENT AND POVERTY

The lack or loss of an adequate assured income is the immediate and most obvious result of being unemployed. Those without private or family means of support live in poverty. The consequences have been well documented in a number of the research studies of the last decade or so. The effects of reduced income and poverty begin with the loss of financial independence and security, and end too often in debt, loss of dignity and humiliation. The responses of young people to the open-ended questionnaire confirm that the pattern of deprivation holds also for many of them. The comment of one of the more fortunate among them - a bank teller - says a great deal in a few words:

"Working in the bank, I see many people my age on the dole and so desperate they make withdrawals of 20 cents or 50 cents."

One of the first casualties of unemployment is financial independence, and the young people feel the effects in much the same way as older persons:

"I am unemployed at the moment and I hate it. I have no sense of being independent. I have to borrow money from parents and friends which I don't like doing."

[Retrenched at 18 from previous job]

"So I am now unemployed, and I am very bored. I have had no money for three weeks, so I can't go out unless my boyfriend pays for everything and it's a bit hard on him for he's only a student. I spend my time doing the housework at home."

[Retrenched from previous employment]
Savings soon dwindle. Brewer\(^2\), in a 1982 study, reported that most unemployed people in his survey had little in the way of savings to buffer them against the loss of income through unemployment. And the young people report:

At the beginning of this year I was unemployed for 4½ months. Although I was working as an agent and not getting paid I was collecting the dole, $62 per week. It was costing me at least $120 to live. I came with $7000 in the bank and was down to $10 by the time my first commission cheque came.

*Insurance salesman*

Unemployment is rough, you might receive unemployment benefits but that's not enough to keep you going, and you can't save money for something, especially if you've got a family to support.

*Unemployed*

Some young people are protected against the worst effects of poverty in that they can live with their families (though this, as will be shown later, has its own problems).

I am lucky I am still at home, and do not have to pay for rent, board, lodging and bills etc.

*Unemployed*

Having a very helpful and supportive family was a great help and I feel genuinely sorry for those who have to manage by themselves, both financially and emotionally.

*Bank clerk; previously unemployed for 4 months*

But, as indicated in Chapter 3, a great many of the young unemployed come from families with other unemployed members. The young unemployed become a further drain on already meagre family finances.

**MAKING ENDS MEET**

Smith, in a 1982 study of ninety low income families in Sydney (including twenty who were unemployed or invalid), examined in detail the day-to-day implications of living on a low income. Recreation and school excursions for children were among the first things to be cut out, and these had significant effects on health and family relationships. Living was generally hand-to-mouth without opportunity for saving or providing reserves for emergencies. Almost all the families were forced to buy the cheapest and often less nutritious foods, and those worst off skipped meals to provide for other needs. Clothing was generally second-hand and inadequate or supplied by emergency relief.\(^3\)

Though by the nature of the ACER survey the young people responding to the questionnaire were not generally those worst off financially, the struggle to make ends meet is clearly evident in their responses. For those without family or other support, unemployment benefits barely cover necessities:
Unemployment is very hard because you are only getting $137.00 a fortnight. But for the under 18s they get $80.00 a fortnight. At the moment the unemployment is very high which makes it even more difficult for people like myself. I haven’t been unemployed the whole 2 years. I have had about 3 or 4 jobs but they were only part-time, didn’t last for more than 1-2 weeks.

(Unemployed for 2 years off and on)

I was unemployed for about 18-20 months. It was absolutely terrible, after paying board I hardly had any money left. It really depressed me to see other girls, dressing nicely and spending plenty.

Being unemployed isn’t easy. It’s hard trying to pay bills with money you haven’t got, especially when you pay board, buy clothes and other small items.

If I find myself unemployed again I feel I would be much better off dead and buried, at least I wouldn’t have to worry about where my next meal will come from. With the little money you get from the government it’s below the poverty line. I’d love to see some of them in Canberra try living off the dole. I’d bet them the dole money would go up then to keep them in their luxuries - unemployed people’s luxury is food.

(Cashier in a supermarket; previously unemployed for 10 months)

As with the older unemployed, social life is curtailed and (as will be seen later) relationships suffer:

Being unemployed is not so good, because you have to budget everything: rent, food, going out for a social evening. You cannot go out as much.

(Unemployed; previously worked in a supermarket)

You can’t live on the unemployment benefit. It’s nowhere near enough to keep you going for 2 weeks. When I’m not out looking for a job I sit at home either cleaning up or doing nothing. We never go out anywhere though. We can never afford to.

(Unemployed after a SYETP job)

I was on the dole this year during the slack. It is very hard to live off the dole every fortnight. I was getting $137.00 a fortnight and that does not go far when you have car payments and Medibank payments to make every month. With what is left you can not really go out and have a good time.

(Employed in a sugar mill)

Pressures on families are particularly severe as these comments indicate:

I am married with two children. My husband is unemployed and we are finding it hard to live as we are paying a loan which is $110 a month. We pay that one fortnight and the next buy groceries. We do get a cut in our rent. We can’t always afford wood and we mainly get our clothes from second-hand shops. If I knew life was going to be like that I don’t think I would have got married and had children. If my husband had a job it would make life much easier.

At the moment I am a housewife, expecting my first baby in three week’s time. My husband is unemployed and we are finding it rather difficult living off unemployment benefits. It is quite a shock to the system after having had good paying jobs with never the need to really budget. I would like to get a part-time job after the baby is born just for
my own mental satisfaction and a little extra income. Hopefully by then my husband will be working.

[Nurse]

My husband is a joiner very good at his work, but what work? He has been unemployed twice in the last year which made us think how can we expect our children to grow up and have jobs when their parents haven’t.

[Housewife; 2 children in the family]

My husband lost his job 2 years ago and I have been keeping our place going ever since. I would love so much to start a family, but I would have to give up work then, and then go on the dole. I don’t think we will survive. Other people my age I know of have their husbands and boyfriends working so when they give up work to have a family they will be better off than those of us on the dole.

[Machinist in a factory]

COPING

People do find various ways of coping with the financial constraints of unemployment. A few, for whom the condition is by choice or temporary, manage quite well - for a time.

Well in the year (1979) when I was not working there were 4 of us sharing a house $50 per week, so for the 4 of us we were bringing in $200 per week less rent we had $150 to buy food and smokes - not exactly rich but we could afford to go out and do things. We had a ball. It’s not bad if you work it out. Like everything you get sick of it. I used to buy clothes from Saint Vincent de Paul, at one stage we got a food package from a church, let’s face it you could never starve in Australia.

[Left school at 16, travelled in Australia and had a succession of well paid jobs; now, with her husband, owns a successful business]

I hate being unemployed! In Broome it was O.K. for a while, down the beach every day everyone else was on the dole and having a good time but I get restless and think what I could be doing with bucks in the bank. At the moment I’m in debt, very bored and want a job desperately.

I am unemployed at the moment, and I kill time by going to town with my mates, go for drives in the country and to beaches in summer etc. I am having a buzz - NOW! Anyway with $150 a fortnight that sees me through over two and a half weeks including looking after a car too. I feel great and happy.

[Unemployed 9 months since leaving school; studying motor mechanics at night]

While unemployed, I lived in paradise and a huge new house in Noosa Heads Queensland. Heaps of good surf and good people and good times. Only problem was I was too broke to enjoy it and I got bored with not doing anything to better my future.

[Qualified carpenter]

For others, borrowing becomes a way of life:

Yes, I have been unemployed and I hated it, because I would get a cheque once a fortnight, and with paying rent, food and other bills I just couldn’t cope and I would have to ask...
Mum to lend me some money, but I could never pay it back because when the next pay cheque came the money would just go again.

[Machinist in a factory]

I am unemployed and find it very hard and boring, you have not got enough money to get by, always asking a brother or a sister who's working for a dollar or two.

I was unemployed for 6 months and it is a real drag; i.e., having no money and what I was getting off the dole was not enough to last me a fortnight as I had board to pay and trying to save. I felt real bad having to rely on my parents for money and they didn't like it either.

[Now employed by an automotive firm]

My brother has managed by borrowing money from his friends, as they borrowed from him when he was employed and they were not, But someone who does not have such friends or helpful parents and who gets less dole money than he does would be in great trouble indeed.

[School student]

Some find make-and-do ways of supplementing unemployment benefits:

At the moment I am putting in a big vegetable garden so it will save us a few bob and I make my own sheets and linen only when I can get cheap material. But I think we have done alright on what we have been living on. I suppose there are a lot more people worse off than what we are. I should be grateful that I have a nice home and 2 healthy children. We were lucky when we moved into a house, it was carpeted right though and wall-papered. The lawns were in and there was also a garden around the house and plenty of flowers. Well thanks for letting me write what I feel.

[Husband unemployed]

When we were unemployed we spent every cent looking for work. I crocheted small articles for sale and sold Avon door-to-door. We had to live in one room at my in-law's house.

And a few choose less acceptable ways of coping:

I was unemployed for a while and couldn't receive the dole so I had no money and had to steal things I wanted and needed which got me into trouble with the law. It was very boring and I had nothing to do.

[Apprentice motor mechanic]

SOME LESS OBVIOUS EFFECTS

Inadequate means has some subsidiary effects. Lack of money for transport curtails the search for employment, particularly if there is need to travel outside the home area and when public transport is also inadequate - areas which seem often to coincide with those of high unemployment. Some of the responses to the questionnaire mention this constraint on job-seeking:
I was unemployed about 4-5 years ago for 5 weeks; it was O.K. for the first 2 weeks but became very boring. I was living in a flat so it also became very expensive (not even having any money to catch the bus into the Social Security or employment office) - I didn’t cope very well being unemployed!!

[Office worker]

A lot of people cannot get to the CES every day to look at the job boards, for a variety of reasons - with bus fares now gone up to $1.00-$1.10 per ride, if a person 17 years of age went to the CES every day (at a cost of $5.00-$6.00 per week) that is a heck of a large slice out of a dole cheque! (I’m not sure what the weekly rate is now, but I think it’s about $35-$40 a week). Say if that person also had to pay $10.00 to $20.00 a week board or rent, but lived about 10-20 kilometres out of the city, it would then cost even more to get to the CES, leaving next to nothing to live on!

[Now an office receptionist]

One of the effects of poverty and unemployment most frequently emphasised in the research is the consequent difficulty of meeting house repayments or rent. Some of the comments of the young people quoted already refer to this aspect of financial constraint; but for some young people unemployment may result in the lack of any shelter at all - homelessness.

As the evidence of youth unemployment has grown through the 1980s, so too has concern with the associated problem of youth homelessness. The accumulating evidence over the years since about 1982 finally produced a comprehensive National Inquiry into Homeless Children by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. This inquiry, begun in 1987, published its report, Our Homeless Children, in February 1989, leaving little doubt that the problem of youth homelessness is large and serious. Focusing on young people under 18 years, the Report shows that the research presented to the inquiry indicates 20 000 to 25 000 homeless young people and an equivalent number or more at serious risk of being homeless. Factors contributing to this situation include: family stress, conflict, neglect and abuse; family poverty and isolation; inadequate and inappropriate assistance to families and children; youth unemployment and its financial and psychological effects.

For obvious reasons, homeless youth are not among the respondents to the ACER questionnaire, but their existence in considerable numbers is a reminder that there are many worse off then those young people whose experiences are told in this report.

**THERE’S POVERTY AND POVERTY**

There are other young people besides the unemployed who lack an adequate income and feel the constraints of poverty. The comments made by unemployed young people on lack of money and its effects are matched - in many cases almost word for word - by comments of students, particularly those undertaking three or four year courses in higher education. Some of them get the Tertiary Education Assistance Scheme (TEAS) allowance of the time; others are ineligible...
for this because of parent income levels. Many of the latter complain about the hardship for parents whose income is just above the level which excludes TEAS eligibility. A medical student, for example, comments:

I do not get TEAS. My parents fall just over the maximum income for me to receive this. They are not rich and I feel cheated when I see others who are obviously well-off receiving full TEAS money. The method for determining TEAS recipients is merely a measure of how good your accountant is at hiding an income. I see others using all of their TEAS money as spending cash to be spent at the tavern on Friday night, while their parents cover the college fees with their petty cash. Then the government tells me that I may not have anything because my parents were foolish enough to put their money in the bank instead of writing it off as a loss by buying a new farm or another house.

Students who are not eligible for TEAS resent the continued dependence on parents:

I think the Government could make it easier for students by allowing everybody to be eligible for TEAS. I'm 18 years old and I'm forced to be dependent on my father's income. I'm sure this puts many people off studying. It's difficult to have to be dependent on your parents for this time.

[TAFAE student]

Those who subsist on TEAS without supplementary support from families find the going tough:

The university environment is excellent but struggling to exist on a TEAS grant means that I am unable to afford to take advantage of some of the social and cultural experiences which are available on and near campus. I resent being poorly dressed and restricted to basic transport, in the number of visits I can afford to take to my father, in the number of text (and other) books I can't buy or the exercising I can't do but I can feel myself mentally expanding from the input of knowledge and I believe that the world will have a place for me and a salary when I do leave university.

[Anthropology student]

Like the unemployed, students find that savings disappear and debts are incurred:

TEAS. I've spent about $700 I had in reserve in the bank. I owe money to my sister and my parents help me out with food. I share a rented flat and do not buy luxuries. I am, right now, working without pay so that I will be eligible for some part-time work later on. With the now necessary job I might have to forego an honour or two. No great hardship.

[Student in Mechanical Engineering]

Some are forced to take part-time jobs

I am a postgraduate student but without a scholarship as I didn't get first-class honours. Thus if I wish to have the 'luxury' of having a higher degree I must earn money to put myself through. I must also have enough for field trips if my degree is completed. This entails working 20 hours a week as well as trying to work as a full-time student I'm rather bitter that there is a lack of support generally for students both from the government and the public.

[Anthropology student]
Because (until recently) the TEAS allowance was less than the adult dole, many students comment on the discrepancy. Many resent the fact that the dole is higher and that TEAS is income-tested on parent income while the dole is not:

The thing that really annoys me is the TEAS allowance system. If I were to go on the dole I would get practically twice the amount I am getting through the TEAS allowance. This is annoying as I know people who are on the dole and do nothing apart from go out and enjoy themselves with their money. They don’t even look for a job. While I have to go to school for 16 hours a week, do about 30 hours study at home, have to pay board, buy clothes, books, etc., pay for transport to and from school and have little if anything left to go out and really enjoy myself. Sometimes, when I think about this I wonder if it is really worth doing the course. I mean I still have another 2 years to go.

(Accountancy student)

One thing I am a bit annoyed about is the TEAS allowance. It seems to me that the government would rather have people on the dole than doing tertiary study. For example, if I wasn’t doing tertiary study, I would be entitled to collect the dole (irrespective of what my parent’s income is) but because I’m doing tertiary study and my parents earn just a bit too much my parents have to save and scrape to keep me alive. As far as I can see I’m doing the country a bigger favour by doing tertiary study than being on the dole and doing nothing.

(Student in Computer Studies)

So, why do they continue as students? Why not go on the dole? The replies seem to indicate that there are many and various reasons for persisting with studies: a liking for university life and for study, rewarding social contacts, freedom. Some of these are indicated in the following comments:

I am on TEAS and am trying to cope (and have so far) independent of my parents. This burden often seems overwhelming and the only thing that has saved me is the friendship of many great people I have discovered at uni. This is perhaps the biggest plus on the side of uni. The stimulation of good discussion, the enjoyment of sport and outdoor activities have made this life pleasurable. If the pay were slightly better it would be easy to become an ‘eternal student’.

(Anthropology student)

I’m a student at Adelaide University but work at -- department store on the weekends. I hate -- as a job. It is very boring, but I need the money. I don’t really like uni much but it beats working a 40 hour week. As a student one can pick your own hours.

But what is clearly of over-riding importance to most students is the end result of the years of study; that is, the prospect of a job and a career. As Chapter 3 indicates, post-school qualifications considerably reduce the risk of unemployment, and its duration if a job is not immediately forthcoming. Many students show that they are well aware of these advantages:

Engineering is not really the career I would like to follow. However, save getting a job (no opportunities for career advancement), there was not much else open to me. I would have chosen to be a pilot, but that takes ‘big bucks!’ which I haven’t got. So here I am at university, hating it, missing my friends, girlfriend, family, but having to put up with it and
slog my guts out until I finish my degree just so I can follow a career which doesn’t really over appeal to me. But a buck is a buck and engineers earn plenty!

At the moment I am a student at --. I am doing a Bachelor of Business Studies in Catering and Hotel Management. I would rather be amongst the workforce earning a living. If I could earn a decent wage, I would be more independent. But I know that if I enter the workforce now, I would be unlikely to get the sort of job I will be able to get when I finish my course in 7 years. So I am sacrificing another 4 years of my life so that I can get the sort of job I long for - one with security, challenges, interests, good promotion possibilities and of course, money.

I’m at uni because of two reasons: one, I wanted to go, and two, job prospects at the time encouraged me to do something other than look for work. Hopefully things will be better when I’ve finished uni in 1985.

[Student in Communication Studies]

I know it is heaps of work but I am prepared for that if it gives me a good and interesting career at the end. It should also provide me with enough money for the things I want to do.

[Law student]

Besides their enhanced job prospects, students have other advantages over their unemployed peers. Studying certainly brings mental and physical pressures, from time to time of an intense nature; but for students, there is an end in sight - in both senses of the word. Poverty is likely to be for them a temporary condition. Moreover, the poverty and the stresses are not exacerbated by community disapproval, such as unemployed people experience. The student, by virtue of being a student, has an identity and a respected place in the community. The unemployed person has neither, and financial constraints, while uncomfortable, are of less fundamental significance than the sense of social rejection. One of the responses by a public servant, unemployed himself for four months before gaining appointment, puts the distinction this way:

At the moment I feel it is people’s self-esteem and welfare we are talking about here. If people have some form of income - albeit a pitiful sum - at least they have something to survive on. ... the unemployed have government benefits, but I know from those around me who are unemployed that it is satisfaction they desire and being able to prove that they are someone important and have the ability to work.

The problem of youth unemployment therefore is not simply a matter of guaranteeing subsistence through welfare benefits. It is basically a problem of offering place and identity in a changing society. It is the lack of these which makes unemployment intolerable for most unemployed people.
Time: And to Spare

Being unemployed is no fun at all, endless hours thinking what can I do next. I’ve washed
the windows, cut the lawn, been fishing, tidied up round the house. All the things you
don’t have enough time for when you’re working you find you have too much time when
you’re unemployed. More time pulling your hair out wondering ‘what am I going to do,
where can I find work’. I really have no idea what I would like to do, but then again I’ll
grab any job that I can get as I can’t afford to be fussy. Beggars can’t be choosers.

[Unemployed after being retrenched]

TIME ON THEIR HANDS

Making the point that ‘more and more wealth is being produced by fewer and fewer people’, Reid (Chairman and Chief Executive of Shell (UK) Ltd) in a 1986 address went on to comment:

Spare capacity has appeared as the curse of unemployment and our rewards systems are
designed to mismatch the capability to enjoy with the opportunity. In simple terms those
who have time on their hands don’t have the money to enjoy it and those who have the
money don’t have the time.

There is an element of truth in Reid’s simple contrast between the unemployed
and under-employed who have time and no money and the employed who have
money and no time. The aphorism makes a point, but the reality is much more
complex. No doubt adequate money would make unemployment less stressful,
but money without purpose or occupation does not solve the problem of having
time on one’s hands - of having nothing to do.

Having a full-time job is the traditional and socially approved way of
structuring and using time. Work, as discussed in Chapter 8, provides a
purposeful activity which fills prescribed hours of each day and week and which
allows non-work time to be regarded as legitimate holiday or leisure. Unemployment removes these externally imposed constraints on time as well as
the sense of purpose that goes with work. So for many, if not most, unemployed
people, time stretches ahead without commitments to mark its passage. Two of
the unemployed young people show what this means for them:

I know that I feel useless, day after day, the days become meaningless. Tuesday,
Wednesday, it doesn’t mean anything.
When you begin to realise you are unemployed it comes as a big shock. All your life you have been a student, always going back to school after Christmas holidays - this year it's different. The holiday is endless, the boredom terrible. You have all this time on your hands but very little money to enjoy it with.

The sense of time as a burden is common to all but a few of the young unemployed, but the degree to which individuals are adversely affected by this depends on the circumstances in which they are unemployed. Among factors of particular influence are: the reasons why they are unemployed; the duration of unemployment; the individual's personal resources in terms of interests, skills and determined sense of purpose; external sources of moral and perhaps financial support.

**TIME FOR PLEASURE**

As Chapter 7 has shown, young people became unemployed for a variety of reasons. In most cases, the period of unemployment is comparatively short, associated with breaks in education or between education and work or with job-changing. For a great many young people in these categories, unemployment is little more than a well-earned break. Time passes quickly enough in relaxation, social pursuits and odd jobs, as the following extracts indicate:

I was unemployed for about 6 months and quite frankly I enjoyed it - I was extremely busy in community and church commitments as well as chasing up possible job possibilities and never found myself with the unemployment blues. That time period gave me a chance to think about myself and my future, which was important. It helped prepare me for the transition from being so long a student and being a responsible member of the workforce!!

*Trained dietitian*

After leaving school I was unemployed for 5 months. It didn't really worry me at first as I was having a good holiday from school. The months seemed to roll by so quickly as I was helping on my parents' farm with odd jobs. They didn't mind me being at home as I was very busy doing the English course. Now when I look back I hate the thought of ever being out of work and I'm so glad that I'm doing a job I enjoy.

*Employed as a jilleroo*

Since I left college I have been busy seeing friends I hadn't seen for ages and doing other things, so being unemployed for me is no great disadvantage, except financially. I am involved in some art and craft organisations and this free time is giving me time to explore new forms and techniques for these arts (the main one being leatherwork).

*Intends studying art*

For other young people, particularly those for whom the future is uncertain, even a short spell of unemployment is hard to take. The most common description of such periods is 'boring'. The following comments illustrate:
I’ve been unemployed once for about 3 months just after I left school. It would have to be one of the most boring 3 months I can remember, there’s not much to do here even if you had the money.

[Electricity Authority employee]

I have been unemployed since I left school on 27-12-81 and it’s boring, frustrating and probably the most important issue anyone can imagine.

[Unemployed nearly 2 years]

Unemployment becomes ‘boring’ when the individual can find no purposeful activities to substitute for paid employment.

TIME AND PURPOSE

There are some constraints on the purposeful use of time by unemployed young people. One is the amount of time consumed by the necessary task of looking for work - anything from a few hours to all day:

Currently unemployed. I spent up to 4 hours and at least 1 hour a day looking for work - no car. The rest of the time is spent talking, reading, currently learning French. I feel really pissed off sometimes.

[Sacked from a previous job in accountancy]

I was once out of work for 2 months. It was very depressing. Each working day I went job seeking for 3 hours each morning and afternoon.

[Now an apprentice hairdresser]

I’m unemployed. I spend most of my days out trying to get work.

[Unemployed for 12 months since school]

I’ve been unemployed for about 2 or 3 months but I didn’t receive the dole. It was the most pain in the ass three months I’ve ever had. You would get up in the morning go and look on the boards, find a job you were interested in, ring them up or write a letter or go see them straight away. You’d be finished before lunch time and as it was October, November, December, January that I was out of work for I would then go down the beach.

[Apprentice in Carpentry/Joinery]

Apart from taking up a good deal of time, the need - and in the case of dole recipients the obligation - to look for work has the negative effect of making it difficult for the unemployed person to pursue study or training or to work on self-employment ventures. The degree of difficulty that young people have in using their time purposefully if they are receiving unemployment benefits has increased or diminished from time to time according to the interpretation of conditions of eligibility. In the period around 1983, for example, attendance at formal courses of study for more than eight hours a week was held to imply that the unemployed person was not actively seeking and available for work and therefore not eligible for unemployment benefits. There have even been periods when engaging in voluntary work on any regular basis was regarded in the same light. At all times however, the zeal with which such eligibility conditions have been enforced has
varied according to the geographical area, the levels of unemployment and job availability and the good sense of those in government agencies responsible for implementing policies.

Despite the constraints, there is some scope for unemployed young people to use the time at their disposal constructively and purposefully, as the following section shows.

MAKING USE OF TIME

Those most likely to survive the devitalising effects of lengthening unemployment are those whose circumstances and personal qualities allow them to use their enforced leisure productively. The motivation to do this is closely associated with their confidence in themselves and the future, and those who are best equipped to make best use of their time generally find employment at some stage before their confidence is finally eroded by repeated rejections.

Young people choose various ways of occupying their time purposefully. Some have hobbies which they pursue with determination:

I have been unemployed, but I wasn't going to let it get me down so I started hobbies - horse riding, rug making, copperwork, doll making, army reserves - anything I could lay my hands on so I didn't give myself time to get bored in that 18 months.

[Now has the unusual job - for a female - of groundsperson in a golf-club, and loves it]

With some, their hobbies are a useful basis for future employment:

While unemployed I spent my time with hobbies (electronics, computers) and learnt enough to make myself confident in my present job. Sport also takes up a big part of my life.

[Home computers salesman]

I'm unemployed at the moment but I'm studying something and I also help with my father's business as he's self-employed and needs help when he gets a job. I'm studying electronics. I'd like to do this and it has been my hobby ever since I can remember. I couldn't find an apprenticeship anywhere though I have all the schooling needed. At the moment I'll be more than happy to find a place to work for nothing just to get the experience necessary for me as I've reached the stage in my correspondence course in which I need practical work.

I was unemployed for 8 months, the first couple of months were great, then I got bored and didn't have any money to get the things I wanted. I spent much of my time playing around with my computer and learning a little bit more all the time which has helped me in my present job.

[Employed looking after electronic field equipment]

A considerable number of young unemployed people take part-time courses of one kind or another, as a way of acquiring or keeping up skills as well as lending purpose to the time at their disposal:
I have been unemployed since 28.4.83 and have undertaken a typing course just to maintain my skills. I keep very busy throughout the week. Like visit friends and have lunch with them, joined a health studio, take Mum out, visit job centre, go to shopping centres, go for interviews, and many other unexpected things. I have a car so it's easier to get around.

[Retrenched from her previous job which she had held for 5 years]

How do I spend my time being unemployed? I took up piano lessons again, and have a few exams to take before I have my A.Mus.A., so I can't really teach yet. I did do a modelling course, and received a piece of paper which said I had a diploma, but jobs for models in Tasmania are hopeless. What else do I do with my time? I go to Rotaract. I used to go to Vigor, but when you're unemployed you can't afford $250 to renew your membership. I do lots of cooking and make bread for friends. I do lots of sewing, but you can only do so much, I mean I couldn't fit anything else in my wardrobe. I've started sewing for friends. I go running every morning to get nice and alert to do nothing all day. In summer at least you can go swimming.

[Graduate in Accounting, but feels that being a female is a handicap in this male-dominated profession]

At the moment I'm unemployed, so I took on a motor mechanics course (nightly) at CYSS, and I am happy now in a way because I don't get bored as much. To tell the truth I don't like the dole. I would rather prefer a full-time job like I used to have.

Voluntary work is a satisfying use of time for some young people:

I am on the dole, but studying 4 hours per week while a volunteer worker. I would like very much to work in a museum using my area of study. In the museum I am semi-research and semi-clerical, assisting with describing and cataloguing work that is given to the museum.

[Arts graduate; wants to take a Diploma in Museum Studies]

I was unemployed 5 months, found pleasure in voluntary work. People appreciate you more if they know you don't want to get paid. The government pays enough.

[Training as a Bar Attendant in a SYETP Course]

I was only unemployed for two months. I started to feel depressed after a few weeks as I am a very active person. I took to teaching horse riding and helping handicapped people. You get to the stage where you just feel like giving up.

[Legal secretary]

Some have part-time or casual jobs which help to keep them busy and provide a measure of independence:

I spend most of my time exercising my horses and occasionally training and cleaning stables at a stud. Other times usually in the summer I work part-time picking poppies and transplanting pyrethrum plants. Yes I love what I do seeing as I love animals very much. I don't like it when the ground is frozen or when it is pouring, I don't mind the cold or the rain so long as it isn't a lot. Yes I still am unemployed. I spend my time doing the above things but I still wish I had a job. Even though I try to keep quite busy by playing sports as well as riding. I sometimes feel as if I will always be unemployed.

[Unemployed since leaving school]

I have been unemployed, it is all right. I spent most of my time at the CYSS doing their courses and helping out. When I was unemployed I wanted to earn my money to know that
I had earned it myself. I seem to be more happier with my job and I don't feel embarrassed. I also don't feel bad. I am still unemployed in some way because my job is only seasonal.

[Has a seasonal job splitting scallops in a fish factory]

At the moment I am lucky enough to have a job even though it is only casual. The work I do isn't really all that exciting (I work in a food processing factory) but then it gives me something to do and money I otherwise wouldn't have. This is the first and only job I have ever had. Before I got the job I was unemployed for over a year, in that time I got lazy. I slept in all the time and you just generally have a big holiday which was alright for a while but you tend to get bored.

Some are grimly determined to fill their time with activity:

I have been unemployed twice. The first time straight after I left school for about three months. I spent my time moping around, doing nothing, being depressed. Then I got the Sales Assistant's job. Now I am unemployed again. At the moment I don't seem to have enough time to do everything. I refuse to get upset or depressed; that doesn't help. Instead I'm looking for night work, helping around the house, reading, helping my sister with her new baby, reading, taking my dogs for long walks, drawing and (you'll never guess!) reading. It doesn't sound like enough to fill in the days, but it does. If I ever find myself with too much spare time I'll go and do volunteer work. So, I feel good.

[Intends now to do an art course]

But the palm for effort must surely go to the young woman who is now looking forward to a promised appointment in the public service:

To fill in my time, I started taking a variety of courses. These included a St. John's Ambulance first aid course, an adult education beginners French course, grooming and deportment and looking in style. The latter two were run by the CYSS and were free for unemployed people under 25. These ended before my overseas trip. Last week, I began 2 more courses - gourmet cooking and computers - both run by CYSS. In addition to these 2 courses I am doing a few hours of voluntary work at one of the creches in Devonport. Yesterday was my first time there and I found working with children to be tremendous fun! I've also been asked to teach English to a foreign lady, an offer I think I will accept.

You know, I am one of the busiest unemployed people I know of!!! When I am at home, I knit or write to my 80 penfriends, as well as numerous other activities. I never have enough time to do everything I want to do! At least I don't have time to become too depressed. At times I feel down, mainly because I don't have enough money to do the things I'd like to do. Sometimes I feel that it's unfair that my friends have got the jobs and careers they want and I haven't. I'm very lucky, though, to have numerous friends and a wonderful family to cheer me up and make me appreciate the things I do have. I could always be worse off!!
problem for the young, the single, the less qualified and schooled, and those from lower socioeconomic suburbs. A great many seemed to spend their time at home in activities which were generally sex-stereotyped: cooking and sewing for women; wood/metal work and car repair for men.

Something of the same pattern comes through in the replies to the questionnaire, though for boys the time-passing activities seem more varied than Van Morst reports. Sport and exercise are commonly mentioned by boys; less so by girls:

I have been unemployed several times and it is very boring so I took up fitness training to fill in time and not spend money as unemployment payments do not give you any money to waste. We definitely need employment schemes.

[Now employed as a barman]

Most of the time I spend my time playing sport, studying Agricultural books and writing letters and possibly too much television. Sometimes I feel guilty because I would prefer to spend my time more constructively. Then I feel it's time wasted.

[Unemployed jackeroo]

I spent my time fishing and playing golf which made being unemployed bearable.

[Painter; previously unemployed for 5 months]

Odd jobs around the house use up some of the time:

The work I do as an unemployed person is work around my Mum's house, do something on my car and look for a job anywhere. I suppose I like it all for a while but it gets boring the monotony, NO.

It's unbearable because all you can do is odd jobs for your parents. After a while when you've been sleeping in, the parents pressure you in getting a job because they too can't stand your being around doing nothing except getting in their way, and before you know it the family feels like it's parting. I try and spend most of my time in my garden.

[Unemployed now because the drought made it impossible for his parents to continue employing him on their farm]

Visiting and 'hanging around' with unemployed mates are also ways of passing the time, mentioned mainly by boys:

I try and keep myself occupied as much as possible. I read the papers and go to the CES a lot to try and find work and in between I help with the housework, read a lot and on weekends visit my parents. I feel depressed and seem to be get more disappointed in not finding a job and probably if I don't find one soon I'll give up looking.

[This young man, unemployed 8 months, moved from his parents' farm to the city in an effort to find work]

I spend my time looking in papers (local and Sydney) each week and on CES boards, local businesses. In the time I'm not looking for work I usually do some fishing or get some local work on the side. I also just sit around a lot with my other unemployed mates.

I was unemployed for three times each time for approximately 6 months. It was boring. Most of the time you hang around the CES with your mates.

[Now a Soldier/Storeman Driver]
For girls, the handicrafts are important time-fillers, as well as providing a sense of creativity and achievement:

I'm sorry but I am unemployed so I really have not much to say about some of your questions. I spend most of my time doing cooking or handicraft. I know you probably think that isn't much but you always find more things to try and it gives you satisfaction when something turns out well.

[Trying hard for jobs]

I spend my time by crocheting big rugs. Walking down the beach and listening to music. I do not know many people my age around the -- area.

I was unemployed at the beginning of this year. It wasn't much fun. I spent my time sewing, knitting, reading, cooking, watching TV, going shopping. I wasn't really bored.

[Now teaches typing and shorthand]

Housework is mentioned as one of the main occupations of unemployed girls:

I do nothing all day except help Mum with the house work and write to my boyfriend. I would do anything to get another job. I hate staying home all the time. I fight with my mother and can't afford to go out.

[Has had occasional factory jobs]

When I wasn't working I found it very boring. Most of the days I was home ironing and cleaning because I had nothing else to do. I wasn't out of work very long which was lucky for me. I think I would have gone crazy if I was.

[Apprentice hairdresser]

I don't work but I stay home and do the housework. I like what I do at home because it fills in time and it helps my mother. But I would like to get a job so I can get out and meet people.

I'm a house cleaner of my own house. I haven't got an outside job. I dislike what I do but you have your freedom but that's not much when you have practically no money, waiting on a cheque all the time and sitting at home bored. It's definitely not what I want, I just want Australia to get a move on and have some jobs for us, help us.

[Unemployed for 2 years]

That housework can become a dead end for unemployed young women has been indicated in various ways in research studies. Miller and Volker, for example, found from their analysis of data from the Australian Longitudinal Study (ALS) that, compared with males, females leaving employment are much more likely to leave the labour force than enter unemployment. Presdee, reporting on his research on unemployed young women in Elizabeth (South Australia) and in England, talked of 'Invisible Girls'. He argued that many of these young women when they cannot find employment are simply absorbed back into family domestic service and, as far as the community is concerned, are no longer seen to constitute a problem. In these circumstances, young women, he says, react with a mixture of 'fatalism and anger, resignation and revolt, ignorance and worldly wisdom, underpinned by a deadening material poverty'.
The responses provide some little evidence of this kind of withdrawal from the workforce into premature domesticity:

Well I think I'm really only capable of doing one sort of work and that's housework. I enjoy what I do and I don't think it will change because I'm not worried if I don't get a job because I've never had one. Yes I'm unemployed and the work at home keeps me busy so I don't really worry about any think else.

I have no work only housework looking after my flat in --. Yes I like doing housework as it keeps me from getting depressed from being unemployed.

And the following account of her days given by one girl seems to exemplify what Presdee was describing. This girl gave up a job which she had held for three years to look after her sick father, and has not had a job since then!

I live at home with my mum and 2 brothers. My mother works and so do my brothers. I take care of the housework and do the shopping and pay the bills. I don't mind it but the boys take advantage of me and don't do a thing. I'm forever picking up after them and if I say, pick up your clothes or take out your dishes etc. they say you do it. You're at home all day bludging, I've worked, you don't know what it's like to work all day bla bla and so on. When I get up everybody has gone. First, I clean up and gosh what a mess 3 adults can make. Then if it's shopping day I go and do that along with my boyfriend. There's not much else I really do. Sometimes I go out when I've got the money and other times I watch TV. I envy my brothers because they work and are always buying something new, clothes, stereos, flowers for their girlfriends, going out every weekend and if I as much as winge about how I wish I could go out and have nice things all I get told is 'Get a bloody job then'! They really don't know what it's like to make money stretch. I would like to work part-time. That way I could please my family and hold some sort of recognition as well as fulfil my obligations at home. Then if I come out with something like 'I think I might do a course in drama', they laugh their heads off and make a joke of it. My dad was a big influence on me he always seemed to know what I should do, what was good for me and what was bad. He died 18 months ago. Now my Mum and I talk but only in a general conversation on the day's events.

**KILLING TIME**

As hopes decline with continuing unemployment, motivation and the urge to be active also diminish. The problem then is not using or passing time till a job comes along but killing time. For many unemployed young people, sleep and television are the great time-killers - and they don't cost much:

For many weeks I would sleep 18 hours a day and only get up to watch my favourite soap opera, have a bath and go back to bed. I have found since that my moods have not swung so extremely or quickly. For me the overall result of my unemployment was once I worked to plan for the future, but now I was out of work - no money in the bank, or plans for survival, both mental and emotional, and physical. I hope to God, I never have to go through all that again.

*Previously unemployed for 9 months; now a university student*
Being unemployed is very boring. I watch TV most of the time especially 'Days of Our Lives' to forget about my own problems. The thing I look forward to most is getting my unemployment cheques.

I have been unemployed for about 10 months all up, and it's pretty damn boring! You spend most of your time at home watching TV when you're not looking for work. You feel useless.

(Now a farmhand)

Before I found this job I was unemployed for 9 months. I spent my time watching late night movies and sleeping in through the mornings, and the occasional trip into the city.

(Customs clerk)

I was unemployed before I got this job. Usually I would wake up about 10.30 - 11.30 and have breakfast. Then I would go down to the CES job centre. Then I would come home and have some lunch and watch TV or go somewhere. You feel rotten most of the time especially if all your mates have jobs, you feel sort of left out.

(Machine operator in a factory)

I have been unemployed. It was horrible. I lost all self-confidence. It ended up that I didn't even want to go for job interviews because I knew it would be a case of 'Don't call us we'll call you'. I spent my time dating, smoking, watching TV and getting fat and lazy - the only thing that kept me going was my boyfriend - whom I've still got.

(Meat packer in a supermarket)

Drink and drugs also help to kill time:

At the moment I am unemployed and have been for the past 5 months. I spend most of my time home during the day, occasionally have one too many to forget life's problems for awhile but they always catch up with you. I've coped fairly well to the extent where I've been able to mould my finances into my lifestyle.

I know people who are young, unemployed and they spend their days getting stoned on dope - and I've heard about their friends who are on heroin. Worse again are the unemployed who spend their days at the pub and knock off their brain cells with excessive drink. There is nothing to do! I am becoming very bored after only 3 weeks! Some people have been out of work for years.

(Retrenched from his job after 8 months)

After a few days you run out of things to do. I used to go the pub everyday from about 11.30 to 5.00. There was lots of other unemployed people there, that's all we used to do. A lot of them have been out of work for 6 months or more and are completely disheartened. And going to extremes most of them will only get a job if one falls in their lap. I couldn't handle it so I went to school, at least there's a routine. The course I'm doing is about the only course I could do, which I don't like, but I suppose it will benefit me in one way or another.

(Taking a TAFE course in Chemical Technology)

One of the results of boredom is described by a young man responding to the questionnaire.

Being on the dole is boring you have stacks of time but no money. If you have money it goes so fast it seems like you never had it. Some unemployed therefore turn to crime not because they have to pinch things to get money, but partly for something to do. I find if I
pick a lock of a door and get somewhere I think 'great I busted their security, I can get in, no one else can'. Then you just go from there. You take things that you like, and maybe you come back sometimes and that way you get caught. The saying 'no honor among thieves', is true. Because when the first guy gets caught he blames everything on the others to save himself. The only thing to do is chase girls and then you need money and that starts the loop. I think in 10-20 years crime will be very high and for me probably prison. Once you start it is very hard to stop, because the cops pick on you and you hate them and try harder to beat them.

This final comment sums up the almost unanimous feeling about unemployment among those who have been unemployed by no choice of their own:

At the very least, being unemployed is boring.
Neither Place nor Purpose: The Psychological Effects of Unemployment

If someone is really looking for work then unemployment is a time of depression when you feel useless, frustrated, angry and unwanted.

[Bank employee; previously unemployed for six months]

UNEMPLOYMENT AND REJECTION

Poverty and the need to fill in time are day-to-day problems for most unemployed people, as previous chapters show; but the real pressures of these handicaps stem from the fact that they are constant reminders to the unemployed of their rejection by their society; of their failure to gain recognition and place. Thus for many long-term unemployed, unemployment becomes associated with a deterioration in psychological well-being. The pattern of deterioration has been the focus of a good deal of research in the last decade both in Australia and overseas. What is described is a process by which unemployed persons move from hope and active job-searching through boredom and frustration to pessimism, hopelessness and in extreme cases to despair and psychiatric disorder.

The feeling of rejection which comes with unsuccessful job hunting is one of the most important factors in the onset of depression. Feather in his South Australian studies has reported that increasing time out of work produces depressive symptoms which affect not only persistence in job-seeking but also mental attitudes: the greater the number of unsuccessful job applications, the greater the levels of frustration and depression. These findings are reflected in comments like the following:

Yes I was unemployed for about 8 months, and believe me it’s very degrading. The first 2 months were sort of exciting, looking for jobs, going for the interviews and so on, but after it becomes boring. I found it embarrassing when after a few months, your friends would say ‘How come you haven’t found a job yet? Also I’d get fed up going for countless jobs only to get a letter saying ‘Sorry your application was unsuccessful’. It does tend to make you give up. My boyfriend who was working couldn’t understand why I was depressed
and just felt like a social security number. Now I'm working, he lost his job 4 months ago and fully understands now what it was like for me.

[Now employed as a hairdresser's assistant]

At one stage I was out of work for 18 months, and during those months I went for an average of 15 interviews a week with an average of 15 'no's' a week. It is very disheartening and I found myself in a deep depression. After 7 months of continual refusals, I lost all my self-esteem and all my confidence. I even contemplated suicide (but thought more of my family to be able to carry it out).

[Shop assistant]

Luckily I was not unemployed for very long. But I could see the problems that could arise, when unemployed for a long period. After a number of unsuccessful job applications, you tend to think it is a waste of time applying for any more. You start to become apathetic about the situation you are in. You then start to fit the image that society has about the unemployed.

[Employed as a props hand in a television station]

Your time is sent travelling back and forward to the employment office twice a day at least, writing out job applications and having to go through the degrading task of attending interviews! At least that was how I spent my time!! You feel as though there is just no way out and that nothing is ever going to go right for you! I am surprised that there aren't a lot more suicides among unemployed youths - perhaps there is and we just don't hear about it! After a while you honestly can't be bothered to get dressed properly when you're job hunting as you know you are going to get knocked back again, so what is the point?!

[Office secretary; previously unemployed for six months]

Repeated failure to gain employment reduces the motivation to go out and look for work:

Being unemployed as I remember was not much fun. First there's a keenness to find work but after too many knock-backs laziness and depression sets in which goes hand in hand with arguments with parents and staying in bed all day.

[Hospital diet aide]

I am unemployed and have been off and on for 12 months and it is getting very boring but I am in a vicious circle in that the more bored I get the less I want to get off my bum to do something. I really have to push myself. All my friends work and I haven't much money so I don't go out.

I am unemployed, I would very much like a job doing something worthwhile, to help the community or tomorrow's future adults.

My first job was in a factory, I found it by going in there and asking, when I finished the job and became unemployed it paid $2 a week better on the dole. Being unemployed makes you feel useless. You spend your time doing nothing or getting into trouble, at a young age. Later you just become stagnant.
MAKING THINGS WORSE

The effects of rejection by employers are exacerbated for many unemployed young people by the community disapproval and insensitivity discussed in Chapter 1:

I am lucky in that respect. I do not have the kind of family who complains and make matters worst. Many people ask 'Are you working?' (outside the family) and that really gets you down. More people need to be aware of the problems that people must face and not think of people as bludgers. Many people also look down on people on a low income which goes to show how ignorant some people are. After all just because you don't work doesn't mean you are not intelligent or a bludger. Young people want work as much as anyone else.

[Unemployed and desperately wants a job]

Well I'm unemployed and personally I hate it. Being unemployed is so boring, looking for work and always being turned down. Being unemployed really gets you down sometimes, you feel like a loser sometimes. I live in a small area where everyone knows each other and it really gets you down when you hear they're talking about you.

[Never employed]

One of the hardest elements I found in being unemployed was the attitude of people - people at the CES office seemed decidedly uninterested, working friends didn't understand the difficulties of being unemployed and my family had an overabundance of advice which did nothing to encourage me. Job creation schemes are a good idea. Equally important however is sensitive understanding by the community at large.

[Intends to take an Arts degree and becomes a teacher]

The loss of friends contributes to growing isolation from the community and its life:

I hate being unemployed. I get depressed and worried what to do in the future. Mum helps me. She talks to me but sometimes she gets me upset on what she says. The best friend I mentioned. She's not my friend anymore. She has a job, I hardly see her. I haven't any friends. Most of the time I spend is staying home doing housework and listening to music but that doesn't help does it. Sorry about the untidiness in the questionnaire, I'm too upset to write anything.

[Advised by the school principal to leave school half way through Year 11 because she was not doing well; unemployed for nearly three years since then]

My friends from school are employed and I don't get to see them anymore.

[Unemployed]

Yes I have been unemployed, and it wasn't very nice. All my other friends had jobs, therefore I spent a lot of time at home not doing much.

[Now undertaking a nursing course]

Loneliness affects even those with considerable personal and external resources:

Most of my time I spend in preventing myself becoming too neurotic about it, and of course, in looking for a job. Fortunately, I am capable of amusing myself - I have been
studying German, have been reading books I would not otherwise have read (Dostoevski, Stendhal etc.) and most of my friends are either students or shift workers, so I am really lonely. I suppose mine would be seen as quite an opulent life, but it does become excruciating at times.

[Unemployed for nine months since completing a degree in linguistics; has applied for over a hundred jobs]

Family attitudes play an important part in the well-being or otherwise of unemployed young people. Understanding even more than material support from the family can alleviate some of the effects of prolonged unemployment:

But I suppose I had a lot to fill in my time with because I was studying part time and had an active social life with my boyfriend - now husband. I didn't feel that bad, because I had the security of my parents and their home and I wasn't desperate for money because my expenses were low, so I suppose I was very lucky, and then I got the shop assistant's job.

[Now a nurse]

I was unemployed for roughly 7 months and it was basically O.K. because I had a great support system of friends and family, and because I was living at home, finances were not a problem, although I couldn't buy a car or anything like that. It was depressing because unemployment is perceived by society to be a negative thing, and pressures result.

[Clerk in the public service]

But sometimes family attitudes simply increase the pressures. One young person comments on her observations:

There simply are not enough jobs to go around, so there are a lot of kids without hope and without, in many cases, any real emotional back up. Families often drive children from home quickly, to avoid excessive cost and kids find themselves without work and, more importantly, without any understanding of the predicament. They have been raised with their parents' 1950s or 1960s work ethics and are simply not prepared for a government subsidised existence.

Others recount their own experiences:

Yes I have been unemployed for 8 months. It's very depressing because all your family gets on to you about getting a job. All you seem to do is sit around or go to shopping centres.

[Kitchenhand]

I know a few girls and boys I used to go to school with, who were unfortunate to get into bad habits like drugs and now are in hospital to try and help themselves kick the habit - one who has been kicked out of home with no understanding or help from their parents in the slightest. Parents should try and understand once in a while and not be critical of everything you do.

[Unemployed]
Prolonged unemployment can lead to tensions which undermine the closest of relationships. Arguments with parents are a common outcome:

I was unemployed for 10 months. I spent the first few months looking for a job. I got sick of knock backs so I started staying home watching TV. You get very depressed when unemployed. I used to fight with my parents all the time to the point I was going to leave and not tell them where I was. Thank god I did get a job and my relationship with my parents returned to what it used to be.

[Cashier in a supermarket]

I stay home, with my mother. Help about the house. I receive dole money, which helps a bit but wouldn’t mind more. I pay for board. I would much rather be working. I hate staying home. As I find myself getting into more arguments with my parents. They are always saying and telling me to get a job. I really haven’t any solution what the government should do. But since the unemployed has no work I would like to receive unemployed benefit each week. I would also like to leave home, have a job but I haven’t the money to do so.

[Unemployed for 8 months]

A similar situation arises with other family members:

At the moment, my sister and I are sharing a flat. We’re both unemployed and we are living below poverty. We’ve never got any money and we’ve got ourselves and cats to feed. We both get very moody but we put up with each other because we have to. If life is going to be as it is today in 20 years I don’t think I want to be around for it.

[Early school leaver]

Marriages and other similar relationships seem particularly vulnerable:

Even though I don’t do much at work I get home and get tea ready and tidy up, etc. It is a bit depressing really because my husband is out of work and I feel that he should help me by doing some of the work at home but he would rather waste time spending money we can’t afford, etc. I suppose we could be a lot worse. We are paying off our house, only low repayments and if I was unemployed we couldn’t do that.

[Bank teller]

I think it is extremely hard on a married couple as you spend a lot of time together and it is easy to become irritable with each other.

[Housewife, expecting a baby; husband unemployed]

When I was unemployed I was O.K. for approximately the first 6 weeks but after that I got very depressed. I was crawling out of bed about 12 midday and did no work except maybe to drive to CES and back. I sat at home by myself and saw very few people. I fought a lot with my boyfriend (now my husband) for something to do I think.

[Hospital employee; previously unemployed for six months]

I have never been unemployed and I know I am extremely lucky. My boyfriend has just left me because he hasn’t got a job. I really love him but he says he doesn’t want to tie me down to someone who has nothing and no future. It makes him feel low because he feels
he hasn’t been able to do his part, and his pride would never allow me to pay or give him any money. Unemployment is the most degrading experience and it affects more people than just those without jobs.

[Bank clerk]

My boyfriend is not working and hasn’t been for nearly 12 months. I can see in him how depressing it is being out of work. He never thinks about the future. He always asks me why I love him so much when he has got nothing and as he always says he never will have anything. He just takes it day by day. All he needs is a job and he’ll be happy. At the moment he is in a big depression state.

[Has herself been unemployed between jobs for four months]

**WHAT’S WRONG WITH ME**

Van Moorst\(^3\), in the Melbourne study mentioned earlier, reported that the majority of respondents, particularly the young and those from low socio-economic backgrounds, indicated feelings of guilt about unemployment. Those who felt most guilt were also more work-oriented and more bored; they had more resource problems, pressures from friends and families and personal problems. They also tended to blame their own lack of skills for their situation.

All of these reactions to being unemployed appear among the responses of young people to the questionnaire. They begin to feel guilt and shame about their situation:

On the dole I spent my spare time sitting around and doing housework. I thought why look for a job, the answer’s always the same: you’re too young or too old, we haven’t any vacancies. You just get sick of being knocked back all the time. You feel terrible because all your friends are working and they complain about dole bludgers and I sort of shrink down.

[Factory machinist]

I was unemployed for twelve weeks after the school holidays and hated it. I was depressed and felt terrible when I had to tell people I wasn’t working or at school.

[Office worker]

Some show determined bravado:

Presently I represent a group quickly becoming the majority in both OZ and overseas ‘The Dole Bludgers’. The term ‘D.B.’ seems to always be applied to anyone who has no employment or only works casually, so requiring the assistance of the government of the day (Good on ya Bob). Being unemployed has bad as well as good points, the boredom, frustration and such like do nothing to make you want to work. Mind you not having to drag one’s self up at six for six mornings a week is not too bad.

[Previously employed as a storeman]

Others are angry and resentful:
I can't tell you about my work because I don't work. Sometimes I'm glad I'm not working getting out of bed on cold mornings, but deep down I wish I had a job cause it's very boring and I'm always broke. You try living on $40 a week, see if you like it. Of course I don't like what I do. Do you think people love being on the dole?!! Can be very frustrating at times. I have gone to that many job interviews, you wouldn't believe it.

There's one thing that is missing from my life at this present day and that's what this is about WORK - PERMANENT WORK. I am sick to death of all the interviews, all the hopeful job prospects, all the phone calls, the ifs, buts, maybe's and all the let downs.  

[Unemployed for 2½ years]

Six foot under - what's the use of living! If you wake up to realise you have 24 hours to sleep today, why get up? If there's nothing in life or even for the day that you have to do, how can you be motivated?

Many begin to blame themselves for their situation:

I was fortunately only unemployed in Australia for about 2 months. Even though I know the political and economic reasons behind unemployment I still felt the pressures from people re being a dole bludger and began to see my unemployment as my own inadequacies.

[Social worker]

I have only been unemployed for about 3 months, which was too long. It is a terrible feeling. You begin thinking that there must be something wrong with you, or otherwise you would have a job.

[Secretary]

I felt utterly depressed. After three years at school learning to get on in the world, studying hard for that elusive job, one entire year at Technical College doing a Secretarial course, and answering literally dozens of letters about job applications, I was without a job. I felt as if I had wasted my time putting the work I did into studying, and learning, because it was always someone else who got the position I applied for - Wasn't I good enough? Didn't I do things the same way everyone else did them? What was so different about whoever else got the job, and what made them better than me?

[Office worker; previously unemployed for four months]

I spend my time on train fares (money too) walking, hitching, just somewhere I can try and find work. I feel so sad, so degraded. Why can't I find a job, what's the matter with me? It's just so damn depressing.

[Unemployed for 2½ years since leaving school]

THE EMOTIONAL EFFECTS

A good deal of Australian research in the 1980s has been concerned to identify the psychological effects that unemployment can have on young people. As a result, it is now widely accepted that unemployment, particularly as time out of work increases, can produce depressive symptoms; in particular, lower self-esteem, lower commitment to the work ethic, unhappiness and a sense of helplessness. There is some evidence also that psychiatric disorder can become
associated with unemployment. Finlay-Jones and Eckhardt\textsuperscript{4}, in their study of young (16-24 years) unemployed people in Canberra in 1980 found a psychiatric disorder case rate of 49 per cent compared with a rate of 9.0 per cent for the Canberra community as a whole. For obvious reasons, these extreme effects are not readily identifiable from the responses to the questionnaire, but the depression and associated effects are widely reported in various ways.

Prolonged unemployment erodes self-esteem and self-confidence:

I am still unemployed, and if I ever got a job, I know I am going to find it very hard, with mixing with people. I have lost my confidence and don’t know how to take people sometimes which makes me a dull person sometimes. I want to go into a shop and ask ‘do you have any vacancies’, but in the fear of them saying no, I don’t.

With being unemployed I feel quite useless and I spend most of my time looking for a job, a lot of the time in dismay and I get a feeling of emptiness within myself and find that the confidence I once had is lacking.

[Unemployed for 6 months]

It’s terrible being unemployed. You lose all confidence and have more problems at home. And you’re always worrying about if you’re ever going to get a job.

[Has held only temporary jobs]

Sometimes despondency finds an outlet in tears:

I have been unemployed once. It was frightening. Emotionally, I became a ‘wreck’. I would cry at anything and I became so bad that my mother sent me away on a holiday to have a break. I wandered around the house like a zombie. Unable to do anything; nothing to do with too much time to do it.

[Day care aid]

Yes I’ve been unemployed. Luckily it was for only 6 months. I tramped around looking for work, read the newspapers, asked around. I wasn’t succeeding so I broadened my interests and hobbies. How do you feel? Well after a time you begin to feel a burden to your parents, you feel depressed, you cry, you feel frustrated because you haven’t enough money to get by. Friends ask you to go out - you can’t because you can’t afford anything nice to wear. It’s generally horrible. I couldn’t stand it. I’d go crazy if it happened again.

[Auxiliary nurse]

Some seek professional help:

How do I feel? - Angry, miserable, pissed off, helpless, bored and drained of effort. It’s no wonder many people give up. I went and saw a psychologist.

[Retrenched from previous job]

Some find other outlets:

At the moment I feel real depressed and no one seems to care. I’ve started on drugs and I tried to kill myself before but was not successful. I’ve started to think about trying it again.
Being unemployed drove me crazy. After an early morning start checking papers in the hope of being able to find jobs to apply for I used to spend the rest of my time with unemployed friends. Then the depression set in after 18 months (6 of these spent in W.A. looking for work). I was starting to drink a lot, we all were. It started off on weekends then week days and then all the time. If I had to go on the dole again I'd go crazy.

[Statistician]

The feeling of hopelessness and helplessness which takes possession of many young people is expressed most clearly in their responses to the question on how they see the future:

My future - what future!!! What future does anyone my age have nowadays with or without an education? There aren't the jobs to be found anyway. What control or say do we have in the way the country is run?

[Unemployed]

The future? Help. I think that it is important to be optimistic but when you look at the future, well, it's enough to make you crawl into bed and never get out! Does that answer your question?

[Unemployed]

Future! What future?? Do you call dole queues a future?

[Retrenched and now unemployed]
I see the future for myself now as not a very good one but I can only make the best of it that I am able and try and hope that one day I will get a job which I'd enjoy and want to do. I think every single unemployed person I know thinks exactly like me and handles it as best as they can. I believe as the years go by, unemployment will be twice as bad and there will be hardly no jobs for semi-skilled or unskilled workers except for professional people who go to university or whatever, not for people like me who have only a limited education (Year 10 & one year of 5th form) and are not exactly a brain wave.

As for the future of my family, there's sometimes a lot of pressure put on if you're unemployed from your family and they see the future of their children a hard one. Life from 10-20 years from now might be better or worse. Who knows? There might not be any earth 20 years from now.

[Unemployed for ten months]

HOPES AND EXPECTATIONS

The immediate postwar decades were years of expansion and prosperity marked by an unbounded confidence in the future. They were years of general social and personal optimism, epitomised in the title of the annual Sydney Morning Herald supplement, 'Australia Unlimited'. In contrast, the 1980s, at least in the eyes of these young people, could well be termed a 'Slough of Despond'. The comparison between now and then is made by one young woman:

I suppose life will change and it worries me because I feel it will change for the worse. Because when you hear about the days when your parents were young and now there's a big difference and that's for the worse.

[Bank officer; married and trying to pay off a house]

The responses of these young people overwhelmingly indicate a strong degree of pessimism about the future of the society, even though this is combined in some cases with confidence about personal futures. Perceptions of the future are of course closely linked with values and aspirations: what one hopes to do in life and to get out of life. Practically all the research which has been undertaken in the last decade or so into the views of young people shows that for the majority values and hopes conform very closely with those held by parents and older members of the community. A 1982 OECD report provided a comprehensive
overview of what young people in OECD member countries were thinking at the beginning of the 1980s. The report comments:

The goals towards which young people aspire do not seem particularly dramatic or radical. They hope to have satisfactory family lives and aspire to social and economic success. Most believe that hard work, ability, and education will be important in their success. However, a minority, in some countries a not insignificant proportion, believe that social origins, luck, or fate are the critical determinants of success. These youth are dubious that on their own they can achieve even their traditional aspirations.\(^1\)

Australian research has produced similar findings\(^2\), and the responses to the questionnaire leave little doubt of the strength of traditional aspirations: job, home, family and a car or two.

The degree will enable me to get promoted more quickly, if I can compete with fellow workers. The promotion means an extra $15 a week. I would like to earn $400 clear, so as I can save for a car or a house. The way it is now, is that I just have enough to survive.

[**Tax assessor**]

In 10 years time, I would like to: 1) Have my career as a social worker well-established. 2) Be married to my great fiance and have a happy marriage. 3) Start a family. 4) Own my own home. Sounds simple doesn't it! I WISH IT WAS! All these aims/goals/ambitions will take a lot of concentrated effort and hard work. I still believe that anyone who works hard enough at what they want to achieve, will achieve it - even if it takes 50 years.

[**Completing a degree in Social Work**]

I hope my life turns out like my parents' life did - family, happiness and health. I doubt it will though, because I think the way the economy is at the moment, there will be a depression, which will cause a lot of confusion. Maybe there will be a war, although I hope not. I really don't know what to expect. I will just live day by day.

[**Office worker**]

I see two things in the future which I am mainly worried about and they are - as if you didn't already know - (1) buying a house, (2) marriage. These things will affect most people my age.

[**Customs clerk; previously unemployed for nine months**]

Economically the future does not look bright for people of my age (especially the unemployed). I have enjoyed a very good family life and I would like to extend that. I would like to get married and have a family of my own. I would like to have been successful in business ten years from now and reached my goals work-wise. I would think in ten years time I would be married and my family life would become very important.

[**Auditor**]

Beyond their personal aspirations - or as a context for them - young people want a peaceful world, protection of the environment, more equal distribution of wealth. The following few extracts indicate what many young people apparently value:

I would also love to see a peaceful united world but I somehow think that will always be a dream. I hope that we don't continue to dehumanise life as we are doing - through
computers, unemployment, test tube babies, etc. because if we do I feel it will be a sad old world in 10-20 years time.

[Teacher]

I intend to be a marine biologist researcher so I believe natural life is invaluable and we are going to have to be careful not to obliterate it in our progress.

Unless people go back to the basics of helping one another and not want higher wages for the pleasure of it, I can't see much change in the world. Material possessions are the main necessity now and it doesn't matter to the majority if your neighbour is starving, so long as I'm not.

[Bar Attendant]

That these concerns are common to young people in most OECD countries is confirmed by the OECD report mentioned earlier:

Most of today's youth seem indeed to be concerned with the safeguard of the environment and the possible ill-effects of technical progress. They show a high degree of preoccupation with social inequalities and differences in privilege.3

These broader issues impinge, but without question the strongest influence shaping young people's views of the future towards optimism or pessimism is the important place that work still occupies in their thinking and lives. Apart from its intrinsic benefits, work is also a means to the personal goals mentioned earlier: marriage, house, family, travel and so on. In other words, what young people generally still want is what their parents had, but they are no longer sure of achieving their aims. On this issue, the OECD report (1982) comments that young people are now living with uncertainty and insecurity:

The massive expansion of education for so many has bestowed upon the majority of young people the social status of youth, and with it the promise that delayed responsibilities would go hand in hand with postponed gratifications, that the acceptance of limited access to the full duties and the equally full privileges of adulthood would, in turn, be followed by upward social mobility and social satisfaction.

The promises implicit in the postwar social construction of youth are being attenuated. The promise of social mobility through education which sustained the middle and working classes' commitments to increased schooling has begun to lose ground. Even before the economic recession highlighted the diminished value of educational credentials, the inflationary corrosion of educational qualifications had already started to surface. The doubts about more and more schooling for youth have been accentuated by economic conditions. The 'social contract' implicitly agreed on by young people is at risk, and it is questionable whether a recovered economy could fully restore it.

For many of today's youth, this state of affairs means that planning toward predictable outcomes in the labour market is increasingly difficult, and it may become even more so in the future. The state of youth has become not-so-temporary. The dynamic feeling that hope brings to human endeavours has been gradually replaced by the anxiety - even the apathy - that marks the actions of those who come to believe that they have lost control over the consequences of their efforts.4
An Australian perspective is given in the Youth Affairs Council of Australia (YACA) report mentioned earlier:

Many young people are pessimistic about their prospects in an 'employed' future, in 'normal work'. For some, unemployment is here to stay, and nothing can be done. Others speak about a perceived increase in 'family' unemployment, or discuss the problems where family relationships become more difficult when there is unemployment. The sense of powerlessness against this threat is strong. A participant in the consultation commented:

People have a responsibility to try and achieve a peaceful and just society for future generations, but the injustice caused by unemployment will affect their and their children's outlook on society.5

More than most other surveys, the ACER questionnaire allows some probing and categorising of the views of young people about their own futures, the future prospects of their contemporaries and the likely social outcomes. In all of these issues, employment prospects are, explicitly or implicitly, central to hopes and expectations, whether personal or for the society as a whole.

THE FUTURE: NOT A PROMISE BUT A QUESTION MARK

Insecurity and uncertainty about the future are very evident in the responses, especially but by no means exclusively, in the responses to the question about the future. Some refuse to think beyond the day:

The future for me is non-existent. I can only take things as they come. If it happens it does, if it doesn’t too bad. The future is not a promise; it’s a question mark. No-one knows what will happen tomorrow. I could win $50 000 in the lottery or get struck by lightning. I think the future is what you make it and nothing else.

[Unemployed; retrenched from previous job]

I used to think about the future but right now the present provides a big enough problem for me.

[Unemployed; retrenched]

I don't want to know the future, it's bad enough as it is. I just live day to day.

[Cashier/sales assistant]

Others express their uncertainties:

The future for me? Who knows. I hope I can still travel then eventually settle down. I don’t want to be an electrician for the rest of my life. I’d like to work my way up night school. At the moment things look bad with high unemployment. A slump in building industry in general. Everywhere around you people are losing their jobs, skilled and unskilled. I just hope and pray in the next few years things get better.

[Apprentice electrician; brother unemployed]
In the future I can only see more unemployment, more urban violence as unemployment increases and short-term employment becomes more to the fore. As for my future I am unsure. I would like to pursue a career working in a museum but it is a very small field.

[Unemployed Arts graduate]

I feel very insecure about my future employment opportunities. I have had a lot of experience with children but there will be twenty other hopefuls looking at the same prospects at the end of this year. I see the same future for myself as well as for others of my age - frustration, confusion, etc. But I feel it will be more difficult if I am unable to get a job in my area of interest after I have studied to become qualified. My family has always been very supportive and no matter what the future holds they will probably continue to be so no matter how many years away from now.

[TAFE student undertaking a child care course]

And some feel that things must get better because they could not be worse:

The future for me is a new job, a happy life, maybe travel overseas, then settle down into a family life. Politics can only improve surely. They can't get worse. 10-20 years from now shouldn't be that much different - a better economy hopefully.

[Unemployed, with occasional casual work]

The future for me must get better, I'm not sure that it could get any worse. I don't know if things will be any brighter for anyone else. Unless we all give up something to make room for the people behind us. When I was in my final year of school, I thought I knew my whole life plan. But things just didn't turn out that way from the word go. I never thought I'd be unemployed, especially at this age, I just never thought it would happen to me. So I dare not predict how my life will be 10 to 20 years from now.

[Unemployed]

The same young person comments:

The reality of unemployment seems so distant to you when you're at school. You are warned about it, figures are thrown at you, you know it exists but you never believe that one day you would add to those figures. Until unfortunately it does happen to you.

THE PERSONAL OPTIMISTS

There are, of course, many responses which are concerned only with personal futures. Among these, young people who comment optimistically on their prospects generally have sound reasons for doing so: they are in, or on the way to, secure and satisfying employment as the following responses indicate:

I see the future as being fairly secure, in the fact that I have a good job and am paying off a new home with my wife working as well. Things may be tight at times but I think that we can manage on what we have.

[Employed by an electricity authority]

My future seems quite good at the moment. The airforce is quite secure. I am married and we plan to have children in about 12 months time. After I have done quite a bit of time in the airforce I hope to get out and get a business of my own, possibly with something to do
And some who should be optimistic seem dubious:

Even among the unemployed, there are some whose prospects entitle them to be optimistic. One young man, for example, is unemployed and on the dole because the drought has made it temporarily impossible for him to work in a paid capacity on his parents’ farm; but for the future:

I see improvement in the future and hope to own and manage my own farm in 10 to 20 years time.

Another, after 6 months unemployment off and on, is going into his father’s butchery business:

I am sure that I shall do very well in the future. I am going into business with my father. I have a third share in the business. There is no doubt in my mind that I will do very well. The reason why I am going to work for my father is because I at present can’t get a job. I’ve tried just about everywhere I can think of, and that is not too far to travel. I’m going into business with my father because if I don’t take the chance I am being given, I may never own my house or anything else I have in mind.

Yet even the optimistic can see some difficulties ahead, like this student in electrical engineering:

I see a fairly successful future for myself. I think I’ll finish my degree and get a job, and slowly get a life together for myself. Some of my friends I can see are going to be even more successful than me in the long run but are going to go through many jobs and many ups and downs. I don’t know how I’ll ever be able to afford to buy a house when I get married as houses are getting more and more expensive. However I hope I have a family of my own at this time and will somehow manage to support them.

And some who should be optimistic seem dubious:

My future is uncertain. I may not be able to obtain an internship, which will mean 6 years plus for nothing. I hope to become a GP in the area where my husband will be managing a front block on the River Murray. If I can’t find that position, then I’ll either have to live apart from my husband, or give up medicine and drive a tractor, to help him. I hope to raise a family - definitely in the country: I pity children brought up in the city. As for others my age, I would hope that they would all find a job and be happy in it, but I fear that many won’t until Australians start helping each other. If the present trend continues, the few with jobs will be taxed to extinction, as well as their employers, to provide the money for all the dole and pensioner cheques, not to mention the health-care bill for the aged and those severely depressed from being unemployed.

[Medical student]
MY FUTURE: THEIR FUTURE

A large majority of those who are optimistic about their own prospects are fairly pessimistic about the future lives of their contemporaries, and this seems to apply even among those whose responses otherwise show no particular awareness of unemployment as an issue:

I'm confident about the future, and I'm also looking forward to it. I'm not so sure about other people my age, I can appreciate that not everyone will have a rosy future, and those hardest hit will probably be the ones who are unemployed right now - it seems a no-win situation.

[Medical student]

For myself I feel optimistic about the future, but for others things are not so bright. I believe that as everything changes with the times we will solve many of the problems we face now but new ones will inevitably arise. I really don't know what life will be like in 10-20 years but it would be unrealistic and unreasonable to expect our standard of living to keep increasing at the same rate as it has been in the past thirty years.

[Solicitor]

Some are prepared to accept the diverging outcomes as inevitable:

As for the future, the economy is possibly improving so I feel my job is stable and hopefully has good prospects for advancement. For other people my age, it may have to be accepted that some may be unemployed for a long time. The situation seems worse for unemployed girls. I feel financially secure enough to marry whenever I want to but being only 22 it will probably be a few years yet. In 10 to 20 years I hope to be married with children and in my own home. I hope to be in a position of greater authority and better pay in my job.

[Surveyor with a mining company]

The future for myself is very positive. When I graduate as a speech pathologist, I am guaranteed a job (although I may need to go interstate to take up a position). This field of work is in great demand. For other people my age, the future will depend on their skills and qualifications and most of all their attitude to life. Schools and the government can only do so much. The final impetus must come from within the individual. The unemployment situation will probably continue to be bad. But people shouldn't give up hope. Perhaps they may have to return to school to get qualifications, but once people have experienced unemployment, they may feel this is a drive to achieve success.

Those whose friends are unemployed draw the distinctions more clearly.

Personally the future is looking good as I have been confirmed in my job and have secured a promotion. A lot of my friends are still unemployed and things are getting pretty bad. A lot of kids I know are turning to the streets and fighting or popping pills. I think in 10 to 20 years things will be really bad and if something doesn't happen in regard to jobs, employment, economy and community attitude then I think Australia will develop into a Brixton/Manchester type of area.

[Clerk in government department]
Some of the unemployed draw similar distinctions between their own futures and those of their contemporaries, and give their reasons for their own optimism:

My future looks fairly bright because there is always a demand for alcohol therefore a demand for bar attendants. Other people my age may find difficulty as our town relies on sugar and if the market picks up so will chances of employment. Otherwise we shall have to diversify. In 10-20 years I think we will still be relying on the sugar so who knows. May be jobs will be easier to get, being more jobs around, or fewer jobs will be available.  

[Bartender, temporarily unemployed]

The future? I find it hard to picture myself in 10 to 20 years time. But gazing into a crystal ball, I can imagine myself married with a couple of kids, working maybe. Unless I win lotto or marry a millionaire. In the future I plan to achieve some goals also; travel, write a book maybe, learn some more about my interests (photography, music, writing etc.) and have a raging good time in the process. For every one else I don’t really know. It really depends on the individual. Maybe they’ll be doing the same as me roughly. I do see the state of the country worsening however. I don’t think unemployment will decrease or crime will lessen, because the government are incapable of finding out firstly what causes the problem and secondly doing something about it. Running the country is a very important job; maybe it is too much for just one person, and I think they should understand these things. I’ll also continue fighting for what I believe in like nuclear disarmament, because unless something is done about it there won’t even be a future.  

[Unemployed but intends to take a job in her father’s business]

I see the future for myself as being a lot better than it is for me at the moment. I am confident that I will be able to go back nursing. The area where I live is always crying out for nurses and the wages are good. I feel that other people my age are going to find times extremely difficult, especially those without trades. As they are finding it difficult already. I have no idea what life will be like in 10-20 years from now except extremely difficult. Maybe the world will not even exist as I come from a religious background and I have other ideas of where I might be.  

[Housewife with young family; husband unemployed]

FEMALE FUTURES

There is a traditional view - still fairly widespread in the community - that unemployment is less of a stigma and less personally damaging for girls than it is for boys, since girls can fall back on marriage or an equivalent relationship. As one unemployed young woman comments:

Unemployment is our future’s worst problem, and is going to continue to worsen. It contributes to violence, drinking and crime. Personally, I don’t think my future looks too promising because I have no career, I was never trained for any special work. These days it seems better to get married off, start a family, and just become a housewife who needs only worry about her family, without the extra pressure of finding a job.

However as previous discussion and extracts have shown, there is generally little distinction between the attitudes of boys and girls or men and women to unemployment. They want jobs and are expected by their families and friends to
get jobs. Nevertheless, as most research shows, marriage and raising a family still do loom large in the visions of the future for young women, and a few of them still hope to live ‘happy ever after’:

10 or 20 years from now I hope to be happily married with a good job, a husband who will be secure in a job and just plain old fashioned happiness.  
[Doctor’s receptionist]

I see the future for myself as getting married, having children, and being very happy.  
[Unemployed]

I really look forward to the future and having my own husband and kids and a lovely house. People tell me I’d hate it but I guess it’s the only thing to look forward to when all the rest of my life is confusing or boring.  
[University science student]

But for most girls reality impinges on the dream:

Hopefully my future will consist of a husband, a daughter, a son and a cat. I’d like to own my own home and just be a housewife. In 20 years from now I think that more than half the population will be unemployed. We’re going to be poorer in the future than we are now. If the government doesn’t do something now it won’t be worth living in the future.  
[Unemployed]

I would like to see myself finishing this course I am doing and being able to obtain a job in my local area if not permanent then casual to be close to my family. I would like to eventually settle down, get married, have a family and live comfortably even if it means working a few days a week. I think this is the dream of most young people and for some this eventuates for others unfortunately this does not result. Hopefully this will eventuate for me. I think though for dreams to turn out the individuals concerned have to work hard on things like relationships, communications, understanding, budgeting, sharing the work load especially in a dual career family, being prepared to work overtime or work a few days a week casual, considering the other partner’s feelings/attitudes. Who knows what life will be like in 10 to 20 years from now, everything may be like peaches and cream and then again the world may be at war where everybody and everything will be destroyed.  
[Studying to be a home economics teacher]

Yet re-entry to the workforce at some stage after marriage seems now to be almost taken for granted:

I see myself in the future as a married mother of children and a working mother. For other people I don’t know, but many others of today are working and raising a family as it is necessary because of the high price of goods and living. The future will only give those of a professional field a job as computers will do a lot and take over. Unemployment will be very high.  
[Unemployed; retrenched before completion of apprenticeship as a chef]

In 10 years I’ll probably be married with two (?) children although I hope to continue working part-time. I like children but I doubt if we will be able to afford to have any for a long time.  
[Completing an Honours degree in Botany]
I think everybody is worried about the future, but so was our mother’s mother. Things are bad but so was the Depression days. For a family to survive comfortably (and no thanks to the new government) the wife has no option but to get part-time work and I know it doesn’t help the young looking for a job, but it is a case of the strong survive. The kids have to learn to be more versatile to get on.

[Unemployed]

Among the many, there are a few who see their pursuit of a career as important - sometimes more important than marriage:

For me, a career has always been paramount. Our egalitarian-minded parents always said ‘you won’t have to get married, you know’ ‘Make sure you always have your own meal ticket’ (i.e. can support yourself). I may not end up being a solicitor, but that won’t matter - I’d try being a journalist or a bank clerk equally. A lot of my friends are the same. We’ll manage O.K. Others are ‘creatively unemployed’ (i.e. on the dole & studying photography, doing music classes, tai-chi etc. etc.) or congregate in like-minded groups (feminist, People for Nuclear Disarmament etc.) to make the most of all this time and education they have. It’s all quite exciting, but there is little stability or permanence in it, so it’s hard to make any commitment (i.e. domestic/romantic) to friends and lovers. Students or unemployed either live with their parents, or collectively in houses, whose residents change weekly.

Even though I come from a more privileged background and already have a better education than my parents (and in 18 months will be in one of the more protected, ‘safe’ professions) I don’t think my personal expectations for the future are anywhere near what my parents were for their own futures in the early 1950s. Although I fall in love and have friendship and intimacies that I would love to hang on to, there is never any question of marriage. Sometimes I think ‘maybe when I’m about 30...’ but I suspect women like me are meant to stay single.

[Law student who deferred her course for a year and experienced in the workforce the disadvantages of being female]

My future - hopefully I will have gained respect from my peers and will be considered a highly competent and successful trainer. For other people? I see most of my girlfriends sort of ‘drifting’, until they marry. The boys? It will be a struggle - it’s hard to make ends meet, and that won’t change. I feel the ones that will ‘get ahead’ will be the ruthless type who use other people - the ‘Looking Out for No: 1’ type of person. Life in 10 to 20 years? Hopefully competitive, especially between females, vying for the important and prestigious jobs, still dominated by males at this time.

[Has her own business as a racehorse trainer and complains about not being taken seriously by her male counterparts]

For those who wish to pursue a career there comes the inevitable dilemma described by these two young women:

I’m facing a problem that must be becoming more common these days. I could continue my studies, but as a botanist, I would need to spend a large amount of time out in the bush or overseas. My husband to be is an industrial chemist, presently based in Melbourne, and if his career is to succeed, he must remain near the large industrial centres. Obviously, something has to give way, and it looks as if it will be my career, because I can probably find work in Melbourne and he cannot find work in the country.

[Botany Honours student]
My future is superficially secure. I should be able to find a nice well paying position as a doctor, perhaps work part-time whilst I have children and then settle down to raise them. This unfortunately is too optimistic a view. We may have a major war. If not I may still find employment hard to get. I worry about trying to mix a career and marriage and possibly a family. I want to do my best in all things, but am afraid I'll have to sacrifice something (probably my career). I would like to specialise in medicine to fulfil my personal ambitions, but I feel that this is being very selfish and could compromise my marriage, or give my children less than an optimal life. It is very hard to be a woman in medicine. How many male doctors have to give up their careers to have children?

THE DESPONDENTS

Almost by definition, those who are despondent about their future prospects are unemployed or in very insecure employment. The employed, even if very dissatisfied with their jobs can generally find consolation in other aspects of their lives such as money, marriage or travel - or retirement:

The future including my future, is so unpredictable it's not funny. The possibilities are limitless. So I'll look at it this way: ALL THINGS BEING EQUAL - I'll keep cruising along the way I am, do my 20 years, leaving the company with my golden handshake and pension in hand and I'll get a part-time job or something till I die. I'll take up hobbies like senility, etc. But who knows; I don't look any further than the day after tomorrow. If I did, considering the number of unpredictable things that could affect any plans for the future, I'd just be wasting energy. But it's a matter of personal philosophy of course.

[Public servant who finds his job tedious and undemanding]

The unemployed do not have recourse to such consolations and their views of the future range from the despondent to the hopeless:

I can't see much of a future for myself or others in the same situation all because of the great number of people unemployed. I hope to get married one day but if times don't change, raising a family would almost be impossible.

[Still unemployed after SYETP course; unemployed for 8 months]

I can see myself being unemployed. As for the people my age, if they leave school when I did, they will be unemployed. Life will be worse in 10 - 20 years from now. People won't be able to afford food or a house. More people will be unemployed.

[Early school leaver; unemployed for 12 months since leaving school]

Some of the young unemployed take refuge in hopes and dreams, but ...

I'd like to think I am going to become an electronics engineer, successful and wealthy, get married, kids, house, etc. But every time I look, things all over Australia seem to be making this just a fantasy.

[Unemployed for eighteen months off and on after a TAFE Electronics course]

Hopefully I will be happily married with a house, family, etc. Jobs will be harder to get as the older you get it will be too dear for young people who want to get married to have kids. You can't do it on the dole. You can't plan a future if you don't know whether or not the
money will be coming in. It's not much use getting married buying a house then getting laid off work and living in debt for the rest of your life.

[Retrenched; unemployed]

I don't really know what I really want anymore. I just find myself continually wishing - or perhaps daydreaming would be a better word - that I was rich and could go around spending money - ideally through travel - and - of course - my money would never run out! It wouldn't dare! Needless to say my dream world is much more enticing than my real world.

[Unemployed for 18 months; part-time 'check-out chick']

And some lose hope entirely:

I see the future dull for myself, I don't see myself going on living for much longer. For other people I wouldn't have a clue.

[Left school in Year 8; unemployed]

I don't think there is anything in the future for me. In about 10 years time I don't think there will be any thing to improve the unemployment. It will raise higher and higher. More and more people like me will commit suicide.

[Unemployed; depressed and taking drugs]

SOCIAL PESSIMISM

The strongest and most disconcerting impression to be drawn from the comments of most of these young people is the degree of pessimism about the future of the society. There are a few who express some optimism, often in a negative fashion:

In a society such as ours I feel that there is no need to see the future as being bad. If a person is prepared to use his initiative and perhaps take a chance the future can be rosy. In 10-20 years time I can see the introduction of shorter working hours and more part-time work and hopefully means-testing husbands of working wives. With less working hours there will be smaller pay packets so people will have to live in low cost high-rise housing.

[Public service clerk]

I have come to take life on a day to day basis. However, I'm optimistic about the future. Being female, peer and parental expectations of me are generally to eventually be married and start a family. As for people my age we are the by-product of our parents be it good or bad. Our parents had a world war and a depression to contend with, we have computers, high blood pressure, mortgages, high interest rates and a million other things to worry about. Really it's the same sort of problems the older generation had to tackle only they have different names and perhaps the world has become smaller in relation to travel.

[Shop manageress]

For quite a number of young people also, the future is in safe keeping:

Well it's what I do right now, which will decide what my future will be. Some teenagers my age have no future at all. All they think about is sex, drugs and other terrible things. I am different to other kids. I am independent and I think differently from other people. The
future does hold a promising prospect if only people thought of God more and stopped being worldly. Take in more accurate knowledge of God. After all, He is the one who created all things. The world isn’t going to be destroyed. Only the wicked people in it. All those who are doing the things which God requires of us will live forever on a paradise earth. There will be no more sickness nor death.

[Shop assistant]

I don’t think about it much - because I know God is looking after everything - even though it doesn’t seem like it. Because He is concerned about us does not mean we won’t get ourselves into problems because He lets us do things the way we want. But what’s the point of me worrying when I know He is worrying.

[Graduate working as a clerk/receptionist]

You can’t live and thrive on hate, mistrust and brutality. If everyone doesn’t stop, have a good look at what’s going on and change their direction I can only see everything getting worse. The only answer is Christianity, the Christianity the Bible teaches - not any of these false cults either. If you read the Bible you will see all that’s happening in the world predicted and if you read on you will see that it will end soon and the Lord will come back to rule.

[Housewife]

For the most part however the young people see little to be optimistic about in the social trends. They fear that the things they value in the society are unlikely to survive:

For my future I see myself being married and working full-time till the decision is made to have a family, maybe working part-time when the family is older and at school. I don’t know what life will be like in 10 to 20 years from now - I can only see it getting worse as that is what it has been doing; i.e. with crime, pollution, economic situation, over-population, destruction of the land (clearing land for development, etc.) hunting of animals to extinction, unemployment, broken marriages, countries/nations fighting amongst each other, increase in diseases (e.g. cancer). Everything is just worsening, nothing seems to be improving.

[Office worker]

In 10 to 20 years there will probably be much greater unemployment than now, hence more crime, fear and distrust in the community, coupled with greater unrest about the political system. Young people will turn more to dropping out of society or taking revenge on it. By 1995 Australia will be like a second-rate TV series, drained of colour, originality, pride, courage and all other qualities that made Australia great during the period 1860-1920.

[University student]

About the future 10 to 20 years, I don’t know. The way the world is shaping up I wouldn’t be surprised if we’re put in the middle of a war. I guess a war would solve the unemployment situation but I would like to do without one.

[Unemployed]

It is hard to say what life will be like 20 years from now. Yet, I can imagine it will be chaotic. There will be no money circulation, we will be a credit card community. The crime rate - because of social frustration in the form of unemployment and stunted social opportunities - will rise; we will be more and more heavily policed. I can see something like ‘1984’ happening. Sounds negative, I know, but one can only view the past in retrospect, and realise that society as a stable structure is rapidly diminishing.
Nevertheless, this shouldn't encourage one into apathy - rather it is necessary to take a stand and to become responsible - thus trying to reverse or - at worst - slow down the downward trends we are experiencing. In 10-20 years from now I want to be happy - with no fears for my children of nuclear war, injustice or exploitation. Well, that is what I hope for. To some it may seem a pipe dream. Indeed it is. But it's a nice one to have when everywhere you look job queues are getting longer and violence is getting crazier! ... and the places you once used as sanctuaries are slowly poisoned, or further away and obscure.

[Arts student]

Is this, they ask, a world fit to bring children into?

The future looks pretty bleak, not just for myself but for many others as well. It makes me wonder. If kids my age finally get married - will it be wise to have children? Financially or because of this recession. If we can't afford to have children it will make it hard on them and if we do have children will they have to be told one day, 'Listen kid, you haven't got a hope in hell of getting a job - so just do well at school so you'll have something to be proud of.' No way, I wouldn't want my kids to have to face that thought. I know it's not as bad as I've made it out to be but I still worry that the situation is going to get as bad that. Unlike for the past God knows how many years, leisure time will be dreaded but working hours will be received with delight.

[Unemployed for eighteen months]

God knows!! I suppose it must get better, but everyone's attitudes must change, and some pride must be brought back into honest work before that can happen - on both sides. Unemployment is only one of the symptoms of a society that is degenerating slowly and surely. We've had it too good for too long and unless every person wakes up to themselves nothing will change for the better. Who wants to bring children into a world that is being killed by its inhabitants?

[Part-time waitress/barmaid]
Part 3

References and Notes

Chapter 8
1 Jahoda, 1981: 188; see also Blakers, 1990a: 11-15; Chapter 6
2 Winefield and Winefield, 1987
3 (Australia) BLMR Report No 9, 1986: 73
4 Brewer, 1980: 45

Chapter 9
1 Blakers, 1990a: Chapter 6
2 Brewer, 1982
3 Smith, 1982

Chapter 10
1 Reid, 1986: 1-2
2 Van Moorst, 1983
3 Miller and Volker, 1987
4 Presdee, 1981: 5

Chapter 11
1 Blakers, 1990a: Chapter 6
2 Feather, 1982; 1985
3 Van Moorst, 1983
4 Finlay-Jones and Eckhardt, 1982

Chapter 12
1 OECD, 1982: 21
2 See, for example, Ochletree, 1984; Gray et al., 1984
3 OECD, 1982: 33
4 ibid: 35
Youth Affairs Council of Australian (YACA), 1983: 77

For comparison, see OECD, 1982:33, which indicates that many young people are interested mainly in their own prospects and affairs.
Part 4
What's to be Done about Youth Unemployment?

Working as a CYSS project officer, I have a first hand view of the youth unemployment scene. But even from such a vantage point, it's hard (impossible?) to point to solutions in such a completely economic issue. Firstly, sufficient benefits should be available to all the unemployed (particularly those under 18). Schools should be doing more to educate for viable work alternatives, and the 'conventional' workforce must be made aware of the possibility of other lifestyles. When alternatives are socially acceptable, the young might be willing to pursue them.

Job creation schemes are of limited benefit: as designed at present they allow for only temporary employment of an individual. When long-term employment is the result of such schemes, they will be of far more use. Even then, the following figures should be noted: the 22 OECD nations will have to create 20,000 new jobs each day from now on if unemployment is to reduce to the 1979 level (which was bad enough!) Our present job creation schemes - mainly construction work through local councils - cannot hope to do that! I am sceptical of youth communes, especially as the proposal suggested self-sufficiency through art and craft work. As craftspeople will be quick to point out, their profession is not lucrative, and requires tremendous dedication and inner resources to pursue successfully. It is just these qualities which the young unemployed, because of their unemployment, do not have. Schemes such as EPUY, CYSS etc. are necessary and good, but are ultimately band-aid measures. I can see the good that CYSS does in terms of support and even skill development, but having completed such a Government program, there are still no jobs for the young.

I am confounded by the complexity of the issue, and don't really know what to do. But in general, I would move to change social attitudes to work, especially through education. Also, a recognition of the inevitability of technological change should somehow be made a part of our 'mindset', so that everyone has a realistic vision of where jobs, and the alternatives, will lie in the future. On the practical level, the unemployed must be assured an adequate income.

Chapter 13 Unemployment: Whose Problem?
Chapter 14 Fair Go
Chapter 15 Preparing for Work
I am really glad someone is taking an interest in the youth of today. I hope people will see your results and use them to support the good things in our society and change things so the society becomes more caring - working as a community and not as a cage full of individual Caesars.

[Science student]

ASKING YOUNG PEOPLE

Young people as individuals or as a group are rarely asked for their opinions on serious issues; and when they are asked - generally in surveys of one kind or another - their views seem often to be regarded as having little more than curiosity value. As a group, they have no place in decision-making structures, even in those areas such as education which affect them directly and particularly. Thus the Youth Affairs Council of Australia (YACA) consultation in 1983 reported:

Many young people have identified their state as one of powerlessness:

- We’re under age and not taken notice of.
- Young people don’t get their say. No one listens to your views.¹

Similarly, the 1982 OECD paper mentioned earlier reported that, while the most important demand of young people is for adult status, ‘the second most important demand of today’s youth is their feeling that they have little control over their own lives, and their desire to increase it’.² The same feelings come through very strongly in responses to the ACER questionnaire. Many of the young people emphasise how rarely they are consulted:

It is very rare that anyone bothers to ask the opinion of a young Australian and I’m very happy to be able to voice my opinion.

[Unemployed]

I like being in this survey. It is the first time that I have been asked about my views on school, work and life generally. It is good that someone is interested in what we are doing
and how we feel about things. I just would like to know if it is going to be of some use to someone.

[University student]

They believe that their views should be important in the shaping of a society which will be their society in the future:

I thoroughly enjoy being part of your survey because it is one of the very few times when I can air my views without someone saying things like 'What does she know, she’s too young to know what she is talking about!! I think the views of people my age are very important, as do you, obviously, because we are the next generation of adults and it is us who will be running the country in the not too distant future. We have to be guided and instructed, of course, in matters of protocol, but as to the basic decisions that will have to be made, I think our views and ideas are very important.

[Office worker]

The ACER questionnaire asked them what they thought should be done about youth unemployment, and almost all of them expanded with comment of one kind or another. Not surprisingly, their suggestions and proposals cover a wide range of opinion, many of them reflecting the most publicised aspects of community opinion and emphasising yet again the fact that youth are no more homogeneous as a group than are adults when it comes to views on social issues. This and subsequent chapters in this section provide a forum for the opinions of these young people on what should be done about youth unemployment and who should do it.

WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY?

A number of young people comment on where they see the main responsibility for action on youth unemployment resting. Many of them, while accepting that youth unemployment is a genuine problem, nevertheless believe that it is mainly up to the individual to do something about it.

I think unemployment is a major problem in our community but the government can only do so much, it is up to the individual to keep himself motivated and stimulated.

[Electricity Authority employee; previously unemployed for several months]

Even among the seriously unemployed, there are those who feel that the government is doing as much as it can about unemployment:

I don’t think there is any simple solution to unemployment. If I knew what it was I would be running the country. Government authorities are doing the best they can to battle unemployment and that’s all anyone can do.

[Unemployed for some time; hopes to be an actor]
But there are those who feel that the government should be doing more:

I don’t think the government does a hell of a lot for the unemployed. They talk about making jobs, but figures have a steady increase year after year. Even though they do fall during the year, it always dramatically increases even more in January.

[Clerk in local government]

In many of the replies a distinction seems implicitly to be drawn between ‘government’, viewed as an abstract entity, and ‘politicians’, who are seen as being only too human. The 1982 OECD paper noted that many of the young people in OECD countries seemed to think that it is the task of the public professional politicians to take care of political matters - even as they are dubious about politics. The responses of these young people disclose feelings about politics and politicians much stronger than merely ‘dubious’. Almost without exception those who comment on politicians - and they are many - express a cynicism and a contempt which must be of grave concern to a democratic society. The following excerpts indicate a view of politicians as incompetent and confused in their leadership, untrustworthy in their promises, motivated by self-interest and insulated from the problems and effects of unemployment. They are typical of many such comments by the young people in their responses:

Politics is so confusing to me and it makes me sick to see so much money spent on defence - royal commissions, etc. when there are so many social problems. The mistakes of the past are just made over and over again. How can the young people change things when important people like politicians and world leaders are more confused about life than we are. If we don’t change and wake up to our problems soon I believe there won’t be life 10 to 20 years from now.

[Bank Officer]

Politics seems to be coming more ‘dirty’ - no party keeps election promises - our children will wonder what is a promise?

[Nurse]

Politicians don’t seem to be helping our society much either. They do lots of talking but little action, they twist the truth to suit themselves. They should try and benefit the community as a whole - by working TOGETHER, not quibbling constantly, and not following ideas which have already failed in other countries (which Australia tends to do).

[Science student]

I don’t have any answers to the problem of unemployment but the government is trying to treat the symptom and not the cause. We walked past Parliament House in Adelaide yesterday. Parked out the front were 10-15 Statesman de Villes, 1-2 white Mercedes and a black convertible Rolls Royce. The bastards that get driven around in these don’t know the answers either. They just pretend they do so they can retire on $100 000 a year. I get $2080 per year - $40.00 per week. I think every politician should be unemployed at least a year before they get into Parliament. It may give them an insight into what it’s like.

[Unemployed, angry and depressed]
Empowers and unions also came in for a share of criticism on their failure to show concern or accept some responsibility for youth unemployment:

However, I don’t think the problem lies entirely on the government’s shoulders. The owners of big businesses, factories and industries, they are all out for what they can get.

[Housewife]

The government are trying to help us in a few ways, but it is really up to the big businesses to help as well. Create positions for juniors. Sack married women and give the young ones a go.

[Unemployed for two years]

The way more machinery is being brought in to replace workers and also the way unions and workers keep wanting to work less hours and get more pay isn’t going to help our kids.

[Factory worker]

Some young people look beyond the immediate scapegoats and suggest that the responsibility for taking action on youth unemployment is one to be carried by the society as a whole:

No individual or government can easily hope to solve the youth unemployment issue. The government should be encouraged to provide larger funding for more youth employment schemes. Voluntary organisations should provide more counselling support plus personal development courses on how to find work, your attitude, etc. Schools can also play their role by introducing subjects, or groups of subjects as part of the school curriculum, therefore helping would-be students wishing to leave on what they can expect from the labour market and how or what they can hope to do about it. How they should cope. Lastly family members, relatives, friends and all people should offer support and self-confidence to the young unemployed. They must show an interest rather than apathy. It must also be mentioned that questionnaires and research surveys, such as the one I am completing, must also be praised. Educational research councils and organisations such as ACER, with their valuable survey and research work on the young and their problems, can do much to help try to solve the problem of youth unemployment. How? By trying to find the statistics and youth related problems faced by today’s youth, as a foundation for the future decisions and direction, likely to be made by the government in these areas.

[Unemployed for 20 months; now taking a part-time course in Interpreting/Translating]

And a few young people express their intention to take some positive action themselves:

My husband and I have a common goal - to have children and raise them with good morals and Christian values. We would like to eventually set up a farm for homeless children and run it ourselves. We involve ourselves in a lot of Social Justice issues and hope that one day our efforts will be worthwhile. I feel that other young people our age will have to
change their standard of living and perhaps not expect so much material gain from life but
spiritual satisfaction. I find a lot of satisfaction in helping people in need.

[Public servant]

All I can say is that when I become a Head Chef in Australia (or hope to) I shall employ
young people first. Perhaps that may be the way that I can help.

[Chef, working at Claridge's Hotel in London]

Less specifically, a teacher comments:

All I can say is that I feel it should be up to the 'haves' such as me, to be aware of and to do
something positive for the 'have-nots'. We have to promote the dignity of every individual
be it Alan Bond winning a Cup or the unemployed street kid. Each has a right to a share of
the cake and I do not really see the government doing much to promote them. Having said
that I'm not really sure what they should be doing because we all tend to hide behind the
faceless bureaucracy in which we live.

[Teacher]

WHAT'S TO BE DONE?

For some young people, the problem of youth unemployment is too daunting:
they just do not know what could or should be done about it:

I really don't know what I could do. Besides that it would give me a headache trying to
find a solution that would suit everyone.

[Unemployed]

Some see unemployment as part of deeper social problems which must be tackled
first:

Wealth distribution and who should fill the few and diminishing jobs are issues that are
going to have to be rethought out by society as a whole. Most people with jobs are over
30, don't seem to care, and hold most of the power in society. Until that happens there is
very little that can be realistically done about youth unemployment.

[Student in Electrical Engineering]

Communes do not solve the problems of the society in which we live - they are merely an
escape. We need greater reforms than hiding our victims. Why not enlist all unemployed
in the Army Reserve? (Sarcasm, please!) Apart from vague notions of having the
unemployed contribute to community projects I offer no solutions here. The whole of
Australian industry needs restructuring, attitudes must be changed - both to work and to
unemployment; business hours, overtime, wages, retirement ages - all need to be
reassessed. The role of the family, of schools, etc. must re-evaluated. At the moment it's
too dark to realise we are in a tunnel, let alone see a light at the end of it.

[Part-time student in Politics and house-husband]

One young man - a teacher - sees government as part of the problem rather than
the solution:
They should stop spending money on defence, politicians’ salaries and expensive white elephants (concert hall, city square, etc) and abolish all the state governments, upper houses and other superfluous rubbish. All the millions of dollars saved by doing this could be used to sponsor some really useful public works (thus creating jobs) or set up some proper job creation schemes. The country would be far more efficiently run by one small council than dozens of parliaments (state and federal), local councils, and inept bureaucrats. Australia is the most over-governed country in the world and we probably get the least back from our government.

Most of those responding, however, have more limited and more specific proposals on what should be done to alleviate if not solve the problem of youth unemployment. The suggestions range from the vague to the definite; from the merely hopeful to the thoughtful and informed. Many of them merely echo the opinions and prejudices that young people see publicised and hear expressed in the community around them. But overall, they display the concern and sometimes desperation of young people caught in an intolerable situation beyond their understanding and control.

Though most of the responses cover a range of ideas for dealing with youth unemployment, the proposals fall into two main categories: those aimed at giving young people ‘a fair go’ in the employment race by reducing the competition for jobs and/or expanding and creating employment; those arguing for more relevant education and more opportunities for training and development. The following two chapters explore the views expressed on solving unemployment and improving education.
In my opinion they should raise the age to leave school to 18 so that people have a matric degree. Bring in a means test for married couples with two jobs. That would also give security to young children who miss out on so much by mothers not being at home. So it would solve two of the major problems of today. Job creation schemes are a very good idea because they give young persons work experience to find a job in the future. Yes, youth communes are a good idea for young people who have lost contact with their parents, as well as communication with what they call the older generation. Earlier retirement and cancelling permanent casual workers would aid the youth unemployment. As would the rescheduling of the system of overtime.

[Baker/pastry cook]

Government job creation schemes are a good idea but they don't offer long-term job security which is one of the essential factors in my opinion when one considers employment. Skills gained in these schemes can be beneficial but 'unfortunately are refused later because the person may be too old for a later job'.

[Administrative officer in the electricity authority]

REDUCE THE COMPETITION

As their comments clearly indicate, young people in 1983 were well aware of the structural changes taking place in the labour market. They were already feeling the effects of declining job opportunities, particularly for early school leavers and of the preference of many employers for more mature job applicants. The simple result of these complex social and industrial trends was, in the eyes of many young people, 'too few jobs and too many job applicants.' It is not surprising then that a common reaction to this perception was to look around the community for readily identifiable groups who might seem to be in unfair competition with young people for what jobs there were.

Given the adherence of young people generally to traditional values and patterns of living and their aspirations to achieve for themselves Australian goals and way of life, young people do not question the prior rights of bread winners, especially family men, to take and hold jobs. Many young people, however, do question and object to employment for some other groups in the community.
whom they regard as having neither prior need nor prior right over themselves. Prominent among these groups are: younger school leavers, migrants, 'oldies' and married women.

In ascending order of frequency and resentment, these are the groups singled out by young people as unfair competitors in the job race. They are the target particularly of those who have been, are or fear they might be unemployed, and it is in blaming such groups that young people express their own bitterness, desperation and sense of rejection.

Young school leavers are mentioned in a considerable number of responses as unwelcome competition in the race for jobs, but there is also evident an underlying sense of sympathy and concern for those who have yet to experience the frustrations of the job market. Raising the school leaving age is seen as one way of improving outcomes:

I would make the school leaving age higher so as there is not a lot of youths unemployed. I would make the leaving age about 17 or 18.

Factory worker

I think that the school leaving age should be higher as what's the point of leaving school at Form 3 and hanging around on the dole for 2-3 years. You could have been at school improving your knowledge and qualifications to improve your chances of getting a job.

Student at agricultural college

I pity the future school leavers, for I don't like their prospects of finding any work at all.

Shop assistant

There are a few however who do not believe that keeping children in school is any answer to youth unemployment:

There is no single solution to youth unemployment. If only there was a fairy god mother with a magic wand!! Each year the schools are churning out more and more young people who are seeking jobs. Some may continue their education but this only delays the problem. There's no saying that there will be jobs for these people, even if they do have degrees or extra qualifications. Keeping children in the schools until 18, or older, will not solve the problem at all.

Unemployed; hoping for appointment to the public service

In the light of the wide experience of unemployment among these young people, it is not surprising that many of their comments focus on the competition offered by migrants in the job market. Postwar immigration has changed Australian society from an almost totally Anglo-Celtic community into one representing a diversity of cultures from every continent. For the most part this large-scale importation of a population for Australia has been handled sensitively at official levels and accepted with a considerable measure of good grace by those of the dominant culture. In the expansionary postwar years, the obvious labour shortages argued the case for immigration and, in many cases, there was little competition from Australian workers for the generally unattractive jobs which
migrants began to fill. Nevertheless, underlying tensions remained, expressed not so much in open hostility as in a patronising contempt which might be humiliating but was on the whole good-natured. Unemployment and the growing competition for jobs has soured much of the good nature, particularly in those areas where unemployment is high and particular groups of migrants readily identifiable. As in the nineteenth century, each new cultural group has been seen as further potential competition for jobs and attracted its quota of hostility. Tolerance is not easy for those who desperately want jobs.

Young people faithfully reflect these community attitudes as they do most others. As might be expected, the majority of those who comment resentfully on migrants are the unemployed or those who are insecure in their employment:

I think the government should create a lot more job creation schemes or better still send back all the refugees. They are stealing all our jobs. It is particularly bad in the Western suburbs of Sydney. I would like you to publish that last piece because there are a lot of people who feel the same way I do.

[Unemployed]

With youth unemployment I would stop all these people coming in here from overseas and taking the jobs. Give the people here the jobs first.

[Supermarket cashier; previously unemployed for ten months]

Some of the rancour against migrants is obviously based on anecdotal misinformation:

The thing that shits me are migrants getting jobs. Especially the slopes. They've only been here 2 weeks and they have 2 jobs, a house and a car. BAN THE UGLY MUTTS. Australians FIRST. Our unemployment level would drop if dumb wogs were banned and stopped getting 'OUR' jobs.

[Clerk in Telecom]

Although I am not racially prejudiced I get very upset and angry when refugees arrive in Australia and are given a car, a house and a job. I cannot see the sense in this type of thing when we have many homeless and jobless young people.

[Laboratory assistant and housewife; previously unemployed for eighteen months]

The reality has been somewhat different, as research and statistics show. Since the mid-1970s, unemployment rates for young migrants have been much higher than for the Australian-born of equivalent age; they have been highest of all for those young people born in non-English-speaking (NES) countries. The resentment shown by many - but not by any means a majority - of the young people in the survey towards newcomers to Australia is no more than part of the long-established pattern of Australian attitudes to those who are different. Manning Clark noted the development of these attitudes in the last century:

What was new was the growing intolerance of the native born towards the immigrant. In 1861 there were ugly riots against the Chinese. In 1871 there were rumblings of anti-German sentiment in South Australia. In 1880 there were acts of violence against British
immigrants in the northern New South Wales coalfields. By the 1880s the native born were closing their ranks behind their slogan of 'Australia for the Australians'. Immigration probably contributed towards this growing xenophobia.2

Unemployment injects bitterness into these underlying tensions, and this must be accounted among the most undesirable of the social effects of unemployment. As unfair and unnecessary competition, people over about 50 years attract mention and resentment even more than migrants do, and from a much wider range of people. The following comments are typical of many.

First off they should put off older women and men so the younger people have a job. Older people have a home and have had their life. How's a young person supposed to start a life without a job?

(Unemployed)

I don’t have any easy answers to youth unemployment. I do believe that earlier retirement is essential for more just distribution of resources.

(Occupational Therapist)

You ask what could the government do about youth unemployment. I think they could retire all the people who have reached the retiring age to make more room for today’s youth, because the older ones are not going to be here much longer, whereas the young ones will. And someone has to learn the older one’s trades to carry on the country’s trades and commerce.

(Shop assistant)

A few of the responses indicate reasons, apart from job competition, why young people resent those at the older end of the labour force age spectrum:

At this point in time, I think that most of the people I attended school with do hold some kind of job. Unfortunately this was not without, often, quite a struggle and many weeks/months (even years) on the dole line. Hardest was the attitude and rather callous handling of many-middle aged persons secure in their jobs and homes who often used the term ‘dole bludger’. They thought that everyone could get a job if they tried and did not understand why young people could not be satisfied with any job even the most menial.

(Teacher)

Though young people resent migrants and older people who seem to be blocking their chances for a job, they reserve their real bitterness for married women who work when they do not need to do so. This is the group most frequently mentioned by the young people as unfair competition. This is partly because women in the postwar years have become an increasingly obvious component of the workforce.3 Between 1921 and 1941, only about 20.0 per cent of women aged 20 to 64 years were in the labour force and the rate of increase in participation was slow. In the early 1950s, participation rates for women aged 45 - 64 years began to increase, but not for those between 20 and 44 years, since these were the women affected by the postwar baby boom. It was not until the early 1960s that this age cohort of women began to increase their participation in the workforce. Between 1966 and 1983, the participation rate of women in the
labour force grew from about 36.0 per cent to 44.0 per cent. Over this period, the rise was entirely due to the increased involvement of married females in the labour force. As mentioned earlier, many of these women have been employed in offices and shops in jobs which previously might have gone to young people.

These trends go some way to explain comments such as these:

One of the only suggestions I have is if some of the married women were to opt out of the workforce this would create some jobs.

[Housewife and parent]

Another facet of unemployment is the increasing number of married mothers coming back in to the workforce once their children begin school. If these women stayed home the unemployment problem would drop considerably. I for one will quit teaching once I start a family and will not go back except for fill-in or casual jobs.

[Student teacher]

The resentment is not due merely to the numbers of married women taking jobs which the young feel might be theirs. Interwoven with this is a strong sense of injustice: most of these women, they feel, have no need to work; they have husbands to support them and are already comfortably off in material goods:

Personally I would like to see working wives who do not need the money step down and let some unemployed person be trained for the job. All of us think we need more money. It's the 'desire to be rich' in us but REALLY we ONLY WANT MORE AND MORE AND NOT NEED MORE.

[Shop assistant]

I am unemployed and have been for the past 2½ years. If the government was at all interested in creating youth employment, it would sack all the middle-aged married women. They have a husband who brings home the money. They have a house and the best part of their life over. The money they earn buys them dishwashers and other luxuries. We on the other hand have barely enough money to keep the pantry full.

Unemployment! An ugly word. How about getting rid of working mothers - in some cases people with 2 and 3 jobs. Well they might say 'We can't leave work; we need the money.' BUT all I can say is they are trying to live a too higher classed life style than what they can afford. Most of them just have too many commitments, car payments, paying off their homes. I should say 'houses' not homes as in quite a few homes I know of you can't even put your feet on the lounge. Well what's a lounge for if you can't lounge around on it?

All I feel is necessary is to get rid of all the working mothers, give the young people a chance. People say 'But young people on the dole don't want to work'. Is this really the case? Sure a very small minority fit into this category but what about the rest? Have they been given a fair chance? It really must upset the unemployed youth of today to walk into a store and see Joe Blow's mum working as a cashier. Does she really need that job? Or is she just outright greedy? May be the excuse will be 'I'm bored at home'. Well for those people there are so many jobs for volunteers, why don't they fill those positions? NO because they are used to the money and driving around in their flash cars and wearing the latest trendy fashions and in some cases they look like mutton done up as lamb anyway. I say 'Get rid of' the working mothers and let the younger generation show what they're made of. They too will get a taste of the money and like it and will work for it.
156 IS ANYONE LISTENING?

Just let me add this. I know one local lady, has worked all her life and she says the only reason she works is to have the money to go overseas and buy diamonds, and my god her hands are full of them. Let’s hope that they turn into steel and rust. Stop me before I do some damage.

[Stock control clerk]

Consistent with these attitudes, they do distinguish between need and what they see as greed:

What would I do about youth employment? In my previous paragraph, I stated that I would like to see married women sacked. When I say ‘married women’ I mean women whose husbands are working as well. I think it is very unfair to have two incomes in one family when some families don’t even have one income.

[Unemployed for two years]

Comments along these lines very noticeably express the views of young women who are unemployed or employed in shops, banks and offices. They are infrequent among those in tertiary education. Males, on the whole, make few such comments, partly because, in a labour market which is still very much segregated by sex, there is little competition between males and females for jobs. In the comments which are made by males there is little room to doubt that the traditional attitudes are also alive and well:

When you’re single you’re out looking for a good time, but when you’re married you go home to have a good time with the people you love. And that’s why it’s a real pity so many mothers think it’s their right to go back to work after having a baby. They pay somebody else to watch their children grow and then have teenage strangers to care for. We have $9 a week out of my pay that’s not accounted for in bills or food money. But at least our son will grow up knowing who his parents are. That would solve some unemployment if more mums decided to stay at home.

[Public servant]

A few voices are however raised in the interests of sex equality:

Many people think it is so wrong for married women to work but what about married men? Why should married women give up work? Maybe men should compromise.

[Art student]

Yet as indicated in Chapter 12, a great many young women, especially but not exclusively among the tertiary educated, expect to work after marriage, or at least after their children are old enough to go to school. Clearly, attitudes among young women, and in the community generally, towards women in the workplace are in a state of transition. The traditional attitudes persist alongside new aspirations and, in some cases, obligations to pursue and be successful in careers. Unemployment again exacerbates the tensions inherent in the old and new roles for women, the roots of which lie deep in social conditioning. The following comment on her schooling by the young woman completing her Arts/Law degree says a great deal:
I omitted to mention that I found this a strange contradiction which nonetheless existed at my school. On the one hand, great emphasis on academic success and on the other great stress on the virtue of being a wife and mother - but never both at the same time.

CREATE WORK

As well as reducing the competition for jobs, young people see a need to create more work. Thus 'job creation' comes in for general approval even if the concept is fairly vague and the term itself is used to cover a wide range of applications. Ideas suggested include industry expansion, encouragement of small business, job sharing, 'relief work' on roads and public utilities, work for the dole and compulsory ‘voluntary’ work. The following excerpts illustrate:

The government should try and create more jobs just for the young generation because if you are just out of school you have no experience at any kind of job unless you have a part-time job and most kids don't so the government should make more just for us kids.

[Unemployed for six months]

New industries should be financed and major public works programs started employing trained people who would be replaced in their previous job by the inexperienced.

[Postgraduate student and part-time tutor/research assistant]

But the main bunch of unemployment is the Year 10 student who doesn't like school or is just too bored to continue. The idea of raising taxes to pay for them is only causing more pressure on small companies. But if a tax free scheme was introduced so that every company put on an employee, the situation would be eased. The dole would be paid to the company and hopefully with upsurge in production the person can receive a reasonable amount.

[Steel fabricator]

Unemployment needs to have job-sharing I think, because it would help two or three people until they can all find a permanent job of their own, so at least they'd get some experience. The government should set up a scheme where they set out certain jobs in the public service, and work into job-sharing.

[Shop assistant]

I feel all unemployed people should be made to do some community work to earn the unemployment benefits, then maybe some people (like me looking hard for work) won't be called 'dole bludgers'.

[Unemployed]

Seeing the government is paying the unemployed anyway they should put them in the armed forces.

[Unemployed and very bored]

I truly believe though that the government should train the youth in getting used to work. If they can't find a job they will of course qualify for the dole, but a new law should be brought in. If you are on the dole you should be made to do voluntary work.

[Student overseas on a Rotary exchange program]
There is however fairly wide agreement that job creation schemes should produce long-term rather than short-term employment:

The job creation schemes at the moment are too small and there's not enough - they need to create big jobs and guarantee long periods of work not just 3 or 6 months.

[Student in Child Care course]

A few argue also for meaningful work:

Job creation schemes are a good idea if they benefit the community as a whole as well as the unemployed - not make someone dig a hole and then make them fill it up just so they can have a job.

[Science student]

Many of the comments which young people make about job creation are the result of experience, direct or indirect, with the Special Youth Employment Training Program (SYETP).

**SPECIAL YOUTH EMPLOYMENT TRAINING PROGRAM (SYETP)**

This program more than any other, judging from the numbers and substance of the comments, seems to have been the focus of hope and despair for unemployed young people in 1983. The scheme provided employers with a subsidy of $50 per week for 17 weeks so that they could employ eligible young people and train them in appropriate skills. Employers were required to pay the trainees award wages, and there was some implicit hope - never as strong as an expectation - that the trainee might be kept on as an employee at the end of the subsidy period. Since the program was intended to benefit the long-term unemployed, only those young people who had been unemployed for four months or more in the previous twelve months were eligible to participate.

During the five years or so of its operation, SYETP was the subject of considerable research interest, focusing among other issues on its effectiveness as a training scheme and on its capacity to provide jobs for young people. Some problems were noted with SYETP as a training scheme; in particular, that the lack of monitoring of the training provided by employers meant that trainees sometimes got poor and incompetent training or none at all. On the main issue of whether SYETP is fact helped to reduce youth unemployment, research by Smith and others indicated that about one-third of the participants had kept their jobs and about two-thirds of all the young people assisted had had a full-time job since being assisted, though 10-15 per cent of them had then lost it.4

Some of the success stories of SYETP are told by the young people themselves:
I was unemployed for 6 months before I got a job through the CES and the SYETP scheme. It was only supposed to be for 4 months. However, I was extended for 3 years before I was finally made permanent.

[Assistant in a plant nursery]

When I left school I became unemployed for about 5 months. Then my first job arose through the SYETP Scheme. (This shows how useful such schemes are, even for temporary employment because valuable experience is gained.)

[Assistant in a plant nursery]

Overwhelmingly, however, the comments on the scheme are critical, reflecting some of the problems identified in research. One of the most important of these was the practice among some employers of substituting young people subsidised under SYETP for regular employees whose wages had to be paid in full. The following bitter comment from a replaced employee illustrates:

As for government employment schemes, these are good for some people, but disastrous for others. Employers, who can receive a rebate for hiring someone on these schemes, are firing employees - in many cases, people who have been working for them for years - and are hiring the people on these schemes to save money. I myself have experienced this. I worked part-time for a company for 2½ years. A full-time position came up which they were going to give me, until they found out about this rebate system. They hired someone on one of these schemes and ended up firing me from my part-time position and giving it to the rebate full-time employee as well, as this worked out cheaper for them.

I myself am now eligible for SYETP but still can't find a job as people on this scheme who are younger than me are getting the jobs, regardless of educational standards, because they are cheaper to hire than me. The government should introduce a scheme to help people keep their jobs which are threatened by SYETP people, etc.

Participants in the scheme are also critical. Their pleasure and satisfaction in having a job are soured by their dismissal at the end of the subsidised period:

The SYETP is the best thing they have done. There's only one thing wrong with it. When I was working in the Newsagent I was on it and as soon as my 17 weeks was up they put me on to casual work then they sacked me. They couldn't afford to pay me the full wage.

[Unemployed]

Both jobs were through the SYETP scheme. On both occasions I was retrenched before the time was up. Both companies were small and insecure and had done this numerous times before. The CES has since been in contact with them both. This is what happens to a lot of people that go into these schemes. Then again some others are lucky and everything works out fine.

[Part-time temporary job with Telecom]

Job creation schemes are a waste of time - I spent 17 weeks on a SYETP scheme and was sacked at the end of this period. The employers of this country use these schemes to get cheap labour and should be forced to show good reason to put the people off at the end of the period.

[Now in the Army; previously unemployed three times, each time for six months]
Some young people resent the fact that they needed to be unemployed for at least four months in order to be eligible for assistance at all:

If you haven't been unemployed for four months you can't go for the SYETP and there usually is more jobs with the SYETP.

Some schemes like SYETP which means you have to be unemployed for 4 months are crazy. I mean I haven’t been unemployed for this amount of time but the Customs jobs that are available always seem to be in this section, which means I have no chance. One day I almost begged the girl to give me a chance at the job but since I wasn't unemployed for enough time I wasn’t eligible. Wasn’t 3 months long enough to be unemployed?

In fact, SYETP was intended primarily as a training and work experience program rather than as job creation, but there is no doubt that the young participants pinned their hopes of further employment to proving themselves sufficiently in the seventeen week period so that they might be kept on afterwards. Their disappointment is keenly expressed:

I have completed 17 weeks with Telecom under SYETP as an assistant technician at our local exchange. Those 17 weeks really gave a boost to my system. While working with Telecom I applied for a few jobs with Telecom but not getting anywhere because I was temporary. I found it very disheartening because I was going straight back on the dole.

Job creation is a good idea but I feel the government should be looking for permanent full-time employment instead of temporary employment/training schemes. They're unemployed at the end of their terms - the result is better trained unemployed!

What the comments on SYETP show above all is how desperately most young people want work, how eagerly they hope for a chance to prove themselves and how deeply they feel the rejection which comes with the end of a temporary job.
Preparing for Work

If the government cannot get everyone a job it should design other schemes that give a training to the still receptive youth that although it may not be a paying job will give them something to do that will be useful in later job life. If I had the choice I would make it compulsory for the unemployed to attend a course (of their choice) that would give them the basic skills that otherwise would not have been taught at school. This takes the burden off employers, creates jobs for tutors in the various fields and fills in the unemployed's time with something.

[Electrician]

The fault in the government schemes to help young people is they are too late. The schooling system should be changed. My suggestion of 'career electives' would prove efficient, sensible and would achieve good results. Abolish exams - base marks on yearly work and assignments not on 3 hours of pressure for each subject - how barbarian! The government schemes are good but they are too late! The idea is to find a cure before the problem gets too out of hand. This means educating children in the art of working and living while they are about 14 or 15. School for the most part is bloody boring. It's only when the teacher and/or subject is interesting that most children pay attention and do well. Maybe the government should educate the teachers in being both educational and fun.

[Employed in parents' textile business]

TRAINING YOUNG PEOPLE

The Kirby Report noted that:

Of the 250 000 young Australians who reach the school leaving age each year, close to 100 000 immediately continue their education and complete 12 years of schooling. Many go from there to higher education. 35 000 to 40 000 gain an apprenticeship. Perhaps 10 000 to 15 000 enter full-time vocational courses in certain areas which have no Year 12 prerequisites. The remainder, over half of whom are females, seek to enter the labour force with no substantial vocational preparation. There may be as many as 100 000 young people in this category.¹

In the past and even well into the post-war decades, the main source of training for young people who left school without qualifications or skills was on-the-job training, and it was the kind of training most appreciated by those whose school experience had been characterised by failure and dislike. Two comments by early school leavers in 1975² illustrate:
It's interesting - there's a lot to learn ... the job is real good. Creative: you can see what you've done and feel proud of yourself. ...It's a new system: working as a three-man team to see a job through - one is a foreman, one is a leading hand, one is an operator. Money and responsibility increase as you go up the scale ... the foreman is great; it's like a big happy family. Got a letter from the (big) boss the other day congratulating us on our performance.

It's better than school because you're learning more ... I was learning how to operate everything ... different machines, lathes ... fork-lift driving is not as easy as it looks - you've really got to use your brains.

By the end of the 1970s, as Chapter 3 shows, opportunities for similar early school leavers to continue learning and to prove their capacities in jobs were declining rapidly. The resulting increases in youth unemployment led directly to a number of federal and state labour market programs intended to provide training for young people who were now denied the chance to develop their skills in and through a job.3

Apart from the time-honoured institution of apprenticeship post-war labour market programs in Australia specifically intended for young people date from the end of 1976 when the Community Youth Support Scheme (CYSS) was introduced, closely followed by the Special Youth Employment Training Program (SYETP). CYSS provided a mixture of social support and employment related activities for unemployed young people. SYETP (as already discussed) provided wage subsidies to employers to employ and train young people. At the same time, the apprenticeship scheme began to be expanded through incentives to employers to take on apprentices (Commonwealth Rebate for Apprentice Full-time Training - CRAFT). In 1977 also, the Education Program for Unemployed Youth (EPUY) was established in TAFE colleges to improve the employability of young people, especially early school leavers, by providing further teaching in literacy, numeracy and job-seeking skills.

Of the special training programs to which young people in 1983 had access, those which drew most comment in responses to the questionnaire were the SYETP (discussed in the previous chapter) and CYSS. Very few comments were made about EPUY or indeed about apprenticeships, though young people who gained apprenticeships obviously considered themselves fortunate and secure in their careers. However, given the stimulus of a specific question in the ACER questionnaire, young people had plenty to say on schooling and its role in preparing them for working life. The rest of this chapter therefore concentrates on the views expressed by young people first on CYSS and then on schooling.

COMMUNITY YOUTH SUPPORT SCHEME (CYSS)

The CYSS was introduced in 1976 to encourage local community involvement in catering for the needs of unemployed young people. Though its guidelines changed frequently over the years, the scheme essentially operated in two main
areas: providing social support to the young unemployed and undertaking a range of activities designed to improve their employability and chances in the labour market. Under the heading of social support, CYSS offered help in forms ranging from drop-in centres and cafes to counselling and referral services. Its employment-related activities have included a variety of courses, craft and other practical facilities and, more recently, encouragement of employment enterprises.

The range of activities undertaken by CYSS projects was therefore extremely wide and the particular aims and style of the projects have been correspondingly diverse, reflecting generally the needs of young people in the local area, the skills and interests of the CYSS project officers and the views of the local Management Committees. The Kirby Report noted some of the difficulties faced by CYSS projects in attempting to meet the needs of young people as well as to satisfy the conditions of their funding by the Commonwealth government:

Some projects emphasise activities that are not strongly linked to employment, because of the demands upon them. At the same time, in the battle for continuing funding they must meet the expectations of the DEIR [Department of Employment and Industrial Relations] and its field officers, who assess performance against a clear expectation that the emphasis will be on skills training and work related activities.

This conflict was brought home sharply to us when we were shown two projects by the DEIR - one assessed as 'good' and one as 'bad'. Predictably the 'good' project offered a highly structured skills oriented program, rather like a mini-community TAFE centre, where project staff worked on administration and the main contact with the participants was made by the sessional 'teaching' staff. The project had good community support and there were other relevant local services available (e.g., a youth counselling service). The 'bad' project was informal, offering support, counselling, group identity and referral services. This project operated with little community support. It had little support from its management committee and operated in dilapidated but expensive premises (rented from the local council). Despite this, the so-called 'bad' project seemed to us to be providing a most valuable service to a group of very disadvantaged young people, in distressing circumstances.

The report went on to say:

We believe the major strengths of the CYSS are its diversity, its informal, non-bureaucratic approach to the problems of young people, its community base and management, and its ability to identify and respond to local problems.

The diversity of CYSS, its strengths and its weaknesses, are reflected in the range of comments by young people. The comment by a CYSS project officer gives something of the flavour of a CYSS project:

I am a CYSS Project Officer. This job involves working with unemployed young people (many of whom are in fact older than myself). I help organise recreational and educational activities, as well as talk to and counsel people on a variety of issues. The job is full-time, and so diverse as to be almost 'recreational'. Each day is so different, and depends largely on the people who visit our CYSS Project. Some days are 'heavy' - involving conflict with
disruptive and angry youth, others are 'light', giving the opportunity to develop friendships with, and assist, a great range of people.

I like the job immensely, but it is the most 'responsible' work I've ever done. Day to day decisions are made according to my judgement. There is no boss telling me what to do, and no structure within which to work. This means creativity, but also a certain fear of making the wrong decisions, etc.

Appreciation of the efforts made by CYSS workers and project officers is shown by some of the users:

I'm unemployed now. It's really boring being unemployed. There's very little to do. I spend most of my time looking for work and going to the CYSS. I think the government should worry a lot more about the unemployed. They waste their money on overseas trips, nuclear warheads, etc. They should be helping us. CYSS - I go to youth support quite often. The project officers help you in many many different ways. They help you find work, help you with lawyers and the police if you need it. They help you if you want to learn a trade, etc. They do things that they aren't paid to do.

[Unemployed]

I have found the people in the CYSS schemes very helpful and really concerned with getting young people jobs and helping them get on the job training. They are truly dedicated to the cause and I think the Government should do everything in its powers to keep these groups operating. It is the best thing for Australia and the unemployed youth.

[Plastics fabricator; previously unemployed for five months]

CYSS, as a place to go and meet people, helps to relieve the social isolation of the long-term unemployed:

CYSS is a good place for all young people to go and learn crafts, do odd jobs and do some of the many courses they hold. CYSS also lets you meet other unemployed people to see what they do and how they fill in their time.

[Unemployed]

CYSS and so on are useful in curbing depression; keeps people occupied but is no good for creating jobs.

[Unemployed]

CYSS also offered a variety of courses on almost any practical subject which was of interest to the local unemployed and for which teachers could be found. Many of these are mentioned by the young people responding to the questionnaire, sometimes as interesting and stimulating in their own right and sometimes as a start to particular vocational training. The following are examples:

I completed a CYSS bar/waitressing course and found it boosted my morale a lot. It kept me busy, studying etc. and it made me feel a worthy person again. Talking with other people that did the course, and how they felt being on the dole, made me realise that I wasn't the only one who felt 'like a number'. I'd recommend these courses to anyone.

[General assistant in a hairdressing salon]
I am currently doing a floristry course through CYSS in Adelaide and I enjoy this very much. I would even enjoy doing this as a job. I am eligible for the SYETP but to date this hasn't helped at all.  

[Unemployed; hopes to start a small floristry business with her mother]

Youth employment schemes are terrific. My sister didn't have a job and experience in nothing. She went along to CYSS learnt switchboard and how to type and now is working in an office. They not only keep the unemployed off the streets and not bored, but you learn something you want to learn in your own time and you're doing it for yourself. It's free and educational.  

[Housewife and parent]

To fill in my time, I started taking a variety of courses. These include a St John's Ambulance First Aid Course, an Adult Education beginners French course, grooming and deportment and looking in style. The latter two were run by the CYSS and were free for unemployed people under 25. These ended before my overseas trip. Last week, I began 2 more courses - gourmet cooking and computers - both run by the CYSS. These CYSS courses are very worthwhile, in my opinion! The only trouble is finding people who are willing to attend them. Only 2 people (myself and a boy, named Wayne) attended the first session of gourmet cooking. Last week the attendance rose to a grand total of 4 people. This is disgusting when you consider how many unemployed people there are!! The computer course attracted some 12 people which was much more pleasing!  

[Unemployed except for casual jobs for about nine months since leaving school after Year 12; now expects a job in the public service]

Given the diversity of CYSS in style as well as in standards, there is also criticism:

As far as CYSS is concerned I don’t know if every town is like ours but if you’re not a big fat greasy broken-down rough hippy you’re not in.  

[Unemployed; retrenched at 18]

CYSS is hopeless - I went once to a sewing class and had to tell the teacher how to do something.  

[Unemployed nearly a year]

For the unemployed however, perhaps the greatest benefit which can be derived from a program such as CYSS is the sense that people care. As one student teacher puts it:

I think there is a definite place for CYSS type projects. It is essential that unemployed people have the opportunity to be constructive. There is also an underlying need for personal support to raise the morale and maintain the self-esteem even to the level of starting your own business.  

[Student teacher]

**SCHOOLING AS PREPARATION FOR WORK**

Despite what is often said about schooling and its irrelevance to work, its prime purpose in industrialised societies has been the preparation of young people for
occupation and place in the society. The development of mass schooling in the
nineteenth century was due in large measure to the need for a workforce with
such level of skills and education as was necessary to meet the rapidly changing
conditions and demands of industry, trade and empire. While the provision of
education became gradually more extensive and comprehensive during the
nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it remained still closely tied to
occupation and social place.

In Australia as in England, secondary education which developed in the early
years of this century was seen very much as a filtering process leading to
university studies and shedding students progressively at points appropriate to
their future jobs and status. In the post-war years, demand for education and
educational qualification has grown prodigiously, partly because employers have
been requiring increasingly higher certificates of education, partly because
education retention is one way of reducing the youth labour supply and therefore
unemployment, and partly because a more highly educated and skilled population
is seen as essential to the continued prosperity of societies in an age of advanced
technology.

Schools have therefore had to face the challenge of increasing numbers of
students with a much wider range of abilities staying on beyond the compulsory
leaving age, many of them to complete Year 12. At the same time, community
expectations of schooling have also been widening. While schools are still
expected to teach the ‘basics’ and look after the academic and intellectual
development of their students, they are also being asked to take on a great many
of the responsibilities formerly carried by families, churches, doctors, local
groups and communities; that is, to fill the gap in the network of social support
left by changing attitudes and patterns of living. Education in health, sex, drugs,
driving, consumer, environmental and many other social issues are now in large
measure the responsibility of schools.

A wider range of student needs and wider expectations of schooling have
added subjects to school curricula but have had relatively little impact on the
priorities and approaches of schooling or on its structures. Despite many efforts
by teachers, educators and others in the last thirty years or so and in spite of some
outstanding examples of success in bringing about change, schools on the whole
remain basically institutions for training young people for tertiary study. This
means in effect differing school experiences for different groups of students
depending on whether or not they are suited by school purposes and processes.
The disaffection and alienation of many students whom school processes do not
suit have been well documented in recent years, and the comments of some of
the early school leavers quoted in Chapter 3 reinforce what research has clearly
shown: that for many young people - especially those who lack the advantages of
financially secure, well educated families - school is a place of repeated failure.
Such young people tend to leave school early and to be then further
disadvantaged in the competition for jobs and consequently for a satisfactory
place in Australian society.
One young woman, from a minority ethnic background, comments on discrimination and disadvantage in Australian schooling:

The schooling system in Australia is diverse, catering for a huge number of students and their needs. There are different forms of education, (i.e., private and state owned), which differ in teaching methodologies, subjects, teacher and parental influence, and even intake of respective students and groups of students. The state schools seem to cater for students from lower to middle-class sectors of society (migrant children), whereas private schools and colleges tend to discriminate in favour of pupils from high economic background and the children of professional persons. It is these students who are ‘favoured’ in tertiary institutions and positions of employment. There is this unfair and unjust system prevailing in Australia’s schooling system.

Schools are institutions of learning. They teach the theory of life from the textbooks and not the reality (the experiences, expectations, and practicalities) of life and society. That is why everything we are taught at school is not all useful in later or future existence; i.e., finding a job, getting married, doing further studies, getting on with people and other such matters.

Children from an early age are taught about growing up and life. They have some preconceived ideas about what they can expect to happen to them once they have grown up. This should be so I feel for students as well. Schools should be teaching them not only scholastic skills and abilities, they should be teaching them work and personal skills, i.e., how to apply for a job, how to fill in the application form, what attitude they should be having etc. By teaching them only ‘scholastic’ skills, the schools are once again discriminating between the social classes. That is, the ‘textbooks theory’ of subject matter is catering only for those from a privileged background, i.e., private school children of doctors, judges, managers, accountants, lawyers, etc. This system is purely for those children, who seek tertiary or further education only. This is an unjust system, purely discriminatory for those students who wish to cease their further studies and take up a specialised vocation; e.g., hairdressing, electrical work, engineering, etc. These students should be fully catered for.

Many others comment to the same effect:

I feel schools should look more towards people and employment than people and university, because just as many if not a greater majority of people work as go to university. I feel students are being taught work that is essential only if they wish to attend a university. Students then tend to get bored, claim ‘I’ll never need to know that’ and bow out of school as ‘dropouts’. But if they are taught more about the types of jobs available to them, I’m sure they’d find it much more interesting and understand that this work will be useful to them when they leave school and join the workforce.

[Shop assistant/clerk]

I can’t think of many things that would make school better for me. I fitted well into the system and have received much from it. However, there are some people who may be bright in their own way who become bogged down in the system. I think the system needs to be more flexible and learn to cope with a greater variety of needs. I think teachers need to play a bigger part in detecting where the person’s strengths and future wishes lie and guiding them appropriately - I think too many people go through traumatic experiences of failing exams, ones at which they probably should never have sat but did because they didn’t know what else they could have been doing.

[Medical student]
This division between students destined for tertiary education and other students not so inclined comes through very clearly in comments that young people make on the role of the school for post-school occupation. One way or another, students in higher education seem to have found their school studies useful. At worst, school provides a ticket to higher education:

To me upper secondary school was only the bridge to tertiary education and could have easily been replaced by another six months of university instead of 2 years of boredom.

[Medical student]

I don’t know about the job, but school naturally helped to get me into university. However, I did start acting when I was in school and clung to this interest in university which led to me landing my first full-time job with the National Theatre Company Theatre in Education team as an actor (1982). Actually when I was at school, I’d spend a lot of time at the movies rather than in the classroom so school helped more than I originally thought - boredom can sometimes be quite productive.

[Veterinary medicine student and part-time employee of a Singing Telegram Company]

Most higher education students however seem to find their schooling of some relevance to their post-school studies, though few are prepared to endorse their school preparation unreservedly:

School in my case provided the background and avenue to further specialise during university. The useful aspect of school is to provide the student with a broader perspective which enables the student to realise their aptitudes and limitations. Within the subjects studied at school the relevance may have been so during the 1950s but today many courses and theories I found especially in the HSC were superseded or antiquated.

[Honours student in Economic Geography]

Since I went on to university most of my school training was relevant. What should be encouraged more at school is for students to be involved in the governing of their school and to have real power. When one is in a responsible position one must learn to enquire and question all avenues of bureaucracy.

[Postgraduate student in Archaeology]

Young people who went from school straight into the labour force tend to be more critical of their schooling. Most of them agree that schools should be more practical, taking into account the needs of those entering the workforce. They ask for education in job-seeking skills.

Very little of what I learned at school has been any help to me in getting a job. As for getting better wages, this is controlled by the Apprentice Commission. Since I am working as an apprentice cook, theory is really of very little importance. I think schools should teach students how to approach an interview for a job, how to dress, how to speak and how to initially apply for a job. Schools should stress that successful employees have to be honest and loyal to their employers and not treat a job as if it were something that could be replaced easily.
They want career education in the form of advice, information and practical help which will enable them to choose occupations appropriate to their interests and capacities and to cope with the demands of life and work in a modern society:

School should be orientated towards:
(a) preparing people for the course and (later) job of their choice.
(b) vocational preparation for those going straight to work from school (re: how to budget, health insurance, etc.)
(c) having employment officers who can discuss with students what they can expect in the jobs of their choice so that they do not end up in a situation they dislike.

Not very much that I was taught was useful in my work. Basic maths and general English are what helped me get through my pre-work exam. Schools should teach: (i) job experience; (ii) skills in letter writing; (iii) how to conduct yourself at interview; (iv) try and make some of school (perhaps in later years) similar to work atmosphere.

Many emphasise the need for more practical subjects at school:

I think that schools should stop and re-evaluate their education program to fit in with the times. In my mother's day, they had a choice of many jobs when they left school, where employers would take them on and train them. Today employers can pick and choose. They can get someone who is experienced for the same price as getting someone who they would have to train. School should offer subjects like waitressing/waitering, typing, shorthand, filing and most important, how to speak well (elocution). For jobs working with the public it is essential to be able to speak well, dress well, etc. Perhaps they could also have special courses in high school to prepare kids for AS (After School!) where they learn things like tax, loans, politics, how to economise, etc. Maybe they could add an extra year to high school and make it a compulsory subject.

Not much helped other than basics like reading and writing, maths. The other subjects give you a general knowledge. I am all for a good education and I appreciate the fact that history, art, science, etc. are traditional subjects and are necessary. The trouble is they're not practical. By third form and in fifth and sixth form, electives such as journalism, elementary medicine, business operation and such should be available. These should be combined with a week to a fortnight's work experience in each term. Had I and others had this we probably would have had a better and more commonsense approach to finding not only a job but a career.

A few reflect rather sadly on what they didn't learn at school:

What I was taught at school did not help me much in my job. I learnt more at my last job than what I learnt at school. But work and school are totally different things.

I have learnt since I left school than at school.
More than anything else, however, young people going into the labour market straight from school mention the need for programs of work experience as part of the school curriculum.

For young people to get a job, keep it and do good work, schools should introduce (if they haven’t already) work experience and give their students a real taste of what it is like in the work force.

[Unemployed]

I don’t know about the schools in the eastern states but some schools in WA give students of a particular year a week of ‘work experience’ - this means during the year those who want to work for a week do so at a job of their own choice. This is a good idea and it has worked in a lot of cases. I really think that a high school should take on a course for all Year 10 students. A course which entails every aspect of the workforce, e.g., interviews, how to dress, how to do your best, taxation and most importantly how to communicate with the public.

[Unemployed]

EDUCATING FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Implicit in most of the comments on the inadequacies of schooling is the feeling that schools fail to see their students as individuals. One young man, contrasting the post-school Agricultural course he is undertaking with his previous schooling remarks:

School never treated me like an individual. We were just students. Very little of what I learned is now useful, it is just trivia collected in my brain. The work I am now doing depends on practical knowledge and attitude to work rather than brains which is good. Far too much is pinned on Matric today. People should be judged on potential a lot more.

His comment sums up the feelings of many young people about their schooling: that they are not recognised as individual persons; that they are processed rather than educated and developed according to their own potential. A wide range of young people go on to suggest that schools should be teaching their students to think for themselves, to accept responsibility, to show initiative and to be confident in their own capacities. These are the skills, they feel, which are most needed by young people in an uncertain labour market and society:

School should spend less time on the so-called traditional skills of history, science, etc. and teach more social interaction skills and experience in interaction. Give students more responsibility in the way of school administration, curriculum, councils, and general day-to-day running of the school. Let students be responsible for their own school, their own discipline, etc. Let them make decisions and I feel in doing this they will be much better equipped for post-school life. Not necessarily more suited to employment as a great deal is taken on school results, but I feel that they will be better balanced more rounded, more mature and capable young adults.

[Arts student]
People expect too much from our education system. If schools fail to teach anything to the people who attend them then their main failing is in the area of 'adaptability'. Schools encourage rigidity of behaviour and thinking, and role and rule following. While the latter is necessary, in a society which is constantly changing, at least in the job sphere, people need to be shown how to adapt to and accept those changes.

[Post-graduate student in Psychology]

I think the best sort of 'education' one can receive is well-balanced - skills, practical knowledge and knowledge of a history, geography, science, language, etc. These surely should help in developing student's ability to think and therefore the first step in coping with work, unemployment - whatever.

[Part-time teacher/part-time shop assistant]

Following this theme of the need to adapt aims, attitudes and processes in education to the demands of a changing society and changing patterns of work, a significant number of the most thoughtful responses to the questionnaire take a much broader look at the issue of preparation and training for work and what should be done about youth unemployment. They argue that, while programs of job creation, training and work experience are necessary to relieve the immediate aspects of high youth unemployment, they do not by themselves tackle the fundamental problems of a changing society. A post-graduate student in Psychology makes the point:

That's a problem when people can't find work through no fault of their own. Job creation schemes are good but they seem to be only a temporary answer. We really need to come to terms with 'unemployment' as a social phenomena that's here to stay. Unless the economic situation changes drastically and 100% employment returns, there is no real use in trying to create jobs which last only as long as finite funds do.

We must look to changing the way our society conceives of unemployment and the unemployed. That's not to say that such schemes are a waste of time and money, far from it. But we should educate ourselves into accepting unemployment and removing the social stigma involved. That's going to take some doing but it is possible. To do that, would be to remove the social and psychological problems the unemployed may have and the need to have schemes would be reduced. Perhaps this is too simplistic but I do believe that it is one of our best options available.

Similarly, a librarian comments:

Nothing the government is doing at present can solve the unemployment problem. At most EPUY, etc., are stop-gap measures, as are job creation schemes. It is getting to the stage in the economy where unemployment has to come to be accepted as a fact of life for a percentage of the population. Here again what needs to be changed are people's attitudes, both those of people who are unemployed and those who have a job. Unfortunately the work ethic is deeply ingrained into the community's psyche and it will take many years for attitudes to change. The capitalist and materialist base of Australian society also makes it very difficult to cope with unemployment, as 'the rich get richer and the poor get poorer'.

What is needed is a greater acceptance of unemployment as a way of life, more equitable sharing of what employment is available, and recreational programs for people who need
them to cope with unemployment, and most importantly, financial security for people who
are not in paid employment.

Comments such as these echo assessments made also in and of other countries. A
1985 OECD paper, for example, noted that 'virtually every OECD government
has introduced new measures to reduce the volume or to mitigate the potential
damage of youth unemployment'. The paper goes on to comment:

There is plentiful innovation in response to young people's current transition difficulties,
but the difficulties do not appear to be diminishing. Many innovations have been launched
in faith and hope rather than confidence. We know that young people's verdicts are mixed.
The intended beneficiaries experience some new provisions as waiting rooms, parking lots
or warehouses where they can only mark time, and become increasingly frustrated.

The disgust of many young people is summed up in the remark of one
unemployed young man:

I believe the employment schemes are a complete waste of money. I'm part of them all -
CYSS, SYTEP, Noarlunga Job Services, CES, CITY, still haven't got a job (they are
useless).

Some of the young people are deeply concerned about the long-term effects of
unemployment both on individuals and on the society:

It's very hard to predict the effects of long-term unemployment on people in 10 to 20 years
time; if people have had their self-confidence taken from them at a time in life (18-25?)
when self-confidence is usually consolidated, then surely this will affect them for the rest
of their lives. The world wars created tragedy for a whole generation of youth by the
massive loss of life, but for all the horrors of war, I think it gave the soldiers positive
experiences of security and discipline, and being respected by the community. Perhaps the
tragedy of unemployment for today's generation will have effects similar to the Vietnam
war; the community tries to push the problem aside, and there is a great probability that the
veterans will have long-term psychological and personality problems. The permanently
unemployed are like the fighters in a dirty, vicious, isolated war that someone else has told
them to fight. (The intensity of my feelings here is because I've seen the effects on my
brother, who's been out of work for 2 years).

[University tutor and research assistant]

This final comment perhaps sums up what many young people are feeling:

The most frightening thing is that society is neglecting the people who will create the next
generation.

[Honours Geography student]
Part 4

References and Notes

Chapter 13
1 Youth Affairs Council of Australia (YACA), 1983: 58
2 OECD, 1982: 16
3 ibid: 33

Chapter 14
1 Blakers, 1990a: Chapter 12
2 Clark, 1966: 240
3 Blakers, 1990a: Chapter 11
4 See Smith (Ralph), 1983; Hoy and Ryan, 1984

Chapter 15
1 Kirby Report, 1985: 61
2 Wright and Headlam, 1976: 77; 87
3 Blakers, 1990a: Chapter 7
4 Kirby Report, 1985: 172-173
5 ibid: 173
6 Blakers, 1990a: Chapter 8, 9
7 OECD, 1985a: 2
Although this survey doubtless gives ACER a reasonable picture of what a (hopefully) representative cross-section of Australian youth thinks and feels, does the survey ever get into the hands of those in power - politicians etc.? Is the survey for some useful purpose, or is it an end in itself? In the end, will any real changes result from the effort put into the questionnaire, or are they a voice crying out in the wilderness?

[University student]
SO THEY SAID

In the preceding chapters, young people from a wide range of backgrounds have spoken frankly about their views on and experiences in work, unemployment and education in the circumstances of 1983. Their comments illustrate the difficulties which many young people were encountering at that time in the transition from education to work. A number of themes and issues emerge very clearly from what these young people say.

First is the central importance of employment to most young people. They want work and they see a job as the gateway to the adult world, to a place in society, and to acceptance by the community.

In their search for work, young people learn quickly the realities of competition and the value of knowing somebody who can give you a job or introduce you to someone else who can. Failing this, they use all available means of finding jobs: answering advertisements, taking aptitude tests, using the CES or other employment agencies, taking the direct approach in person or by letter. The successful are likely to be those with the greatest self-confidence and persistence, though few of them end up in the kind of work they hoped for.

Given the opportunity, these young people have a great deal to say about the attitudes and practices of the employers they have encountered in their job-seeking and their employment. Most of it is highly critical. Those in the younger age groups - the early school leavers - are bitter about employer requirements for experience: how can you get experience unless you get a job? For those in the later teens, it is the fear or experience of being sacked at 18 which draws resentment. But employers are also widely criticised for not letting job applicants know whether or not they have been successful; for discriminatory practices; for taking unfair advantage of young people desperate for a job, and in some cases for sheer exploitation.

Relatively few young people are unemployed by choice. Most of those who are accept unemployment for particular personal reasons and for defined periods. They tend to be young school leavers revelling in unaccustomed freedom and a measure of financial independence; those - often from better off families - who choose to defer or interrupt studies in higher education, or those with a personal or social mission in life who are generally fully employed in an unpaid capacity.
The large majority of unemployed young people are those who, for a variety of personal, social or industrial reasons, simply cannot get work or, at least, cannot get stable work. Many of them are likely to be unemployed for a long time. Yet they are the same kinds of young people who, in the expansionary decades of the 1950s and 1960s, would have had a choice of jobs whatever their personal and educational deficiencies and would have settled happily into the Australian way of life. In many cases these are the parents of the school leavers of the 1980s.

Community attitudes to unemployment do not recognise differing reasons for unemployment or distinguish the temporary from the long-term. The unemployed are an amorphous group outside the mainstream of community life. The social disapproval evinced by so many people of all ages reflects the fact that employment has become the credential for social acceptance as a member of the community and, in the case of young people, as an adult. The social disapproval is deeply felt by most unemployed young people. Their sense of rejection by their society leaves them feeling inadequate, guilty and ashamed. The longer the unemployment lasts, the greater the erosion of self-confidence and self-respect. As the tally of unsuccessful job applications mounts, energy and determination to find work are succeeded by apathy, lack of purpose and hopelessness. For some, the solution is sought in drink, drugs or despair. Many others while away the time in sleep, watching TV and purposeless ‘hanging around’.

For almost all of the young people writing in 1983 - whether or not they are optimistic about their own prospects - the fact of high levels of unemployment colours expectations of the future. They want for themselves the opportunities, the security and the stability which their own parents enjoyed; but what they see is a world under threat of nuclear, environmental or economic dissolution. In their own society, they experience the growing influence of technology, declining job opportunities, increased competition for jobs and the demands of employers for ever higher educational qualifications, irrespective of the jobs to be done. As one young person observed bitterly, ‘We’ll soon need a degree to dig ditches’.

Looking back, those who did not go on to higher education mostly see their schooling as having been irrelevant to their post-school experiences, except for such studies as basic English and arithmetic and practical subjects like typing, woodwork and cooking. For many of these young people school was a negative, dreary experience; for a few it was ‘a disaster’, a constant ‘duel’, ‘hell’. The experience of many early school leavers is summed up by the remarks of a shop assistant: ‘I never enjoyed school; it was just a place I had to go until I was old enough for work’. These young people want more practical subjects, more career counselling, more work experience, but above all they want to be seen and treated as individuals and not as no-hopers.

Among those going on to higher education, their schooling is generally seen as relevant in terms of subjects studied. What these young people mostly criticise is the stereotyping and rigidity of school approaches. They complain of having no say or responsibility in the decision-making and organisation of their schools; of not being encouraged to think for themselves, to use their initiative, to be
independent. In more precise terms, they echo the discontents of the early school leavers: that schools on the whole do not see their students as individuals each with an individual potential which schooling could and should assist them to develop. Significantly, young people who attended the colleges in the Australian Capital Territory and Tasmania and a few selected private schools do not share these discontents about their senior years at school. They are generally enthusiastic about their experiences in these years, often contrasting them with the less satisfying years of primary and junior secondary education.

Asked what should be done about youth unemployment, the young people in this survey, like most other people in the community, are bewildered and uncertain. What they are clear about, however, is that they want the chances that older generations have had and seem still to have. Hence their particular resentment against 'oldies' and 'married women', and their questioning of immigration policies which seem to encourage more competition for scarce jobs. More constructively, they plead for increased job opportunities through positive job creation, emphasising the need for such jobs to be genuine and long-term, and not simply a source of cheap labour for employers.

Overwhelmingly, and whether they are employed or unemployed, they demand work for the dole - some because they feel that money should be earned, but most because they are only too well aware of the deleterious effects of unemployment on individuals and of the reduced chances of gaining employment after a spell of unemployment. They reject wholeheartedly the label and substance of dole-bludging. They do not want hand-outs or charity; they want meaningful work or at least effective training and work experience which will allow them to compete more successfully in the job market, and they do not see why they have to experience significant unemployment in order to qualify for government training programs.

At the same time, many of them believe that unemployment is here to stay because the social and industrial structures of the society are changing so rapidly and fundamentally. These young people argue that the society will need to revise its attitudes to work and the unemployed; to recognise that not all people can have jobs. The corollary is an obligation on the society to provide adequately and without stigma for those who cannot find stable employment and more fundamentally to develop different ways of re-distributing wealth and ensuring recognised place in the society.

But perhaps most striking of all in the responses to the ACER survey is the sense of isolation reported by so many young people, irrespective of social background, occupation or lack of it. They seize on the survey as an opportunity to express their feelings and put their points of view. For many of them apparently, finding someone, even among family and friends, who is interested in them and willing to listen is a rare experience. Even rarer is the opportunity to offer their views and proposals to policy-makers or to those with some influence in decision-making. Yet they feel they have a point of view and things to say worth listening to. Young people, many of them argue, have a right to be heard.
They will be the adults, the voters and the decision-makers of the future. Implicitly and often explicitly in all they say is an appeal for attention, recognition and help - for somebody to do something about unemployment and the problems which young people face in a changing society where declining job opportunities and new industrial circumstances are already denying many of them a useful place in their society. They feel, as Clohesy\(^1\) reported in 1983, that ‘The land of the fair go is not their land’.

**AND NOW THE 1990S**

The views and experiences of the young people responding to the ACER questionnaire in 1983 are of interest intrinsically and perhaps historically; but some obvious questions arise for those concerned with the situation of young people today. How far can the views of these young people in 1983 be accepted as providing insights into what young people think and feel nearly a decade later? Have circumstances so changed between 1983 and 1991 that the experiences of these young people are of historical interest only? Is there any need in the 1990s to be concerned about youth unemployment and the effects it might have on young people and the future of the society? The next two chapters set out to provide information which may help to answer these questions. Chapter 17 looks at labour market and other developments since 1983 which make up the present circumstances in which young people live and try to find their place in the society. The trends of the present shape the future, and Chapter 18 examines the options and choices likely to determine whether or not the society can find a useful place for all its members, but particularly for its inexperienced young.
THE SIGNALS OF CHANGE

The Australian economy is part-way through a process of substantial structural change. This and many similar comments made these days signify acknowledgement not only by governments but also by business and union leaders that the economic and industrial foundations of Australian society are changing radically. The comments indicate also a most significant difference between the circumstances at the beginning and at the end of the 1980s. Ten years ago it was still possible to assert, and perhaps even to believe, that unemployment and economic uncertainty were a temporary aberration from the norm of full employment and general prosperity experienced in the 1950s and 1960s. Today the issues are the directions and management of change.

Recognition that the society is changing rapidly and fundamentally has been slow in coming in Australia despite a variety of warnings over the decades. In the mid-1960s, Donald Horne was writing of ‘the lucky country’ - a country whose prosperity was based on the use of other people’s ideas; in which the social climate was largely ‘inimical to originality, and the desire for excellence was lacking (except in sport)’. He went on to warn that ‘Australia will not be able to maintain its prosperity in the new technological age, without profoundly changing its life patterns’. Similarly, the architect, Robin Boyd, pursuing the same theme from a different perspective, argued the need for brains - ‘not just acquisitive brains and not just academic brains, but creative brains, imaginative brains exercised to the edge of their capacity’. ‘The one precious thing in this old world’, he wrote, ‘is the new idea’. By ‘ideas’ he meant not ‘half-baked notions and gimmicks, but the real stuff of creative progression which will give us eventually a real Australian civilisation - instead of a second-hand British, or second-hand American, or second-hand, second-rate, second-best anything else’.

Looking backwards, it is possible to see how right and how little regarded were these Cassandras of the 1960s. Australians preferred to go on believing in unbounded prosperity as a natural right. Nevertheless, the growing uncertainties of the last two decades have been reflected in the extraordinary number and range of inquiries and reports which have scrutinised almost every aspect of Australian life - reports on poverty, the arts and crafts, manufacturing industry, the national...
A CHANGING ECONOMY

The cliche of the prosperous 1950s that Australia was riding to prosperity on the sheep's back encapsulated the traditional economic base of the Australian standard of living: primary produce and raw materials. Since the early 1970s, however, Australia has been feeling the vulnerability of an economy largely
dependent on export of commodities in a world where prosperity is increasingly related to the capacity to generate and apply creative ideas and to add value to raw materials. As Schedvin commented:

There are good reasons for believing that we are nearing the end of our heavy reliance on resource exploitation. Nineteenth-century style commodity production has been maintained well beyond time in the twentieth century, and the future must bring major changes to the composition of our export production and the style of our economic life.6

Thus the Budget Statements of the last few years7 are peppered with warnings about continued reliance on overseas demand and prices for commodities. The 1990s have already demonstrated how well founded these warnings have been. Adding urgency to the search for ways and means to bring about a more diverse economic base have been national and international pressures resulting in relatively high inflation, high interest rates, low levels of domestic saving, demand for imports and, above all, an ever-growing deficit in the balance of trade account. Furthermore, in 1991 as in 1983 the Australian economy was in recession - the latest of the series of downturns which have occurred roughly every decade postwar and which seem in fact to have become an integral part of the high/low cycle of operation of some free market economies. These downturns may be serious or less so depending on circumstances and affect different countries differently depending on the intrinsic strength of the particular economy and the appropriateness or otherwise of management policies. Overall however, the economic difficulties and uncertainties of the last two decades are symptomatic of societies which are changing rapidly and fundamentally, and not simply in terms of economies. In Australia, economic vulnerability takes the limelight and tends to disguise the fact that the society as a whole is in transition from one set of assumptions and way of life to another as yet but dimly perceived and uncertain.

POLICIES FOR CHANGE

With the recognition of changing circumstances has come a new commitment to management of change, and to restructuring of the important social institutions of work and education/training as a basis for development of what has been called ‘a productive culture’ or ‘the clever country’. Since 1983, the aim of federal government policies has been to shift the balance of economic activity towards greater domestic production of high value-added goods and services that are traded internationally.8 Among measures to achieve these aims, to encourage adaptation to change and to propel the Australian economy into international waters have been various policies of financial deregulation, rationalisation of key industries and the encouragement of high technology. In all of this, the expertise and capacity of the private sector to make Australian industry competitive in world markets has been seen as of central importance. Hence the increasing
attraction of governments to privatisation and to policies designed to reduce financial and regulatory impediments to the exercise of private enterprise, particularly in large concerns. As a corollary, a main aim of government policy, illustrated by domestic budget surpluses, has been to reduce spending and employment in the public sector, in the expectation that private enterprise will then use the increased availability of money, borrowing capacity and labour productively and efficiently.

Whatever the eventual outcomes of these macro-economic policies, there can be little doubt at the end of the 1980s that deregulation, a hands-off approach by government and greater integration into world economic systems have accelerated some trends generally regarded as counter-productive if the aim is genuine enterprise and productivity. Among these trends has been the growing role of money as a commodity in its own right, fostered by the capacity for instantaneous decision making in financial markets provided by micro-technological communication systems. As Robertson and Cadman have pointed out, most energy and resources in financial systems today are directed not to producing goods and services but to making money out of money. The currency speculation which is a corollary of deregulation is a daily example.

Other effects are to be seen in the spate of take-overs and mergers which have characterised the 1980s. Many of these were pursued not for increased productivity or efficiency but for purposes of creative accounting, profit-taking and the building up of financial empires as insubstantial as houses of cards. In other cases these trends have led to an aggregation and centralisation of power which have the capacity to disadvantage individuals and distort the good management of the society.

In support of economic restructuring governments have also made efforts to introduce greater flexibility into the operation of the labour market. The Prices and Incomes Accord with the unions has been relied on as a main instrument in control of wages and inflation. At the same time it has brought an unusual degree of stability to relationships in the workplace and between unions and government. It has a key role in efforts to achieve increased efficiency and productivity through the process of industry restructuring, particularly in rigidities of labour market operations which have been the target of criticism for a long time. The 1987 ACTU/TDC report has contributed significantly to this rethinking about labour market operations. There are now therefore serious efforts being made to rationalise union structures and the complex system of industry awards, both of which inhibit change. Work practices are under review in a variety of industrial situations and both the ACTU and the Federal Government are clearly using exhortation and moral pressure as well as wage incentives to encourage attitudinal change.

Less apparently successful have been government efforts to induce change in employer and management attitudes and practices, particularly in the direction of greater employee participation in decision-making or even in the recognition that employees might contribute ideas as well as labour to the enterprise as they
do in more successful economies such as Germany and Japan. There appears to be a similar employer/industry resistance to proposals that employers might contribute in greater measure than they have done in the past to the education, training and re-training of their workforce. All the evidence suggests that investment in training by Australian firms is much lower than it is in Japan, West Germany or America, and much of what is spent is directed to managers and a few selected staff rather than spread equitably. Australian industry has been much more inclined to rely on recruiting needed skills from overseas or by poaching from other firms rather than on training its own employees.13

The reluctance of many employers and some unions to abandon cherished practices illustrates the considerable barriers to change inherent in attitudes and vested interests. As Ford has many times commented, ‘outmoded intellectual and organisational baggage will need to be dumped. Such un-learning may cause more anguish than the process of learning’.14

Sadly, change does not wait upon evolution or even revolution in attitudes. It is continuing even more rapidly than at the beginning of the 1980s and its effects are to be seen now as then in labour markets and on the life and work of individuals.

THE CHANGING LABOUR MARKET

The effects of economic and technological change are still being worked through labour markets, but the trends already apparent in 1983 seem now to be well established; in particular, the declining demand for the unskilled and unqualified. These underlying trends are exacerbated by industry restructuring where the rationalisation of key industries results in redundancy of workers and out-moding of skills. This in turn can have disastrous consequences for the affected geographical localities and regions. Recession intensifies the effects. The key issue these days in most industrial disputes - whether in the driving of trains, trams or planes, in the operation of coal mines or factories, or in the public service - is loss of jobs; fewer people required to provide the service or the goods.

For the first time, the traditional relationship between inputs, especially labour, and outputs in productivity is being eroded. ‘Jobless growth’ is a recent phenomenon in which productivity increases while labour and employment decrease. An examination of productivity growth in manufacturing industry by BIE found that whereas in the decade between the mid-1950s and mid-1960s productivity was due largely to economies of scale, for the later period 1976/77 to 1981/82 the increases in productivity seemed to have been mainly the result of labour saving through technological improvement. The report notes that the emphasis placed on scale and market size in the past may not be appropriate for a future increasingly dominated by technologies for which scale is irrelevant.15

Disguising these underlying trends, the boom years in the second half of the 1980s, saw a considerable growth in employment. The Budget Speech 1989/90
claimed '1.5 million more Australians in jobs than those were six years ago'. The trends of the 1990s show a different picture: a month by month decline in the numbers of persons employed and in job vacancies. Between December 1990 and January 1991, there was a fall of 24,900 in the seasonably adjusted estimate of employed persons. There was a corresponding increase of 26,800 in the numbers of unemployed persons, giving a seasonally adjusted estimate for January 1991 of 781,700 persons unemployed - the highest level since September 1983.

The overall figures obscure other trends. As mentioned earlier, one of the most noticeable trends of the last two decades has been the growth in part-time employment, accompanying a decline in full-time employment. Year by year, the strongest growth has been in part-time rather than full-time employment. The proportion of those in the labour force employed full-time dropped in a decade from 85.0 per cent in 1977 to 80.0 per cent in 1987. In the same period, part-time employment grew correspondingly from 15.0 per cent to 20.0 per cent. In the current recession, it is full-time employment which has suffered most. The main component of the decrease in employment between December 1990 and February 1991 was a fall of 20,000 in full-time employment, particularly for males.

These trends have particularly affected young people, especially young teenagers. Sweet points out that 'since the mid-1960s the full-time labour force has accounted for a steadily declining proportion of teenagers. The trends continue. For males and females aged 15-19 years employed full-time, trend estimates have fallen each month since June 1989. As Sweet goes on to comment, 'full-time employment has declined in importance as an activity for teenagers, and part-time employment, unemployment and full-time education have occupied a steadily increasing proportion of the age group'.

The most marked feature of youth part-time employment is that so much of it is held by full-time students, particularly those at school, so that school and labour force participation for teenagers can no longer be described in either/or terms. In contrast, young people who have left school tend to be in or seeking full-time employment. Some of the reasons for this are to be found in the kinds of part-time jobs offered to young people. They are generally casual, taking up 7-10 hours a week, poorly paid and dead end. Such jobs are less attractive to non-students, since they rarely compensate in earnings for loss of unemployment benefits and do not generally lead to full-time employment.

WHERE ARE THE JOBS?

Like some other groups in the segregated Australian labour market, young people tend to find employment in particular industries and occupations. Full-time employment for young males (15-24 years) is concentrated in the manufacturing, wholesale/retail and construction industries. Young females tend to be employed
in wholesale/retail, finance, community services and recreation. In terms of occupations, most males are employed in the trades or as production process workers, labourers and miners; most females, as clerical workers. Some of the industries which employ young people have been declining, others expanding; but by and large young people have not been holding the shares of employment, even in expanding industries, that they have had in the past, though for teenage males access to apprenticeships has had a cushioning effect not so generally available to teenage females.

Contributing significantly to the decline in employment for young people has been the substantial reduction in public sector employment for teenagers at both federal and state levels, resulting in the loss of an estimated 50 000 jobs between 1971 and 1981 (assuming earlier recruitment patterns had been maintained). About 20.0 per cent of the 50 000 jobs were lost in the Australian Public Service (APS), though the APS itself accounts for less than ten per cent of total public sector civilian employment.20

Behind the decline in opportunities for full-time work for young people have been interacting social, economic and technological factors, among them: the growing use by industry and business of part-time labour; technology, including automation, which has eliminated many of the entry level positions for both male
and female teenagers (messengers, junior office workers, telephonists, typists); upgrading of required qualifications, as in the move from nursing as a quasi-apprenticeship to degree training; general levels of unemployment. At bottom however, labour markets and employers prefer maturity and experience to youth and an unproven work record.

At the same time, there are a number of reasons why part-time work has grown and is likely to continue growing. For many employers - particularly in industries dominated by female labour - a casual part-time labour force has the advantage of flexibility and economy. Workers can be hired only when necessary and costs attaching to full-time employment (such as superannuation and sick leave) need not be incurred. Thus, all but a small fraction of part-time work is in the secondary labour market in positions which lack permanency, career opportunities and employment benefits. For most part-time workers who depend on their earnings - mainly women, migrants and some young people - participation in the labour force is likely to be characterised by restricted access to the labour market, reduced earning capacity, insecurity of employment, poor career prospects and exclusion from the education, training, pensions and other benefits of full-time tenured employment.

Young people are well aware of these trends in the labour market and are reacting accordingly. Ross\(^{21}\) points out 'that the 1988 cohort of teenagers is less likely to be classified as unemployed than the 1983 cohort'. Instead, they stay at school, take part-time employment and hope that their chances of full-time

Table 2  Education and Labour Market Activities: 15-19 Year-olds, 1990
(Per cent in bold; Numbers '000 in brackets)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Labour Force Partic.</th>
<th>Employed</th>
<th>Unemployed Looking for</th>
<th>Not in Full-time Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FT</td>
<td>PT</td>
<td>FT</td>
<td>PT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>(65.3)</td>
<td>(0.0)</td>
<td>(50.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>31.9</td>
<td>(66.0)</td>
<td>(0.6)</td>
<td>(57.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>(48.3)</td>
<td>(0.0)</td>
<td>(42.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-19</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>(194.4)</td>
<td>(0.6)</td>
<td>(162.1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source:
ABS  The Labour Force, Australia, August 1990, Cat. No. 6203.0
employment after education will be improved by higher qualifications or simply extra years at school. Their perceptions of their employment chances if they leave school early are largely borne out by the preferences and practices of employers. There seems little doubt that opportunities for young people to enter the full-time labour market direct from school have been declining during the last decade and are likely to go on declining. There will be few stories in years to come of the messenger boy who became head of the firm or the department, and this is not entirely because all those with ability and initiative nowadays to on to tertiary or further education. A large part of the difference today is that the job entry opportunities are no longer readily available for those who have not done well in school to demonstrate their capacities in work.

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

It has to be recognised that most people, including most young people, still do get jobs. But current trends in Australia as elsewhere, when put together, present a fairly bleak picture for the future. On the one hand there is the likelihood, for cultural as well as demographic reasons, of a continuing rise in the numbers of those seeking to enter the labour force, including increasing numbers of women claiming their right to paid employment. At the same time, it seems likely that employment opportunities, for a variety of reasons, will go on declining and the decline will be accelerated in Australia as in other countries by the effects of technological change. Furthermore, in a topsy-turvy kind of way unemployment seems now to be regarded as an indicator of economic well-being. Strong growth in employment and low unemployment have come to mean that the economy is growing too strongly, imports and wages will rise and this is bad news for the balance of payments. Economic and political comment leave little doubt that unemployment rates at fairly high levels have become an essential component of economic policy.

Again, young people are particularly at risk, since their rates of unemployment are generally between two and three times higher than those of adults. In August 1990, for example, the unemployment rate for 15-19 year-olds was 16.5 per cent compared with an overall rate of around 7.0 per cent. In January 1991, the comparable estimates (partly reflecting the influx of school leavers) are about 22.0 per cent and 8.5 per cent. This means that nearly one in four teenagers in the labour market are currently unemployed, and nearly 135,000 of them are looking for full-time work.

These estimates do not include young people in hidden unemployment and those who are under-employed. In both cases, the numbers of these are difficult to estimate. Among the hidden unemployed could be significant numbers of young people in education who would leave if jobs were available; others who have dropped out of both education and work into what Sweet has called 'a black hole'. Others again having left school and become unemployed have since been
absorbed into some form of government training program. Ball\textsuperscript{24} notes that these kinds of government measures 'have had the effect of removing young people from the labour force for a period of up to two years in some countries'. These young people are no longer officially unemployed, but they are wanting work.

Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of contemporary unemployment is its increasing duration. The average duration of unemployment for teenagers has increased from under three weeks in 1967 to 21 weeks in 1977 to 25.5 weeks in 1989. For 20-24 year-olds, the equivalent increases have been from 2.8 weeks to 17.8 weeks to 34.7 weeks. Teenagers now on average are unemployed for about six months, and older groups face even longer periods unemployed. Moreover, these average duration of unemployment rates cover a large number of people with relatively short spells of unemployment and a smaller number of very long-term unemployed persons. These long-term spells are increasing, indicating that 'the long-term unemployed have borne the greatest burden of unemployment over the past decade'.\textsuperscript{25}

Cass\textsuperscript{26} notes that 'a significant proportion of those who became unemployed in 1982-83 were still unemployed in 1986'. She goes on to show that of the 185,000 persons receiving unemployment benefits in 1983, 37,000 were still receiving them in 1986, including (in 1985) about 12,000 young people under 25 years. The record is similar in Europe where half the European Community's sixteen million unemployed have been out of work for more than 12 months, and a third for two years. Of these long-term unemployed, a third or more are aged under 25 years.\textsuperscript{27}

Ball summarises the problem of the 'hard core' long-term unemployed:

The less qualified academically (and especially in terms of basic literacy, numeracy and communication abilities) and vocationally a young person is, the more depressed (socially and economically) the area in which he or she lives, the more possessed of personal disadvantages he or she is, the more likely it is that he or she will be among the 'hard core'.\textsuperscript{28}

COMMUNITY ATTITUDES TO UNEMPLOYMENT

These young people are neither 'bludgers' nor 'no-hopers'. They are the same kinds of young people as those who in the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s left school as soon as they could, got jobs, had their youthful flings, got married, bought houses and brought up families. They were the lucky generations in the lucky country. Their children and grandchildren face a bleaker future. Many of them have become or are becoming what Eckersley\textsuperscript{29} has called 'casualties of change'.

The employment growth of the last few years and the effect this has had an overall statistics have helped to reduce earlier concerns about unemployment and induce attitudes bordering on complacency. The three ANOP polls (1984, 1986, 1988) show that over the period 1984-88 there has been a marked decline in
community concern about youth unemployment, and a hardening in attitudes to unemployed young people. In 1986, for example, 16.0 per cent of persons surveyed thought that the level of unemployment benefits was too high; by 1988, 24.0 per cent thought so. The same attitudes have made possible the continued tightening by governments of eligibility conditions for employment and other benefits, and have provided a base on which inequitable tax policies can be justified on the grounds of ‘taking from the bludgers and giving to the workers’.

Attitudes of indifference to unemployment and resentment of the unemployed show how difficult it is for those of past and present generations to whom secure employment came or is coming easily to appreciate what unemployment - the lack or loss of a job - can mean, when people have been brought up and educated to accepting that the job makes the person. To be unemployed is to realise that without a proper job there is neither self-respect nor social place. Whether the current recession and the re-appearance of headlines on the rapid increase in unemployment will substantially affect community attitudes to the young unemployed remains to be seen.

**EDUCATION FOR NATIONAL NEED**

Given the difficulties faced by many young people in their efforts to enter the full-time job market, it is understandable that more and more of them are choosing (or being persuaded by their families) to stay in education to improve their chances of a job and to avoid the risk of unemployment. This fits in very well with government and public perceptions of education now as an essential requirement for economic and industrial restructuring.

Education and work in industrialised societies have been complementary institutions. This is because work, stemming from technological and industrialised development, has been the base on which the society has grown and prospered; and work requires a workforce. The prime purpose of education as it has developed since the nineteenth century has been to provide a workforce appropriately graded and trained for the work needs of the society, as these are perceived at any particular time. It is these perceptions of national economic and industrial need which have been a constant force shaping the practice of education, because they influence not only government policies and provisions for education, but also, in a complementary fashion, the value put on education by individuals as prospective workers. It is not surprising therefore that education is now being regarded as a key to economic survival at least as important as economic and industrial adjustment. Its task now is to produce the highly educated and skilled population considered essential in a rapidly changing technologically driven society.

There appears to be wide agreement among government, business and unions that ‘Australia is an under-skilled country and our wealth is rapidly dissipating’. This perception is the theme of government policies in education and training.
An early definitive document circulated by the Ministers for Employment, Education and Training stated firmly that 'the Government is determined that our education and training systems should play an active role in responding to the major economic challenges now facing Australia.33

A prime goal of government policy has been to increase participation in education and training and as the foundation of this to increase retention in schooling beyond the compulsory years. There has in fact been a long-term trend in the postwar years towards increased retention in schooling, but this trend has accelerated during the 1980s.34 The proportion of young people 15-19 years attending an educational institution full-time rose from 48.0 per cent in 1983 to 56.3 per cent in 1988. Young teenagers particularly are staying at school longer. Apparent retention rates reflect these increases, showing 57.6 per cent apparent retention of students to Year 12 in 1988 and 64.0 per cent in 1990 compared with 40.6 per cent in 1983. Expectations are that retention rates in schooling will go on increasing.

There are a number of reasons why young people are staying longer in schooling. Australians have generally viewed education less as a means to intellectual and personal development than as a means to employment, status and position in society. Young people tend to stay in education if they or their families see occupational and eventual economic advantage in doing so. In times of high unemployment, a number of factors may combine to persuade many young people against leaving school early. One is the shortage of readily available career type jobs for the young and unqualified. Associated with this is the fear of unemployment. People have become aware that - so far, at least - the unemployment rate of those who enter the labour force without postschool qualifications is double or more the rate of those with postschool qualifications.

Government policies in the last decade have also had an influence. A prime objective of the Participation and Equity Program (PEP), introduced in 1983 as the successor to the School-to-Work Transition Program of the previous government, was to increase school retention rates. The statement by the then Minister for Education and Youth Affairs on tabling the report in Parliament in December 1983 affirmed:

> The Government sees the PEP as the centrepiece of the overall framework of youth policies it is developing.35

This program has now been phased out, but the emphasis on increased school retention rates continues in public statements, building a climate of opinion in which young people and their families see advantage in staying on at school. More practically, encouragement of school retention is given by changes in income support for young people in education.

AUSTUDY, introduced in 1986/87 to replace the previous tertiary and secondary education allowances (TEAS and SAS), provides allowances for students aged 16 years and over undertaking full-time secondary or tertiary study.
The allowances available under AUSTUDY, though means-tested on parental income, are now at the same level as those available as unemployment benefits, one of the main purposes of AUSTUDY being to remove any financial incentive for students to leave education in order to gain higher allowances as unemployment benefits. Further to discourage early school leaving, the 1987 May Economic Statement abolished unemployment benefits for 16-17 year olds and replaced them with a Job Search Allowance (JSA). This has a standard rate of $25 per week - half the previous unemployment benefit, though a further $25 a week is available to young people who can show real need. There has also been a tightening of eligibility conditions for receipt of unemployment benefits and more stringent reviews of eligibility. These changes in income support, combined with already existing poverty traps and inadequate income, have exacerbated the difficulties faced by many disadvantaged young people.

SCHOOL STAYERS AND SCHOOL LEAVERS

Given the known advantages of staying on in education and the level of encouragement to do so, it is a matter for remark that so many young people do still leave school early. In 1988 (over all schools) over half the 17 year olds had left school, and in government schools over half the 16 year-olds had left. This would seem to confirm the reluctance of many students to continue their education. It certainly indicates that perceptions of education as a means to occupational advantage can be subject to the circumstantial factors of family background and of personal motivations, opportunities and school experience, so that the effect of labour market conditions will be different for different groups of students.

On the whole and irrespective of employment circumstances, there is at one extreme of the educational achievement/occupational expectation range a group of students who will continue to perceive job and career advantage in remaining in education; at the other extreme is a group of students who will leave school at the earliest possible moment. The first group comprises those whose family background, traditions and encouragement and/or their own personal aspirations are a stimulus to high occupational aspirations and expectations, and therefore to gaining appropriate educational qualifications. The second group consists of those whose unsuccessful and unhappy experiences of schooling have generated in them low expectations, low concepts of their own capacities and a dislike of schooling which makes any alternative to it seem desirable. In many cases, the decision to leave school has been taken in the early years of secondary school and sometimes as far back as primary school.

Between these two groups is a range of young people whose decisions to stay in or leave education can be influenced by educational, personal, economic/industrial or other factors. It is, on the whole, these who change the trends in education and labour force participation; and it is these who have begun
in the last decade or so to see advantage in remaining in education, particularly if they are offered appropriate courses.

**THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL**

The consequence of postwar trends to higher retention rates in schooling and of recent policies encouraging and accelerating these trends has been that schools now have in their post-compulsory years not only more students but a wider range of students in terms of aspirations, interests and abilities. That this has not been adequately recognised in terms of the provision of extra staffing, professional development of teachers and curriculum and other support is indicated in the 1989 report, *The Challenge of Retention*.

At the same time, the schools find themselves in the forefront of the battle for economic survival. The greater the changes in social circumstances, the more the community sees the schools as, in large part, both cause of and remedy for matters of concern. The central role of schooling in meeting the needs of a structurally changing society has been described by the Minister for Employment, Education and Training. As part of economic and industrial adjustment, he comments, 'parents and the community generally, now more than ever, have rightly come to expect schools to provide young Australians with all the knowledge and skills, and especially contemporary skills, they will need in life'.

This perception, echoed in other publications including those representing the views of some major employers and unions raises the immediate question of what is meant by 'knowledge and skills, and especially contemporary skills'.

'Skills' and 'training' have become key words in the rhetoric of restructuring, but what kinds of skills, and training for what are less than clear. Such research as has been undertaken on these questions indicates that, given the depth and rapidity of current change, it is not possible to predict for more than a very short time ahead precisely what skills will be needed in the workforce. It is on this assumption that the BCA, for example, supports 'the emphasis in curricula on the benefits flowing from students achieving results, developing their potential, accepting responsibility, working in teams and taking leadership roles'. The paper, *A Changing Workforce*, seems to sum up many of the public statements on education and the future of the society when it states:

> Society expects its schools to ensure that pupils are competent in essential subjects and that they receive encouragement and assistance to develop less tangible characteristics such as curiosity, initiative, talent and communicative and analytical skills.

If these sentiments have a ring of familiarity about them, it is because they are in general a re-statement of the aims of most postwar school systems in Australia. If the Australian population has not developed these skills in the postwar decades, the reasons need to be sought not so much in the schools themselves as...
in the society whose pressures and demands on schooling shape the practice of education in ways often quite contrary to the aims expressed in the social and educational rhetoric.

Despite what is often said about the irrelevance of schooling to work, there has been in industrialised societies a kind of symbiotic relationship between the practices of schooling and the needs of the labour market. While from time to time much has been hoped of schooling as an agent of social reform, its chief importance for both the society and the individual has been that it provides pathways to occupations and the benefits thereof. The pathways to different kinds of work have on the whole been quite clearly differentiated. Schooling, as the first and perhaps the definitive stage in the formal process of education, has been required to provide a basic education for all and a sorting process for the convenience of the society. In addition, in its later stages it has undertaken as a prime task the preparation of those selected on aptitude or financial background as fit for higher education. Schooling has thus served as a filter through which the young labour supply eventually reaches appropriate occupational destinations and place in the social structure. This social role of schooling is clearly recognised in government policy statements.

The criteria used by schooling for sorting and grading are rarely explicit; they are implicit in the practices of education and reflect existing social classifications and expectations based on characteristics such as sex, ethnic origin, the education and financial background of families and estimations of intelligence or aptitude—all of these, one way or another, related to work and place in society. Research throughout the 1980s has shown how these criteria are applied in school practices such as streaming and labelling; the emphasis on and status accorded to the ‘academic’ curriculum; school expectations of and attitudes to different groups of students; the hierarchy of success and failure. These practices of schooling result in differing school experiences for different groups of students. Those whose experience is largely one of failure are likely to become the early school leavers and eventually the long-term unemployed. These are the kinds of school practices which will need to be changed if the recommendations of reports on education throughout the 1980s and current statements of government policies on equity, are to be taken seriously; if the potential of all young people is to be valued and developed.

**POLICY INTO PRACTICE**

General statements about policies for change in education can attract a large measure of agreement. It is at the point of approach to the specific what and how of educational change that unanimity begins to fade and the perennial issues to emerge along with some new ones. Fulton identifies some of the major issues now concerning education: current pre-occupations with high quality, value for money, ‘futures for purpose’, and in general with economic regeneration which
may result in greater social inequalities, more rigid selection and streaming criteria and processes; the increased disaffection of students forced to remain longer in schooling; the forging of closer links between work and education; criticisms of education stemming from 'the long-standing incapacity of schools and colleges to train every last school leaver to high standards'; the unresponsiveness of educational institutions. These same issues and the dilemmas they pose are very evident in Australian debate on education, and most of them are familiar.

The reluctance of institutions to change has long been recognised. There is in education at all levels, as in other social institutions, the inertia and the vested interests of traditional practices which have been distorted but not essentially changed by the increasing retention of the postwar years. A changing society and wider expectations of schooling have added subjects to school curricula, but had relatively little impact on the priorities and approaches of schooling. Despite the changes initiated through Schools Commission Programs during the 1970s and early 1980s, despite the strong support for change offered by many parent organisations and despite the notable attempts by some teachers and schools to cater for the needs of all students, schools still tend to serve best the needs of those going on to higher education. Though in every state/territory there are examples of resourceful (in human rather than financial terms) attempts to cater for the needs of students as individuals, the traditional patterns remain only too effective. Education overall remains streamed on occupational and corresponding socio-economic patterns. There is still in many schools an expectation that students unsuited to higher education should really be in the labour market.

Reinforcing the established practices of stereotyping and grading in school processes, there are again the familiar demands from employers, politicians and others for more of those practices most likely to ensure conformity and to discourage individual initiative and the enquiring mind: more external examinations; national testing of basic skills; centrally designed common curricula; ranking of students for the convenience of employers. Schools are also being urged to become more relevant to the workplace, to get closer to employers, apparently on the assumption that employers know what skills will be needed in the future and how they should be acquired. This is in spite of the evidence that a great many employers, managers, unions and workers are themselves reluctant to abandon the apparent security of long-cherished attitudes, structures and practices, however rapid and fundamental the changes going on around them. Thus, while the combined rhetoric is urging schools to develop the potential of their students for independent thinking and learning, statements of what passes for hard-headed economic realism are sending quite different messages to schools about what they should do.

The schools will inevitably change as the society itself is changing; but the directions of change are still uncertain. They will depend on whether the apparent agreement on the need to develop the potential and skills of all young
people for the good of the society holds in intention, policy and implementation; or whether financial constraints and short-term gains induce an even greater concentration on nurturing the few and disregarding the many. The schools and other education institutions will produce what the society wants - not what it says it wants.

**EDUCATION BEYOND SCHOOLING**

Circumstances and government policies have combined to increase the participation of young people in schooling, and to encourage more of them than ever before to look towards continuing their education beyond schooling before entering the labour market. Many of those who aspire to and qualify for higher education are likely to be disappointed, despite the increasing number of student places available since 1983. The DEET publication, *Taking Part*, comments that 'since 1983, when young people’s demand for higher education began to revive there has been a growing problem of ‘unmet demand’ for places'. This unmet demand has been estimated each year between 1987 and 1989 to affect between 13,000 and 20,000 eligible applicants, of whom about 60.0 per cent are aged under 20 years. The government’s commitment to an additional 40,000 places in higher education between 1988 and 1991 is unlikely to satisfy these demands. In 1991, the shortfall is expected to be upwards of 20,000 places for eligible applicants.

Access to higher education, particularly in prestige vocational training areas such as law, medicine and veterinary science, is restricted in other ways also for many students. There are the discouraged students and early school leavers who never get to the starting gates. For those who complete their secondary schooling, advantage lies with those students already advantaged educationally and socially, particularly those who have attended non-government (especially non-Catholic) schools, and those whose postcodes signify high socio-economic backgrounds. It remains to be seen how far government policies and funding for Higher Education Equity Programs will open the way to higher education for disadvantaged groups of students.

Unlike higher education, TAFE is the responsibility of the states/territories. It has traditionally provided the vocational training for those wanting to undertake apprenticeships and trade training as well as further education for many adults. Here also demand exceeds supply. Because there is no central enrolment process for TAFE, unmet demand is more difficult to measure, but all the signs are that in many states, reduced funding for TAFE is exacerbating unmet demand.

Following the Kirby Report, a system of traineeships was established based on the recommendations of the report but differing in some key characteristics. The traineeships provide on and off-the-job training in non-trade areas for 16-17 year-olds in private enterprise and the public service. They carry neither guarantee nor expectation of continued employment after training. The program
has had difficulties of implementation particularly in the private sector, and has fallen far short of the target of 75,000 places expected originally for 1988-89. Between 1985 and 1989, about 30,000 trainees have participated in the program, about 87 per cent of them gaining employment after completing the traineeship.

TRAINING THE UNEMPLOYED

Current emphasis on training extends also to labour market programs for the unemployed. These programs are now almost entirely focused on training - to the exclusion of job creation. Thus the Community Employment Program (CEP), established in 1983, has now been discontinued, leaving only the National Enterprise Incentive Scheme (NEIS) - a small program begun in 1985/86 - and some of the activities of ITECs to carry on the job creation theme. The SYETP was replaced in 1986 by Jobstart, a similar wage subsidy scheme, funding for which has now been reduced 'in line with the greater emphasis on training'.

Among community-based programs, the CYSS has lived a precarious existence since its inception in 1976. It has been a frequent target for criticism and policy changes but has survived largely through the strength of its support in local communities. CYSS has now been combined with two other community-based programs - the Community Training Program and the Community Volunteer Program - to form a composite Skillshare Program. The overall objective of Skillshare is to provide training, counselling and support for long-term unemployed (12 months or more) and other disadvantaged people. While filling an obvious need, the program has been criticised on a number of grounds; in particular, that it is in fact preparing the unemployed to accept and retain marginal employment in the secondary labour market.

A range of other training and assistance programs is also provided to meet special needs among groups such as Aborigines, sole parent pensioners and homeless youth. Taken together, these programs considerably expand the training available to young people after they leave full-time education. For most of them however, eligibility conditions still include a minimum period of unemployment, currently between six and twelve months. Given the acknowledged and actual importance of education and training for young people, this eligibility condition seems curious. It means that many young people who leave school early are thrown almost entirely on their own resources to find a place in the labour market. In effect, these young people, arguably the least equipped to cope and the most likely to be at risk of unemployment, must for six months at least go through the experience of repeated rejections and decreasing self-confidence before they are eligible for the training they are assumed to need. It was to remove this anomaly that the OECD panel visiting Australia in 1983 recommended an Entitlement Year to provide help, information and training for those not going on to further formal study. This has not been taken up.
The Education Constraints

Any review of youth policies in Australia will show a continuing concern among governments for the plight of young people, even if the practical expressions of concern seem inadequate and sometimes capricious and inconsistent. Provisions in education and programs for young people in difficulties are now more considered and comprehensive than they have ever been. The needs, however, have also grown for both individuals and the society. Discussion in all five Issues Papers prepared for the 1988 OECD Conference on Education and the Economy leaves little doubt that societies will be more and more dependent on developing the talents of their people. To provide the education, training and opportunities necessary for a skilled, adaptable and creative workforce is neither cheap nor easy. Yet the costs to individuals and societies of under-investment may be even higher and not simply in financial terms.

During the 1980s, policies of increasing participation in education and training — of laying the foundations of a ‘clever society’ — have warred (in general unsuccessfully) with parallel policies of government expenditure restraint in the public sector. Among the outcomes of this have been the inadequate provisions and places in education already mentioned; the upheaval in higher education in pursuit of greater efficiency and productivity; the risk of neglecting long-term research in the interests of short-term results apparently applicable to industry. Further, the curtailment of employment benefits for 16-17 year-olds has resulted in growing pressure on families to maintain and support their teenage children, whatever their own circumstances.

Attempts to spread the costs of education/training among those who benefit have produced the Higher Education Contribution for students, but have not been noticeably unsuccessful so far with employers who still tend to count education and training as a cost rather than an investment. A specific higher education levy on employers is still in the future. Little encouragement is given to governments to expand their investment in education, training and income support for the disadvantaged by a society which gives a much lower priority to welfare payments for those in need than to tax cuts for those who are not.

The lack of adequate, consistent and comprehensive policies and provisions in education and training has meant that year by year, many young people have been, are and will be at risk of being excluded from the mainstream society. The responsibility for ensuring that this is not simply ignored or accepted as a cost of industrial change rests with the society as a whole, but effective action on behalf of the society is required not only from governments but from some other key players as well. Employers and unions, despite their rhetoric, have generally been more concerned to pursue and safeguard their own traditional interests and structures than to consider how more job opportunities might be provided for young people.

Australia is not alone in facing the complex problems of fundamental change, as the report of the Conference on Education and the Economy in 1989 shows.
But it has perhaps had less experience than some other countries in co-operative and coherent planning and action, and in relating education needs to wider social and economic developments. The concluding Conference Issues Paper on Strategies for Change comments on the need to take a broad view of what should be done, complementing action on the central economy and large key enterprises with attention to regions and their local employment and enterprise development.

But a commitment to investment in human capital alone is not enough to create jobs or sustain persons in an active society. It can only be effective if it takes place in tandem with other policies and is part of an overall strategy embraced by public authorities as well as the social partners, of restructuring and modernising OECD economies, regions and enterprises.53
Future Conditional

THE RHETORIC AND THE PRACTICE

The fact of social change is indisputable; the outcomes are still uncertain. They depend essentially on what kind of society Australians want for their future; on whether the directions which the society takes are consistent with the rhetoric of policy-making or with much of what emerges in practice. The rhetoric provides a view of the society as it likes to see itself. It expresses principles and values: democracy, equality, freedom, rights, justice, compassion. Affirmations of its principles - sometimes genuine, sometimes sentimental, sometimes expedient - are rarely absent from public speeches, leading editorials and policy-making. However much these may sometimes savour of lip-service and tokenism, such statements are nevertheless important because they are constant reminders of principle and provide the society with a standard against which to measure its practice.

How far short of the rhetoric much of the practice falls is evident in research and reports in the last twenty years on poverty, education, unemployment and the host of social issues which spring from disadvantage and discrimination. The kind of society which emerges from this period of transition will depend very much on how closely the implementation of policy adheres to the rhetoric of social justice and equity. There are choices to be made in the restructuring of the economy and of work and education between a society in which only some people matter, and one in which the contribution of every individual is encouraged and valued.

The existence and numbers of long-term and hidden unemployed and the growing irrelevance of many young people in the operation of the society are pointers to an increasingly possible future: a two-class society of the well employed and the rest. Already, those employed in the primary labour market are comparatively affluent and comfortable; those outside this kind of employment are adapting to a cheerless and insecure fringe existence in which television, drugs and other pacifiers help to kill time, in which crime and fantasy provide excitement and outlet for frustration, and in which suicide is increasingly being seen by young people (males especially) as the final solution.

The difficulties that young people now face in their transition to work and adult life come basically from the changes taking place in the society, not only in
employment but also in other social institutions such as the family. What young people now lack above all is opportunity to exercise their capacities, to use and demonstrate their enterprise and resourcefulness. Like anyone else, young people respond to high expectations, opportunity and responsibility. For many of them schooling and even higher education do not offer these stimuli; and the second chance which work used to provide for early school leavers has now all but disappeared. In addition, the personal needs of young people, rooted in family and community, are in many cases no longer adequately met either by the family or by the impersonal and fragmented social support which has been developing to replace the traditional and now declining community network of extended families, stable neighbourhoods, churches and other local institutions. As Coleman and Husen have pointed out:

Young people today from later teens to early 20s in important respects live in a no-man's land. The attachment to family has decreased. School in the later teens no longer acts in loco parentis. For many, employment is temporary and sporadic. Even the question of who should be financially responsible for young people in this transition period is unresolved.

Issues such as these call for a reappraisal of the role of the institutions in society of today. The very institutions of 'work' and 'schooling' may need to be reappraised and re-defined.¹

THE CONSTRAINTS

As indicated in the previous chapter, statements by business, unions and government show recognition of the depth and far-reaching nature of the changes taking place in the society. Policies and action to match this kind of change need to be far-sighted and equally far-reaching. But the constraints on effective action are many.

Not least among constraints is the lack of any certainty on which policies - among many different theories - are likely to be effective in circumstances of rapid change where past experience offers few guidelines. Thus while there is wide agreement on the need to restructure the Australian economic base, there is equally wide disagreement on the policies most likely to be effective in doing this and on what the outcomes of current policies are likely to be. Perhaps Vines best sums up the situation when he says that 'macro-economic policy in advanced Western countries is now in a state of profound crisis'.² The confidence which characterised reliance on Keynesian approaches in the 1950s and 1960s is gone, and so also is the promise offered by monetarism in the 1970s. 'Policy makers', he says, 'are adrift, without a framework to guide them', and a new framework for policy is urgently needed.

One of the results of these uncertainties has been the apparently unquestioning acceptance of and adherence to ideologically based theories which seem to offer clear prescriptions for policy and action, particularly in the management of the economy. Often these prescriptions seem to be designed in and for a neatly
organised world in which market and other so-called 'forces' operate according to reliable and unchanging rules. Unfortunately, as the 1980s have demonstrated, variables and inconsistencies in the 'real world' and the waywardness of human behaviour cannot be dismissed as easily as some economic ideologies suggest. In any case, the pressures of competing interests within a society ensure that market forces are never left to work unhindered, but are often deflected and distorted in the practice of day-to-day economic management by ad hoc policies which protect or favour particular groups or sections of the society.

Among other impediments to change in the economic and industrial base of the society are the methods used to estimate the performance of the economy. These are based solely on economic transactions. Thus paid or monetary activities of any kind in the primary, secondary and tertiary labour markets contribute to the national income or Gross Domestic Product (GDP); unpaid activities do not contribute, so that housework, volunteer work, do-it-yourself production and most leisure activities (unless involving money transactions) are not-counted as adding to the wealth and well-being of the society.

There is surely some absurdity also in a system of national accounting where remedial action (involving costs) increases national wealth while preventative measures (which involve lesser or no direct costs) are less valuable. Encouraging good health in the population is less nationally valuable than dealing with ill-health. Reducing the road toll adds less to the nation's wealth than catering for its consequences. And cutting down trees is an economic good, whereas letting them grow contributes nothing, even when they in fact perform useful functions in maintaining the water-table; preventing erosion and soil degradation; providing shade, shelter and clean air; not to mention offering relief to human eyes and spirit.

There is some official recognition that these methods of economic accounting ignore significant aspects of 'the quality of life' and do not fully describe all aspects of the well being of the society. Nevertheless, these are the methods by which the country's performance is judged and on which budgets and forecasts and eventually policies are based.

There are other constraints as well on the kind of long-range and comprehensive policies necessary to manage a changing society. One is the short-term nature of planning and decision-making in Australian in both the private sector and government. In the private sector, investment has in general been directed to the more secure and quicker returns derived from buying ideas and tested products from other countries rather than to the long-term planning, research and development necessary for innovative and soundly based productivity. Aggravating these traditional approaches has been the fact that so much of Australian industry has filled the role of branch factory for multi-national concerns. The decade of the 1980s with its paper entrepreneurs and its rush for quick speculative gains was a flowering of the deep-rooted private sector concentration on the short-term.
The process of governmental decision-making are no less short-term in nature. The budget timing and arrangements, together with three year (or less) parliamentary terms, almost dictate a policy span of from nine to twelve months. Commitment to a policy is subject to changing resource priorities and/or changing governments. There have been many examples of fine policies unbacked by adequate resources or subject to sudden withdrawal of resources or change of direction. Add to this the difficulties inherent in a federal system of government and the result is a range of serious impediments to the capacity of a society to cope with the effects of change or to devise and implement the comprehensive long-term policies necessary to manage the direction of change.

The long view and long-term planning are inhibited also by the pressure of other short-term considerations. Policy-making in the postwar years has become more public and more complex: more public because of the constantly enlarging role of the media; more complex, not only as now because of economic constraints and the need to determine priorities, but also because there are many more players in the game of policy-making. A great many highly efficient lobbies press a variety of conflicting aims and interests. As Gruen comments:

We have a dense network of interest groups each strenuously resisting any economic change which affects it adversely whether it be running trains with one driver, increasing shopping hours, higher diesel fuel prices or introducing tax reform. Government is often not sufficiently powerful to impose economic change on resistant pressure groups. The Federal Constitution, the existence of hostile upper chambers, the fine balance of the opposing political parties, even the frequency of elections, all work to increase the relative power of our many, often very narrowly based pressure groups.4

More and more frequently, the development of policy means choices between short-term gains and long-term benefit; between the interests of the few and the well being of the many. Often it is the short-term economic and political gain which wins against the long-term benefit to the society. Often, the priorities seem to favour the interest of the influential few rather than the needs of the many.

Even where policies are comprehensive and consistent, implementation may diverge significantly from intent because attitudes among those implementing policies and the structures of decision-making themselves can inhibit the co-ordination necessary for effective action. Departments of government, like academic institutions and the large bureaucracies of the private sector, tend to be compartmented in their operation within as well as between institutions. The coherence of decision-making and the co-ordination of policies are apt to give way to institutional demesnes, responsibilities, rivalries and sectional interests. Moreover, the centralised nature of most decision-making in Australia - whether at Commonwealth or state levels - almost guarantees that policies, once formulated, pass through many hands and many interpretations before appearing as actual programs in the cities, towns and suburbs. The local level - where the people and the needs are - is too often the last and least regarded link in the long chain of policy implementation.
Some prevailing concepts of work and education also impose constraints on the capacity of the society to adapt to change. Much of the discussion on education and skill formation leaves some doubt about whether underlying concepts of the structures and patterns of work in the future are sufficiently different from those which have been familiar since the nineteenth century. Work in Australia, as it has developed from nineteenth century structures and practices, has overwhelmingly meant 'employment; that is, a minority of employers and self-employed people and a very large majority of employees. The divisions between employers/managers and employees have been deep and well demarcated. Relationships have been marked by confrontation, misunderstanding and mutual disrespect, but on the whole little questioning on either side that employers/managers make decisions and employees work as directed. The results have been that the exercise of initiative and decision-making by employees has had little scope or encouragement; nor have continued learning and broadening or upgrading of skills been considered of interest or priority in most work situations.

Consistent with these industrial patterns, education has had the task of turning the majority of its students into good employees; of providing them with the particular skills wanted by employers, to be used over a lifetime. Employees have not needed the capacities to question, to adapt, to use initiative and to continue learning; that is, all the qualities which the rhetoric of restructuring now affirms as essential for a productive workforce. If in fact young people were to emerge from schools with these qualities, they would be quite unfitted not only for current employment patterns but also for the kind of work increasingly available: the part-time, the casual, the temporary and the routine mindless jobs tending automatic machines. In the tally of jobs created each year, there is seldom public acknowledgement of how many of the jobs in the private sector fall into these categories.

Up to the present at any rate, the main drive of government policies - macro-economic and labour market - appears to have been based on the assumption that something like these traditional patterns of employment will continue in what Robertson and Cadman have called the 'Business-as-Usual' society. Governments have sought to restructure the economy by encouraging generally large-scale enterprise in the private sector, while drastically reducing employment in the public sector. The assumption seems to be that the private sector, given room and deregulation, will provide the growth and employment necessary for continued prosperity. Accordingly, community job creation programs have been virtually abandoned and a mild interest in 1986-87 in local and regional economic and employment development based on encouragement of community initiative and enterprise has been discarded. Instead, policies of the 'big fix' see economic well-being in terms of large corporations and impersonally regarded human resources, in much the same way as the nineteenth century saw prosperity in terms of factories and 'hands'. In neither approach is the potential of people as individuals and in their groups and communities given the weight which the rhetoric at least suggests they should have.
Similar approaches appear to underlie provisions for unemployment and the unemployed. Unemployment is a symptom of a society in transition but it is also an essential tool of some of our macro-economic policies, being regarded - and even occasionally acknowledged - as necessary to reduce wage demands, curb imports and inflation and reassure foreign exchange markets. It is also accepted almost without comment as a necessary by-product of industry restructuring and reduced public sector spending.

At the same time, the rhetoric insists that the answer to unemployment lies in training the unemployed for work. The emphasis now on training programs for the unemployed - to the exclusion of other approaches such as productive job creation - raises questions about consistency of assumptions. There is an implication in this almost exclusive reliance on training that, despite the acknowledged changes in industry and the economy, there are or soon will be jobs for all, provided the unemployed are trained and willing. The inference is that unemployment - whether short or long-term - is basically the result of personal and educational deficiencies in the unemployed themselves rather than a manifestation of changing employment circumstances. Yet the kinds of people unemployed now had no difficulty finding jobs in the 1950s and 1960s, and most of them would be in work now if the range of jobs were still available.

Training programs do not create more jobs for the unemployed, nor do they in most cases provide them with the skills demanded by long-term full-time employment; they seek to make them more competitive in the existing job market. The unemployed certainly need all the help they can get to find work, but without substantial increases in stable employment, training programs by themselves are a re-ordering of the queues. They are likely to result in further failures for the unemployed, short-term unstable employment or, in some cases where subsidies are involved, displacement of the already employed. This is not to argue against the need for and importance of education and training, but rather to put these approaches to unemployment into a more realistic context, so that other complementary approaches may also be considered. There is no single answer to unemployment, as there is no single cause or effect of it.

RHETORIC INTO PRACTICE

Concepts of work which simply extrapolate established patterns and structures into the future ignore the capacity of technological development to change work and living as radically as the factory technology changed life in the nineteenth century. The direction of change depends on how the technology is used. Some current trends already indicate how easily technology could produce a highly centralised, supervised and manipulated society. Yet at the same time, technology has the potential to encourage trends in the opposite direction: to decentralise work and living, to break down the conurbations of industrialised society and to give people more control over where they live and how and when they work.
For many if not most people in the society, work, while of central importance to their way of life, is also something apart from it. It regulates their time, but in many cases offers no challenge to them as human beings. Interest, initiative and satisfaction happen outside working hours, and it is often in these leisure-time activities that the real potential of individuals comes to be shown. Indeed, the industrial society could not have functioned as well as it has done without the work that people undertake in communities, clubs, charitable organisations and neighbourhoods. There is ample evidence in such activities that people do not lack initiative and commitment. What is lacking generally in the society is a recognition of how much of this potential is and has been wasted in employment which requires and expects nothing more than the particular routine skills for which it pays.

This unused potential of people could be the source of different approaches to work, job creation and productivity, leading to a diversity of work in which people could feel themselves fully involved and contributing. To achieve this would require something of a revolution in the thinking and concepts which underlie policies; in particular, the economic assumptions on which some (but certainly not all) industrialised societies have relied so heavily and which are now proving less than effective. In the development of the industrialised society, growth and size have been regarded as key desirables. It has been assumed that constant growth is essential for a prosperous economy and that size equates with increasing efficiency and productivity. Both of these assumptions may possibly have had some validity so long as natural resources were considered unlimited and the select few of industrialised nations could draw their raw materials cheaply from their non-industrialised possessions and colonies or other 'undeveloped' countries. These countries also, with rising standards of living and 'undeveloped' countries. These countries also, with rising standards of living and the select few of industrialised nations could draw their raw materials cheaply from their non-industrialised possessions and colonies or other "undeveloped" countries. These countries also, with rising standards of living and the select few of industrialised nations could draw their raw materials cheaply from their non-industrialised possessions and colonies or other 'undeveloped' countries. These countries also, with rising standards of living and of domestic demand, provided ready markets for manufactured goods. Industry, based on mass production and increasing size, produced the required quantity in goods and services, often to the neglect of quality.

In present circumstances, these conditions no longer hold. The now obvious ill-effects of unconsidered and uncontrolled exploitation of the natural environment have belatedly convinced all but the most reluctant nations that the resources of the planet are not only finite but also destructible. Furthermore, the countries which provided the ready and lucrative markets for trade are themselves now in many cases the highly successful innovators and efficient exporters of value-added goods.

Reinforcing these considerations are other developments which have begun to show themselves clearly in the last five years. To begin with, as the Bureau of Industry Economics has pointed out, 'the emphasis placed on scale and market size in years gone by may no longer be appropriate in a future increasingly dominated by technologies for which scale is irrelevant'. Secondly, consumer demand is no longer uncritical. "Quality, style and flair", comments Reid (Chairman and Chief Executive of Shell (UK) Ltd), "are the hall-marks of today's products. Individual creativity and imagination are in high demand and
production is increasingly more ingenious and complicated. Individual talent more than ever carries its own premiums. The same gentleman warns that 'we must not delude ourselves that in the future a new host of jobs lies in the renovation of our older industries'. Shirley Williams has put it more graphically:

The relics of feudal Britain, the half-timbered houses, the cathedrals and castles, remind us of a vanished society. The empty factories of Merseyside and the desolate mills of Yorkshire and Lancashire are, similarly, monuments to a fast-disappearing industrial past.

In these circumstances, Australia has some choices to make. It can continue to concentrate its energies and policies on encouraging in orthodox ways value-added manufactures of orthodox kinds, while still relying principally on export of its primary produce and irreplaceable natural resources. The vulnerability of heavy reliance on demand for commodities is again only too apparent in the agricultural and mining sectors. Joining the export race with products - primary or manufactured - which simply duplicate those being produced elsewhere either more cheaply or with better quality and design is unlikely to provide the basis of a stable economy. In addition, policies reliant on traditional approaches to industry perpetuate a role that Australia (except in its rural production) has been all too ready to accept in the postwar years; that is, the role of an uncritical, often inferior and always belated imitator of overseas practice. Britain and America, more recently Japan and Sweden have all had their turn as models. It is a role which has devalued Australian ideas, as the assembly line approaches to management/worker relationships have discouraged initiative in the workplace, and reliance on overseas research and design has diminished the role of and support for basic research in Australia (except in rural production).

To persist with this kind of role is to accept a continuing waste of resources both human and natural, and the declining status of a country which lacks the independence of a creative culture. To break free from the constraints of perceptions essentially rooted in nineteenth century practice requires some creative thinking about social as well as economic aims and policies; in particular, how to use Australian conditions, resources and talent in ways likely to improve the quality of living not just for some but for all Australians and in the process contribute also to quality of life in other countries. Policies to meet such aims would begin with conservation and economical use of natural resources. They would encourage long-term basic research to provide the foundation on which future industries might grow. They would expand perceptions beyond amorphous concepts of 'high technology' and build on a wider range of research strengths. They would ensure that the practical applications of research and enterprise could be fully developed and produced in Australia. They would demand quality in all aspects of endeavour from research to production and services.

These and associated policies are not luxuries beyond the means of a small country. Wars and the provision of arms and the financial responses of governments to the concerted pressures of vested interests and sometimes of
public opinion demonstrate that most societies can find the financial resources for what they regard as essential. Policies such as those outlined above are essential if Australia is to survive the level of a dependent subsistence economy. They are policies based on the rhetoric of change: to provide opportunity for people individually and in groups and communities to use initiative, generate ideas and contribute to the society in ways they can see are useful and satisfying.

THE INTELLIGENT SOCIETY

Even without the stimulus of consistent and far-sighted policies, there are indications that some organisations and many individuals are seeing the need for new approaches and are taking initiatives themselves. There are a few examples of large-scale enterprises which have replaced assembly-line approaches to employee management with methods which recognise that their employees are responsible and intelligent individuals. This kind of approach allows small teams of people to work together on a project whose aims they understand, seeing the operation through from start to finish and gaining in the process a sense of creativity and achievement, as the project itself gains in quality from care and attention. There are many examples also of small enterprises built innovatively on identifying and meeting particular needs at home and overseas, though in present circumstances the more successful such an enterprise becomes the more it attracts the kind of unproductive takeover mentioned earlier. There are many other examples of innovations and research application which could become practical enterprises given the necessary support for long-term development and production. It is curious that Australia over the decades has been willing and able to support these kinds of development and research in rural production but not generally in other areas. Its postwar standing as an agricultural exporter demonstrates the benefits of substantial research and policies.

It is at the local level however that people can most easily find opportunity to demonstrate their capacities and contribute to their society. Traditionally, these opportunities have been found in the wide range of leisure activities and in support of church, school or other local institutions; more recently still in small-scale art and craft. In the last decade or so, outlets for initiative and commitment have widened as people have become less willing to see democracy as confined to the periodic election of governments and have sought to influence policies at local, state and federal levels. The involvement of community groups with local councils in economic and employment development and the multitudinous groups across the country concerned to ward off threats to the environment bear witness to the capacity of people to act independently and with initiative. In many areas affected by declining industry, unemployment has been a catalyst for the further extension of these developments.

This kind of community activity and participation, as distinct from the traditional lobbying by groups for reasons of vested interests, are important
trends in a changing society. They indicate that restructuring for change should not simply be thought of in terms of new plant, more imported technology and investment, less labour and more of the same ideas about what is productive and how it should be measured. The rhetoric displays a faith in the capacities of men and women to be creative and productive. The practice of restructuring needs to follow through by extending opportunities for people as well as corporations to contribute. This means in effect devoting some attention and resources to developments at the local (and regional) level where people can operate more comfortably, more personally and more effectively. There are good working examples in Australia as well as overseas to show how people in their communities can work together to revitalise areas of declining productivity and growing unemployment.

The growing interest in Australia in local economic and employment development follows already well established trends in other OECD countries where the potential in local areas for satisfying and productive job creation has been well recognised. Interest in local economic or employment development has arisen for a number of different reasons. Among these have been: dissatisfaction with the appropriateness or administration of centrally designed and administered programs; the fact that different areas have different needs and different resources which could be used to meet the needs; a concern to establish some measure of local control in a world where size and impersonal operation seem more and more to ignore human needs and capacities. At its simplest however, interest in local economic development is a straightforward response by local communities and groups within communities to do something for themselves to reduce unemployment and off-set the effects of economic downturns.

In these developments, local government should have a key role in Australia as it does elsewhere. This would require a considerable re-thinking of the place of local government and communities in policy and decision-making and a greater concern to ensure quality and disinterestedness among those charged with responsibility in local affairs. For a variety of reasons - historical, geographical, economic and political - Australia has developed more highly centralised systems of government than is generally the case in other comparable countries. Local government evolved not as a response to local demand for participation in decision-making, but rather as a convenience to other tiers of government when it became necessary during the second half of the nineteenth century to provide infrastructure such as roads and services. For these and other reasons, the contribution that local government can make to local and thence to national well being has tended to be overlooked. Local governments and local communities have commonly been expected to be passive recipients at the end of a chain of decision-making. The time has come to expand concepts of micro-economic restructuring beyond sectors like the waterfront and to see similar needs for new structures and processes in local areas.

Local development is not a substitute for policies and action at other levels of government. It is a complement to these and cannot in fact - in Australia
recruits as by appreciation of the intrinsic value of education. There are however been as much influenced by the declining labour market demand for young required for employment. The extension of education over the postwar years has been to extend the period of preparation and dependency; to keep young and more for skills and experience. The common solution throughout this century of the growing irrelevance of youth in a society where the requirement is more recognised place in the society are likely to grow.

Youth unemployment already discussed, the numbers of these young people without a problem. Its essence is the transition of young people into adult society; its long-

AND IN THE MEANTIME

Youth unemployment is not a problem which can be met simply by handing out subsistence welfare benefits. Nor is it in essence an economic or industrial problem. Its essence is the transition of young people into adult society; its long-term issue is the future character of the society. Though most young people still do get jobs - satisfactory or not - there are concentrations of young people to whom the society as it presently operates has little to offer. Given the trends in employment already discussed, the numbers of these young people without a recognised place in the society are likely to grow.

Youth unemployment has been recognised to be part of a wider phenomenon of the growing irrelevance of youth in a society where the requirement is more and more for skills and experience. The common solution throughout this century has been to extend the period of preparation and dependency; to keep young people in education until they acquire some of the maturity and qualifications required for employment. The extension of education over the postwar years has been as much influenced by the declining labour market demand for young recruits as by appreciation of the intrinsic value of education. There are however
financial and practical limitations to much further extension of this process of front-end education.

As participation and retention rates grow, the required outlays also expand; or else financial constraints impose 'rationalisation' with a high probability of decline in quality or neglect of some needs. Secondly, there is a limit to the amount of time young people can be expected to spend in education, preparing for life. Already, increased rates in schooling cloak an unknown number of hidden unemployed. Alternative approaches in postcompulsory education along the lines of postcompulsory colleges in the Australian Capital Territory, Tasmania and many places overseas could alleviate some of the difficulties of this betwixt and between situation of young people who are generally adult in all respects except social recognition. But initiatives such as these in education and training are dead-end unless they lead on to recognised places for young people as adults in the society.

There can be no delusion that restructuring in Australia - whether in terms of large-scale industry or in facilitating the potential contribution of local communities or in reforming the traditional patterns of schooling and education - will be anything but a lengthy, painful and long-term process, if it proceeds at all. In the meantime, opportunity does exist to ease the hurtful aspects of transition for both the society and individuals, in particular for young people.

The recommendations of the 1986 OECD report on youth and work in Australia might be resurrected and seriously considered. These recommendations or similar approaches could be the basis of a fully comprehensive system of education and training. At present, both community interest and financial provisions are focused on young people going on to higher education and, to a lesser extent, TAFE. Equal provisions are not made for the 50.0 per cent or more of young people who leave school before completing secondary education. Many of these will go on to vocational training of one kind or another; but many of them leave school and try to enter the workforce without skills or qualifications. It is these who make up the bulk of young unemployed and who also forfeit claims to the benefits of further public expenditure on their education. Indeed, as already mentioned and for reasons badly in need of review, such young people are positively excluded from government-funded training until they have been unemployed - and registered as unemployed - for at least six months. Even with the Higher Education Tax, the higher education student comes off considerably better in terms of financial provisions.

Adequate and appropriate education and training need to be complemented by expansion of employment opportunities. In the current process of restructuring of the workplace, the provision of adequate opportunities for young people to enter employment and to receive appropriate training could be accepted as an obligation by governments, unions and employers. Among other initiatives, this would require that young people were given a defined place and proportion of positions in the operation of any enterprise or organisation. The possibilities of
this approach, trialled in the early 1980s in the South Australian Public Service, have never been taken up or fully investigated.

Finally, in the interest not only of young people but of all those who want paid employment and are denied the opportunity, it needs to be recognised that there is no shortage of work to be done in our society at present or for the foreseeable future, but much of it is of a kind generally regarded as non-productive in the material sense and therefore non-essential. To a society which has developed and prospered on expanding material production (whether or not the products are needed or wanted), work such as that associated with caring for others, or conserving the environment, or ensuring justice and opportunity for those who are deprived, or meeting the spiritual, cultural and social needs of people, has been regarded as a luxury to be afforded or jettisoned as economic circumstances appear to dictate. It has been regarded as more socially useful to produce plastic crystal chandeliers or musical toilet rolls than to provide adequate services for the disabled or the aged or the young. Given compartmented budgeting and accounting procedures, it is easy to overlook the extent to which unemployment and inadequate preventative measures and welfare services contribute - in the short let alone the long-term - to reduced government revenues and the ever-growing costs of health care and law enforcement.

If we continue to discard as luxuries the opportunities for labour intensive work offered by the obviously increasing need for social services of all kinds in the community, then whatever good things may happen in the future, we will have chosen year by year to discard as worthless the interests and potential contribution of significant numbers of young people - generations of long-term unemployed.

These are among the reasons why there needs to be a reassessment of the processes by which young people move to independence and adulthood. Work - in the sense of what people do with their time and how they contribute to the society - is and will remain of crucial importance to people of all ages, though it will increasingly have different meanings and different patterns. Young people, even through the years of their early education, need to feel themselves and to be part of the communal effort. They can achieve this most easily and naturally if the potential of local communities is recognised and fostered and if the schools and other education/training institutions develop the relationships with their communities which are at present so conspicuously lacking.

Young people should not be seen merely as target groups - passive recipients of advice, services and welfare. They can manage themselves, given opportunity and support and an education which helps each of them to develop fully and rigorously the capacities which make each one a valuable member of the society. As the excerpts in the main chapters show, young people want their chance in society; they want to be heard. But - Is Anyone Listening?
Part 5

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1 Clohesy, 1983: 5

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1 Dawkins, 1988a: 1
2 Home, 1966: 239, 241
3 Boyd, 1967: 9, 10
4 See, for example, Briggs, 1983
5 Schedvin, 1987; see also Vines, 1987b
6 Schedvin, 1987: 20
7 Keating, 1988, 1989
8 Dawkins, 1988: 1
9 Robertson and Cadman, 1985
10 Freebairn, 1987
11 (Australia) ACTU/TDC, 1987
12 (Australia) Confederation of Australia Industry, 1987
14 Ford, 1987: 1
15 (Australia) BIE, 1986; see also Williams, 1985
16 Keating, 1989: 14
17 Sweet, 1987: 1; DEET, 1988; Ross, 1988
18 ABS, 1991
19 Blakers, 1990a: Chapter 3
20 Blakers, 1990a: 43-45
21 Ross, 1988: 13
22 Blakers, 1990a: Chapter 4
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24 Ball, 1989: 13; Ross, 1988
25 (Australia) BLMR, 1986: 73; Blakers, 1990a: 72-80
26 Cass, 1988: 177
27 Ball, 1989: 14; See also Hawke, 1988: 10
28 Eckersley, 1988
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29 ANOP, 1984, 1986, 1988
30 Blakers, 1990: Chapter 9
31 (Australia) BCA, 1987: 1; ACTU, 1987
32 Dawkins and Holding, 1987: iii
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34 Ryan, S. 1983
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36 Maas, 1986, 1987; Treheway and Burston, 1988
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39 Dawkins, 1988a: 1
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41 (Australia) BCA, 1987: 5
42 Dawkins, 1988b: 10
43 Blakers, 1990a: Chapter 9
44 Fulton, 1986: 3-5
45 (Australia) DEET, 1988: 21; Blakers, 1990a: 164-165
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47 Kirby, 1985
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2 Vines, 1987a: 1
3 ABS, 1986 Cat. No. 5216.0
4 Gruen, 1986: 193
5 (Australia) BIE, 1986: x
6 Reid, 1986: 1
7 Williams, 1985: 13
8 Ekins, 1986 in Blakers, 1990b:207-209
9 Dawkins, 1988
End Piece

Can you see the future?
Do you have a crystal ball?
Is my future hopeful?
Is there one at all?

Will I earn a living?
Or just be one in ten?
Drawing benefits each Thursday
To the very end.

Will there be peace and disarmament?
Will my son grow strong and lean and tall?
Or will he be a mutant
When the radiation starts to fall.

If you can see the future
Please, try your best
Will it rain tomorrow?
I don’t want to know the rest.

Let us know what you are doing about it. You’ve established that there is some mud under the mat so tell us what POSITIVE ACTION YOU ARE TAKING.

[University science student]
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Williams, T., Clancy, J., Batten, M. & Girling-Butcher, S.  
A book which provides some fascinating, yet often depressing, insights into the views and experiences of young people as they face the world of work — or unemployment. It's a large picture of young people (15–24 years) in work and in education — young people caught in the trap of a society in transition. High youth unemployment is one of the jaws of that trap.

Catherine Blakers sees industrial and technological change as likely to lead in one of two directions: either to a much more centralised and controlled society or to one in which the capacities and contributions of individuals are valued and used. If Australians still value social equity and the worth of individuals, then there are clear implications for the ways in which social change is directed and managed. In particular, the roles of technology, work and education need urgent and constant review. On present trends, many young people feel they are becoming irrelevant in today's society. This book lets them speak.