Edward Slack explains how the Enterprise & Career Education Foundation is helping young Australians achieve their potential

V ET in schools has come a long way in little more than five years and one of the main drivers, the newly renamed Enterprise and Career Education Foundation (ECEF), has provided a snapshot of its research findings.

ECEF chief executive officer, Harris van Beek, told the first national ECEF research forum in Sydney in May this year that at a similar event hosted by the Australian Student Traineeship Foundation in 1996, there was speculation that vocational education and structured workplace learning were the latest educational fad.

At that time only about 2000 students were participating in Structured Workplace Learning or its equivalent and there was an expectation that student numbers would grow to around 15,000 by 1998.

The reality bears testimony to the relevance of these kinds of programs—now over 90,000 students Australia-wide are taking part.

ECEF supports a total of 231 community partnership programs which link clusters of schools with local businesses.

Unemployment levels for structured learning workplace students are lower than the national average (12% compared to 17%), with more people moving into full-time work or full-time study, including university.

In terms of schools about 78 per cent are accessing workplace co-ordination funding via ECEF, although this varies by State/Territory. ECEF supports a total of 231 community partnership programs which link clusters of schools with local businesses.

More than 42,000 businesses took an average of two students each in 2000. Recent research indicates that only 3% of businesses do not think SWL is a good idea and that over 180,000 businesses would take students “if asked”.

SWL programs are particularly attractive to indigenous students, with more than 30% of Year 11 and Year 12 students involved in an ECEF-supported work placement in 2000. ECEF is supporting 34 programs under its Wadu indigenous initiative.

“E&CEF’s vision is for young Australians to achieve their full potential through enterprise learning and informed career choices,” Mr van Beek said at the Research Forum.

Since ECEF’s formation in March this year a broader vision is emerging, and building on success of the ASTF, ECEF will continue to build alliances which equip all young Australians with the information and employability skills to make the successful transition from school to work.

“ECEF explicitly has a role, on behalf of the Commonwealth, in assisting young people to make informed choices about their future, acquiring a range of skills through workplace learning, assist in students gaining enterprising skills and building partnerships which promote the expansion of school to work links. We welcome the opportunity to build on the successes already achieved,” van Beek said.

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