

EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING



CONTEXT

Education is a universal human right, and arguably the most important determinant of a person's life chances. SACOSS believes that every person, irrespective of their background, should be given the opportunity to develop their own skills, knowledge and talents throughout the course of their life. Education is a fundamental ingredient for a healthy society, and is instrumental in tackling social and economic inequality.

“Education increases our opportunities for choice of occupation and for income and job security, and also equips us with the skills and ability to control many aspects of our lives – key factors that influence wellbeing throughout the life course”.¹

The *South Australian Social Health Atlas* also confirms that education is strongly linked with a range of risk factors including substance misuse and homelessness. There is clear evidence that improving educational attainment will also improve health outcomes². The more formal education a person has the more likely they are to live longer. Significantly, educational attainment is steeply affected by a person's socio-economic position, and there are huge and persistent disparities between the educational achievements of the richest and poorest members of society. Compared with the national average, South Australia's

labour force is underqualified. In 2002, the gap between the Australian average (54.5%) and the proportion of South Australia's labour force with a post-school qualification (51.2%) represented over 24,000 people³.

The advent of the 'knowledge economy' in post-industrial societies such as Australia poses new challenges and demands for skilling the workforce. New technologies, along with changing patterns in the labour market, are shifting labour demand away from workers with lower skills to those with higher skill levels. There is an increased danger that these changing patterns will entrench and indeed widen existing social inequalities.

SACOSS believes that everyone has the right to meaningful, secure and well paid employment. The importance and value of employment was highlighted in a recent report on the labour market changes taking place in Australia:

“In so many ways, having a job is a good thing. It is the best antidote to poverty, it is a source of self-esteem, friendship and social engagement. Work feeds us – physically, socially and emotionally – and being without work is a disaster for many who can not find it”⁴

In addition, there is also strong link between employment and health and wellbeing. However, the type of work a

person does plays an important part in determining the quality of their life:

“For employed people, those who have more control over their work circumstance and fewer stress-related demands in their jobs are likely to be healthier”⁵

The benefits of being in paid employment are contingent on other factors such as the nature of the work and the pay and conditions. In some circumstances, paid employment can have a detrimental impact on people's lives. For example, for many low paid people who may have two or even three part-time jobs, the expense and time spent commuting can undermine family life, or the ability to participate in other areas of social life.

The importance placed on people to be economically productive comes with a social cost. The value placed on being in paid work – any paid work – can undermine other important aspects of human life such as raising a family, caring for another person, or volunteering in the local community.

As with other realms of social and economic life, the starkest disadvantages are faced by South Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people compared with the wider population.

“In South Australia, Indigenous educational disparity is evident in lower school retention rates, lower

apparent retention rates in secondary school, lower completion rates in the Vocational and Training (VET) sector, and lower rates of participation in higher education”⁶.

These patterns are also reflected at other stages in the education system in South Australia, for example the disproportionate rates of educational achievement at higher education level. The large disparities between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the wider population are also marked in the labour market. In 2001, the unemployment rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Adelaide metropolitan area was 22.2% - compared with 7.4% for the wider population⁷. Youth unemployment was also significantly higher for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

RESEARCH

In general terms, South Australia lags behind the rest of the country. At March 2007 for example, the national labour force participation rate was 64.8% compared with 61.5% in South Australia. With the exception of Tasmania, in every other state and territory across Australia there was overall higher labour force participation. Similarly, the unemployment rate was higher in South Australia – 5.3% compared with a national average of 4.5% in March 2007 (Figure 22).

The problem with headline data on unemployment rates and labour force participation is that it masks the deep-rooted ‘postcodes of poverty’⁸. Recent research found that “1.7 per cent

of postcodes and communities across Australia are more than seven times more likely than average to hold top rank positions on major factors that cause intergenerational poverty”⁹. Another survey of employment trends in South Australia found that:

“...significant underemployment, hidden unemployment and precarious employment are disturbing features of the South Australian labour market. This is largely a consequence of insufficient full-time employment growth in the state and an unhealthy reliance on part-time and casual forms of employment”¹⁰.

Research confirms that “when you take into account the unemployed and the underemployed, we have a labour force



Figure 22

Source: ABS (March 2007) Labour Force Australia. Cat. Number 6202.0

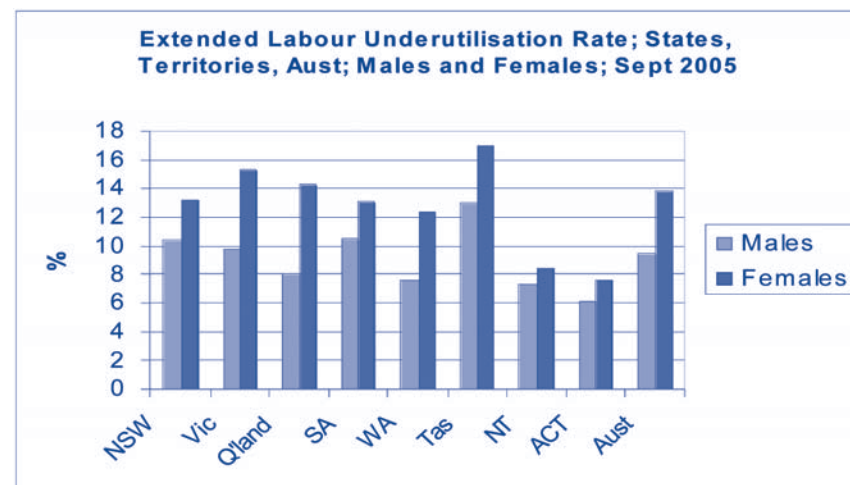


Figure 23

Source: ABS: Australian Labour Market Statistics, (6105.0).

underutilisation rate of nearly 10 per cent”¹¹. Figure 23 compares the labour under-utilisation rates across all the states and territories, and also the national average. With the exception of Tasmania, South Australia has the highest male labour under-utilisation rate in the country.

This data confirms that while Australia has experienced a period of economic growth and prosperity, the employment prospects for many South Australians lag behind their counterparts in the other states and territories. The headline unemployment data also hides deep-rooted and persistent levels of poor educational and skills

attainment in the poorest areas, along with significantly high levels of unemployment. Some population groups are much more likely to face unemployment and poverty.

On the whole, more women tend to work part-time than men, and women are much more likely to be employed in poorer-paying sectors (such as childcare) than men. Overall, as outlined Figure 24, women are also significantly far less likely to participate in the labour market than men, although the gap is closing to some extent.

The relative strength and growth of the Australian economy therefore camouflages the persistent patterns of unemployment and joblessness in many areas. Australia is becoming a more polarised society, and the perception of generalised and increased affluence obscures the full extent of hardship and concentrated areas of multiple deprivation. As the HILDA data reports, “in recent decades Australia has seen the available pool of employment become polarised in households where either no adult is working or where all adults are working”¹².

The HILDA data reports that when limited to the working age population (and excluding full time students) **1.3 million households or 16% of all working age households had no adult in paid employment**. The impact of unemployment does not just affect individuals but also the households and wider social networks that they live within. The impact on children in particular, is crucial. HILDA data calculates that:

“1 in every 7 children is growing up in a household with no employed adult. This is relatively high by international standards”¹³.

The longer a person remains unemployed, the more likely they are to face poverty, lack opportunities to participate in society, and become marginalised from mainstream society. These negative impacts can, in turn, also affect any children in these households.

While the harsh impact of unemployment is clear, what is also striking is that labour participation patterns are changing across Australia, which are also having detrimental effects. Increasingly, there has been a trend away from full-time to part-time employment. For many people, the ‘flexibility’ of the labour force has heralded a period of increased insecurity and ‘casualisation’ in how they work.

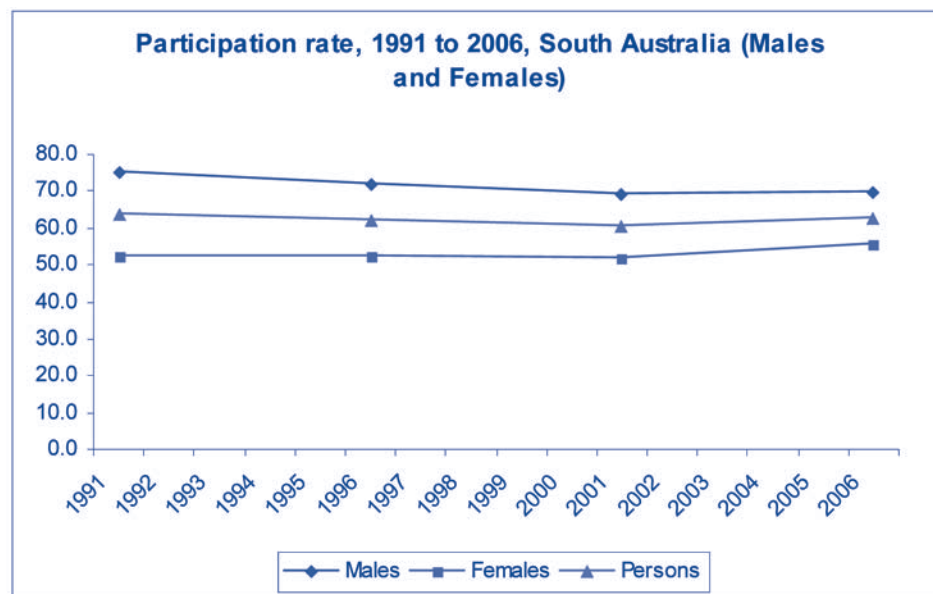


Figure 24

Source: ABS Cat. no. 6291.0.55.001 Labour Force, Australia, Detailed.
Available from Gender Indicators Online: <http://www.aisr.adelaide.edu.au/gio/data>

Over the past two decades the proportion of Australian workers who are employed on casual terms has increased significantly. The proportion of limited term casual jobs has also increased. In 1988 18.9% of Australian employees were employed casually; by 2003, the proportion had reached 27.6% (Kryger 2004) making Australia's labour market one of the most insecure in the OECD area after Spain (Campbell 2001)...women remain disproportionately represented among casual workers...¹⁴

As outlined in Figure 25, during the 1990s across Australia the patterns of employment for young males changed dramatically. At the beginning of the decade almost twice as many young men worked full-time compared to those in part-time employment. By the end of the decade not only had these patterns reversed but for the first time for this age cohort there were more young males in part time rather than full time employment.

These changing trends in employment patterns have left a strong 'gender' impact. Women are much more likely to be in part time employment in low paid sectors (such as childcare) compared with men. Employment and education strategies to tackle poverty and disadvantage need to be suitably gender (and culturally) responsive.

The issues related to employment, education and training are complex and inter-related. For the poorest groups in South Australia, the lack of access to meaningful work and to training and skills development diminishes their ability to be able to fully participate in society. There is also a negative cost for the Australian economy where some of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups are either unable to find suitable employment or lack adequate support services or flexible working practices that enable them to remain in the labour force. For example, the average cost to employers is more than \$9,000 per annum for every worker not seeking treatment for depression or anxiety¹⁵.

SACOSS believes that to tackle the issues of disadvantage related to education and employment, there needs to be concerted and targeted action by a range of agencies. The State government has a key role in improving the education and employment outcomes for the poorest South Australians.



Figure 25

Source: ABS Labour Force, Australia (cat. no. 6202.0)

This chapter outlines these key issues under the following headings:

- **Access to Jobs**
- **Quantity and Quality of Jobs**
- **Skills, education, and training**

Under each of these headings, we highlight some of the key research, make links with relevant government (and other) strategies; and highlight targets and strategies that, if adopted, can make a meaningful difference to eradicating poverty in South Australia.

ACCESS TO JOBS

Many different population groups in South Australia face a range of systemic barriers in accessing employment. These barriers can include a lack of reliable transport, poverty, and for some groups discrimination and stigma by employers. This section identifies some of the main groups who face systemic barriers in accessing employment. We also identify a related set of underpinning structural barriers that particularly affect disadvantaged groups.

The statistical data about the levels of unemployment and labour underutilisation can highlight some of the key groups living in poverty and disadvantage. However, this research and data does not tell us much about the kinds of barriers that people – especially those on low incomes – face in entering the labour market. Recent research has given voice to many Australians struggling to live on low incomes, and articulates in their own words the barriers they face in finding work¹⁶. Some of these main barriers are highlighted in Figure 26.

Some of these barriers are physical, for example issues around lack of transport. This is particularly a problem for low income groups who rely more on public transport, particularly where the employment is shift work. Other barriers relate to issues of stigma that face some people, for example those with mental health issues or with a disability. In many cases, it is the lack of money itself which

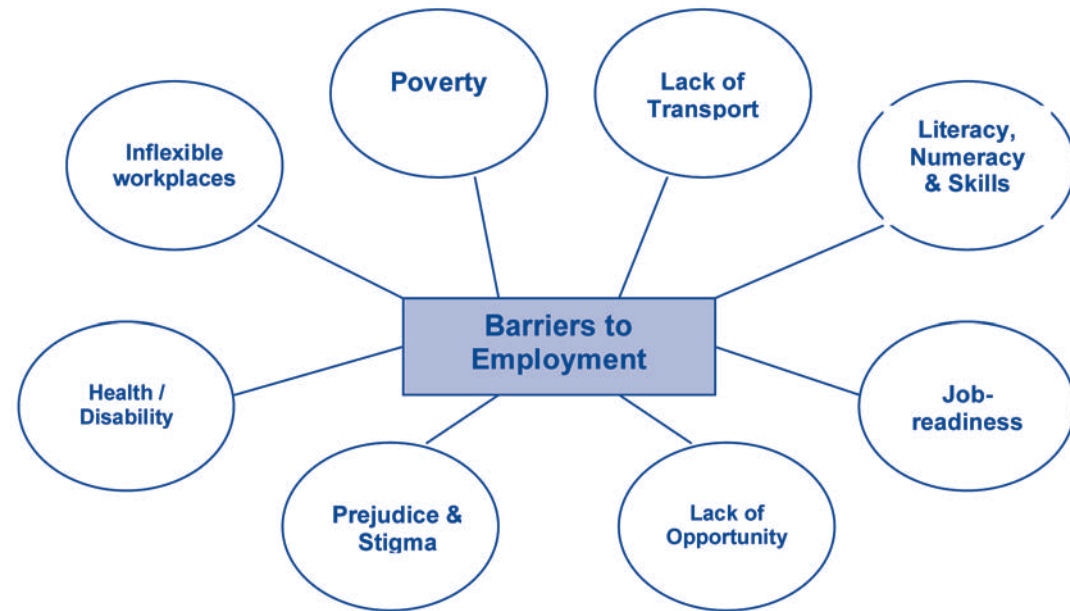


Figure 26

is a barrier to seeking employment, for example the prohibitive costs of education, training or re-skilling.

This section is organised under two main headings. Firstly some of the key generic barriers that many diverse disadvantaged groups face are outlined. Secondly, some of the key groups which are over-represented amongst the unemployed and under-utilised are identified.

BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT

For many South Australians one of the main barriers to accessing employment is the lack of appropriate flexible and family-friendly working practices and

affordable paid care. The struggle to balance work and life issues is ongoing, particularly for low income and disadvantaged groups. The importance of creating a sustainable balance between work and life has been highlighted by a range of different researchers and organisations^{17 18 19 20}.

While the difficulties of balancing work and life affect a number of key disadvantaged groups, it is useful to view the issue from the standpoint of 'family carers'. Carers SA highlight an important distinction between paid care workers and family carers (usually family members or close acquaintances who provide care at other times). While there are distinct issues for paid care workers – particularly low pay – there are other

distinct issues facing ‘family carers’. In this chapter, the issues relating to this later group are highlighted.

As highlighted in Chapter 2 — Income, family carers are a distinct group who are less likely to be in the labour force than the wider population, and also more likely to live in poverty. Inflexible working practices hit this group particularly hard when we consider that²¹:

- 32% of all employed carers needed time off work due to caring, with 10% having to leave work for at least three months to care and 11% to resign from paid work to commence or increase care
- 26% of people providing elder care and 29% of people providing disability care have reduced their working hours due to the cost of replacement care
- 64% of employees with caring responsibilities left the workforce due to the cost of care.

A national survey of carers also found that if care replacement were more affordable, 60% of carers not in the workforce would return to it and 52% of those working part-time would increase their hours of work²². This is particularly an issue for women, who are much more likely to be a primary carer. It is also significant that Australia is only one of two OECD countries which do not have a national paid maternity scheme.

There is a pressing need to tackle both the inflexible working practices of many employers in tandem with addressing the costs of care. While these systemic barriers remain in place, many key disadvantaged groups (particularly women) are unable to fully access the labour force.

LACK OF ADEQUATE SUPPORT SERVICES AS A BARRIER TO PARTICIPATION

Recent research argues that Australia’s current system of vocational support follows an essentially ‘work-first’ strategy. Furthermore, “international evidence... shows that work-first is not a viable strategy for harder-to-employ population groups”²³. Many of the most disadvantaged groups have only been marginally attached to the workforce, or have not been in paid employment (if at all) for longer

periods of time. In addition, many of these groups have complex and additional needs that are not always directly related to their employment needs. In many respects these groups often face a lack of appropriate, ongoing and targeted support to enable them to (re-)enter the labour force.

There is emerging evidence from Victoria that the use of ‘intermediate labour markets’ (ILMs) can create new pathways for some of these groups²⁴. ILMs are locally based initiatives that ‘typically provide temporary waged employment in a genuine work environment with continuous support to assist the transition to work’. There is a clear need for existing and ongoing intensive support for some of these key groups to access employment, and ILMs may be one of a broader policy response to meet these needs.

COMMUNITY CASE STUDY — COMMUNITY ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE (CEDI) IN VICTORIA

The Community Enterprise Development Initiative (CEDI) is a series of related projects managed by the Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL) in Victoria. The BSL team works with not-for-profit organisations in 12 disadvantaged neighbourhoods and provides enterprise training, networking opportunities, a seeding grant, one-to-one advice and support with business planning and development. Evaluation of the up and running schemes shows that significant numbers of people have started enterprises, completed training and jobs created. A number of the projects in the CEDI initiative have also helped renew the local existing infrastructure. There is scope for initiatives based on the CEDI model to be implemented in South Australia.

Further Information: BSL Victoria²⁵ www.bsl.org.au

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

In recent years, the gap between the numbers of unemployed South Australian young people is widening when compared with the national average (see Figure 27). Unemployment for young people can have significant long-term consequences and, as outlined in Chapter 2 — Income, HILDA data confirms that the longer a person has been in poverty, the less chance they have of ceasing to be poor. There is an urgent need to tackle youth unemployment, as it severely diminishes a person's life chances and ability to engage fully in society. The issue of youth unemployment also takes on a new significance in the context of the ageing society. The long term trends for the ageing population across Australia

will place unprecedented demands on the labour market to ensure a sustainable quality of life for all citizens. In this context, youth unemployment is not only a moral issue but there will be a pressing need to ensure that increasing numbers of young people are able to access the labour market.

ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue to remain the most socially disadvantaged group in South Australia. The levels of poverty, ill-health, and lack of access to the basic necessities of life are charted throughout this *Blueprint*. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

people are well over twice as likely to be unemployed than the wider population (see Figure 28). The headline unemployment figures also mask much higher numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are marginalised from the labour market. In particular, in remote and rural areas where employment opportunities are much scarcer, the 'unofficial' unemployment rates are even higher as there is even less incentive for Aboriginal people to be 'actively seeking' work.

The systemic barriers for employment and training opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander South Australians are part of a vicious cycle that locks many people into joblessness and wider marginalisation from the workforce.

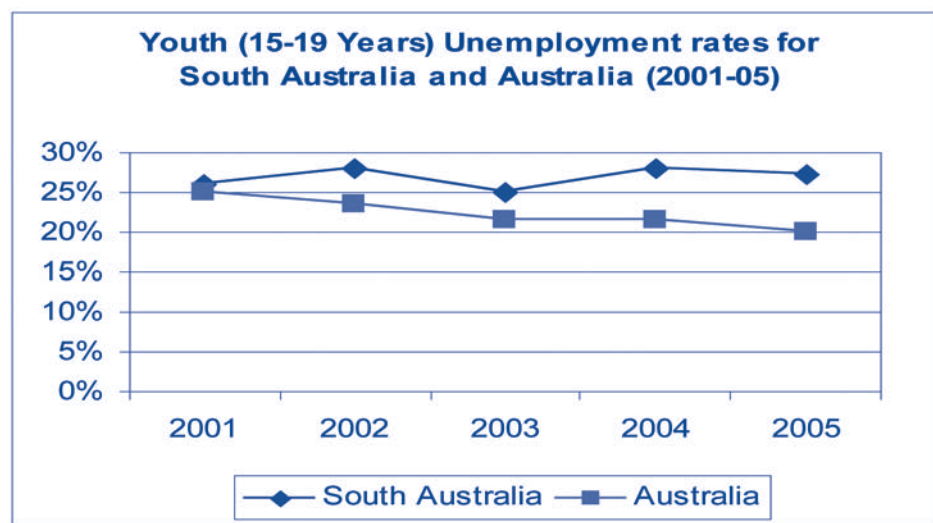


Figure 27

Source: ABS Statistics: (cat: 6202.0) (cited in SASP Progress Report 2006 p.11)

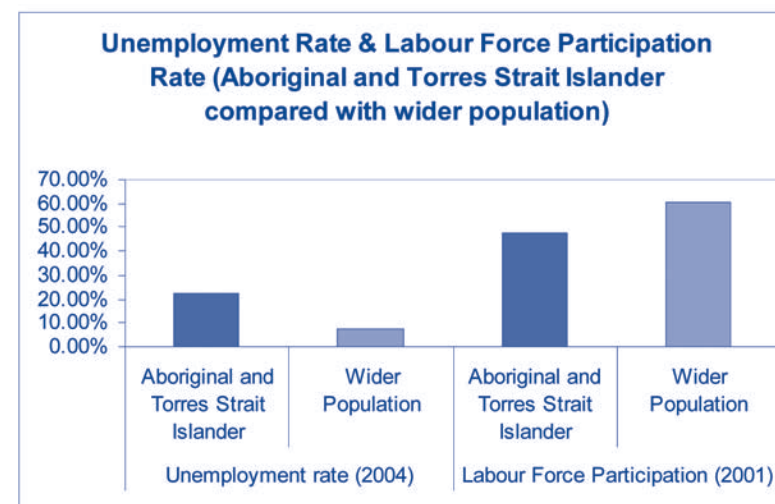


Figure 28

Sources: Unemployment rate (2004) - SACOSS Blueprint (2005), p.7 (Note: rate is for Adelaide metropolitan area only). Labour Force Participation – 2001 census data

Where some mechanisms have been set up to attempt to address these lack of opportunities, for example the introduction of Land Use Agreements, research has shown that the structural barriers have meant that these ‘deals’ have often ill-served Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people²⁶.

SACOSS believes that only with specific, targeted social investment, run by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, will there be meaningful progress in tackling the widespread and entrenched disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander South Australians.

LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYMENT

The barriers to employment for many of the people who are long-term unemployed are complex and interrelated. In many cases, the long-term unemployed have to deal with a range of social needs in addition to becoming ‘job-ready’ to enter the labour force. For example, many people living on low incomes have reported that the costs of training courses can be too prohibitive. Similarly, many long-term unemployed South Australians living in remote or regional areas are not even able to access such training.

Significantly, the average duration of unemployment in South Australia has consistently been longer than the Australian average. For example, in 2004, South

Australian men (aged 45-64) were on average unemployed 14 weeks longer than the national average²⁷. More recent data confirms that South Australia continues to lag behind the national average – see Figure 29.

People who are long-term unemployed are a diverse group, with a range of different needs. It is particularly striking – as illustrated by Figure 30 – that unemployed older people (aged 45 and over) will remain without work for almost double the amount of time as unemployed young people (aged 15-24). Tackling long-term unemployment requires sophisticated social policy responses that are properly targeted at those most in need.

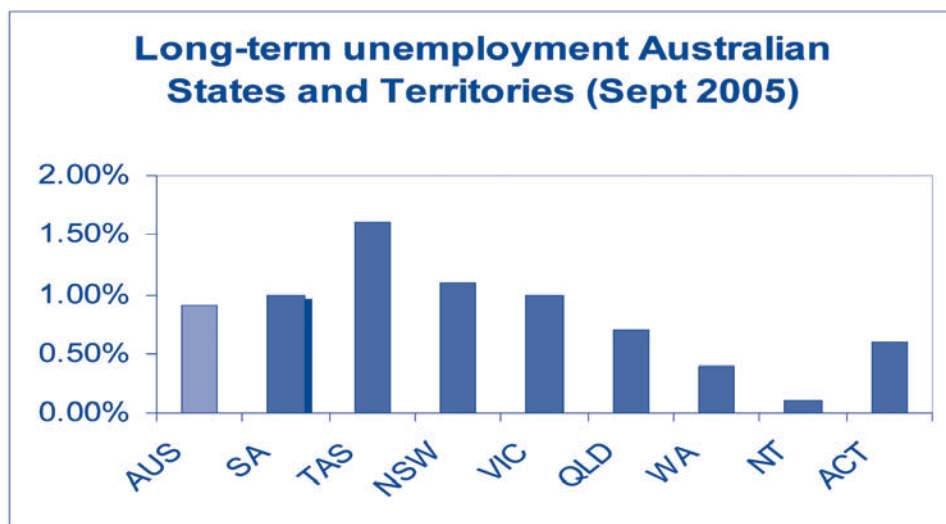


Figure 29

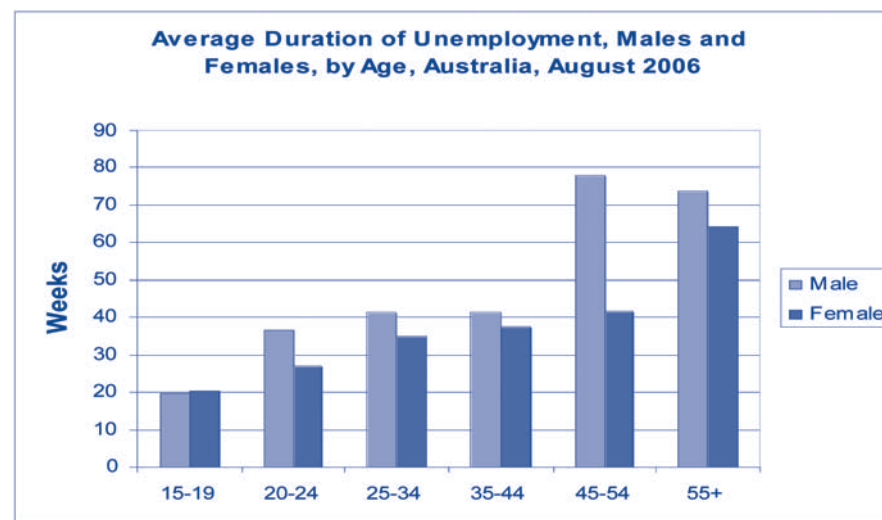


Figure 30

Source: ABS Labour Force, Australia (cat. no. 6202.0)

BLUEPRINT TARGETS: ACCESS TO JOBS

The SACOSS *Blueprint to eradicate poverty in South Australia* sets out a 10 year anti-poverty strategy (2005-2015). In the 2005 release of the *Blueprint*, a series of ambitious targets were set that, if achieved, will make substantial contribution to improving the lives of thousands of South Australian people living on low incomes. As the *Blueprint* has shown, while economic growth can help improve general employment outcomes there has to be specific targeted action to ensure that all population groups will benefit from the current period of economic prosperity.

In revising and updating the *Blueprint*, we have also developed a set of measurement indicators for tracking progress in meeting these targets. These are outlined in Chapter 7 — Measurement Indicators.

The specific *Blueprint* Targets for improving access to jobs are as follows:

Blueprint Targets: Access to Jobs

- 7 **Reduce by more than a half the current numbers of long-term unemployed in South Australia.**
- 8 **Increase the rate of employment amongst young people and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to equal that of the wider community.**

LINKS TO GOVERNMENT STRATEGIES

There is a plethora of both Federal and State based government activity that attempts to dismantle some of the barriers that some marginalised groups face when seeking employment. Social investment through government spending is an integral part of tackling the lack of access some population groups face in entering the labour market.

The State government's main program for employment and training is the South Australia Works initiative²⁸. In many respects, SA Works is potentially a positive framework for tackling the labour force issues faced by many of the most disadvantaged groups. The SA Works program prioritises action for a number of the key groups identified by SACOSS in the *Blueprint*. However, SACOSS is concerned that SA Works is not being implemented in full, and nor has its effectiveness been fully evaluated. The risk is that a potentially positive government strategy is not dismantling the systemic barriers that key disadvantaged groups face quickly enough. For these reasons, SACOSS has developed its own strategy to boost the SA Works initiative and evaluate it in full.

South Australia's Strategic Plan (SASP) sets out the government's overarching visions and priorities until 2014 and is now one of the main drivers for government activity.

Positively, the State Government has now included a target on work-life issues in *SASP*. The findings of the State Parliament Standing Committee's Inquiry into work-life issues should also help generate reform on this issue once they are released.

SACOSS has identified the following *SASP* targets as playing a potentially useful part in supporting the overall *Blueprint* agenda to eradicate poverty in South Australia:

- *T1.10 Jobs*
Better the Australian average employment growth rate by 2014
- *T1.11 Unemployment*
Maintain equal or lower unemployment compared with national average
- *T1.12 Employment participation*
Increase overall employment participation
- *T1.13 Employment in the defence industry*
Increase employment in the defence industry
- *T1.26 Aboriginal Unemployment*
Reduce the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal unemployment each year
- *T2.12 Work-Life Balance*
Improve the quality of life of all South Australians through maintenance of a healthy work-life balance.

Given the overall importance of these *SASP* targets to the *Blueprint* agenda, SACOSS will adopt a 'watching brief' over them and will be closely scrutinising

the progress made in meeting them. However, we remain concerned that the ‘headline’ SASP targets are not sufficiently calibrated and differentiated to specifically address the needs of low income and disadvantaged South Australians.

QUALITY AND QUANTITY OF JOBS

A key part of the drive to eradicate poverty focuses on labour force participation, particularly for low income and disadvantaged groups. However, a focus on increasing overall levels of employment is inadequate. As explored in more detail in this section, the quality and type of employment available is also crucial.

The quality and security of available jobs is a fundamental part of ensuring that all groups in South Australia can participate as fully as possible. In surveying the employment patterns and growth in South Australia, Spoehr and Barrett note that following the recession in 1992, “the recovery period was characterised by an increase in the proportion of non-standard jobs”²⁹. In 1989, part-time employment accounted for 23.3% of the total employment in South Australia, and this rose to 32.2% by 2004.

While part-time employment is a welcome option for some people, it is predicted that ‘South Australia’s increasing dependence on

COMMUNITY CASE STUDY — THE WORK BANK

The Work Bank is a collaborative support and promotional system for workers who are looking for ‘fragmented work’ and for employers with fragmented work opportunities. This means work for a few hours at a time, or short term contracts. Whereas most job systems are about fitting the person to a job, this system operates by fitting jobs to people. The Work Bank is targeted at disadvantaged job seekers and enables them to build a job résumé that will be taken seriously by employers. The Work Bank can be used in either two ways: firstly to either build a business or secondly enable a person to gain paid work.

Further Information: www.workbank.com.au

part-time and casual employment growth make it vulnerable to rapidly escalating unemployment when the next economic downturn occurs”³⁰.

The policy implications of this are quite clear. There has to be pre-emptive state-wide planning to identify the areas and jobs most at risk, and build more opportunities for skilling and incentives for full-time work. In South Australia, two of the main dominant growth areas will be in mining and defence industries – and concerted action with the key agencies within these sectors should be taken.

Low income groups also share these concerns about the increase in part-time and casual employment. Research shows that many people on low incomes feel that

the type of work available is important:

“Employment that is stable, secure and safe was considered ideal as this was seen to provide an ongoing income as opposed to casual employment, which was seen to provide an insecure and inconsistent income....

...Whilst all groups saw employment as a key pathway to adequate financial resources, many agreed that decent employment was also about having job satisfaction, choice and opportunity...

...Low wages, and limited choice and opportunity meant that many low income people faced huge disincentives when transferring from welfare benefits to employment”³¹.

This also suggests that unless more abundant full-time and secure work is made available, some of the lowest-income people in the state will have little benefit from seeking casual work.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE AGEING WORKFORCE

Over the next 10 years, South Australia faces the very high likelihood that “significant labour shortages will emerge as more people retire”³². It is estimated that within the next 10 years around one third of South Australians’ workforce will be approaching retirement (55 to 64 years age)³³.

Some of the key reasons for the change in age structure of the labour force include declining fertility rates, increased labour force participation by older women, rising educational participation by younger people, and emigration of prime young people³⁴³⁵. The median age for males in the South Australian workforce rose from 36.5 years to 38.8 years from 1989 – 2004.

HILDA data shows that up to **36% of Australians were ‘pressured or forced’ into early retirement**, in many cases by their employer³⁶. While many older workers are choosing to leave the workforce, some appear to be forced into leaving before they are ready – which can have crucial financial implications particularly for more vulnerable and poorer older people.

The current period of economic growth has led some employers to express concern about ‘skills shortages’ in South Australia. However, there is a strong case to be made that some of the projected labour shortfall in the state can be addressed by tackling the high labour underutilisation rate. In South Australia it is estimated that at least 37,500 unemployed South Australians are looking for work, and between 8,000 – 10,000 people who work part-time want more hours³⁷. These ‘official’ figures are also likely to significantly underestimate the number of people who are either not in the labour market or are more marginally attached to the workforce. There is a pressing need to retain the knowledge and skills of older people, with new incentives for them to continue to participate in the labour market.

A key dimension of addressing an ageing society is to increase youth participation in education and employment. As recent research confirms while the number of full-time jobs for older Australians has risen by 1,270 million since 1995, full-time jobs have been static for teenagers and have actually declined by 42,000 for young adults³⁸.

For these reasons, the current period of economic growth is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to unleash the potential and skills of some of the most disadvantaged groups in South Australia. The strong economic growth enjoyed in Australia

means that there is a unique chance to enable all members of the nation to prosper and flourish.

BLUEPRINT TARGETS: QUANTITY AND QUALITY OF JOBS

The following *Blueprint* Targets are framed to improve the overall quality and quantity of jobs and employment in South Australia. The targets were initially developed by SACOSS in 2005, and shape our *Blueprint* anti-poverty agenda until 2015. These targets are part of SACOSS’s efforts to help renew attention and give these issues a higher strategic focus. SACOSS is concerned that government action is concentrated on improving economic growth in the state but that less attention is being directed at the overall quality and quantity of employment being generated.

Blueprint Targets: Quantity and Quality of Jobs

- 9 Increase the percentage of the jobs in the market that are skilled, high income and permanent.
- 10 Ongoing statewide planning to identify areas of skills/labour shortage.
- 11 Reduce the Labour ‘under-utilisation’ rate in South Australia.

LINKS TO SOUTH AUSTRALIAN STRATEGIC PLAN

South Australia's Strategic Plan (SASP) outlines the headline targets the State government is pursuing, and includes targets for employment and work. A number of the targets are specifically aimed at increasing the numbers of people in the South Australian labour force. The focus of *SASP*, however, is predominately on quantity rather than the quality of jobs.

Some of the targets below relate specifically to the issues outlined in this chapter:

- *T1.10-13 Jobs and Employment Participation*
These targets relate specifically to increasing employment in South Australia
- *T1.26 Aboriginal Unemployment*
Reduce the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal unemployment each year
- *T1.21 Strategic Infrastructure*
This target aims to match the national average in investing in key economic and social infrastructure
- *T6.5 Economic Disadvantage*
This target seeks to reduce the number of people receiving government benefits

While *SASP* sets a range of targets related to increasing overall employment and reducing unemployment, it does not address the issues of job security, casualisation of labour, and issues around part-time work.

There needs to be effective action taken on these issues by government and all vested stakeholders. At the last economic downturn South Australia was not able to recover as quickly as other parts of Australia; and in this current period of prosperity, the foundations for creating a vibrant and well skilled workforce and economy need to be laid now.

SKILLS, EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The link between education/training and employment is well established. People who have more formal education are much more likely to be employed than those who have had less formal education or training. There is also a marked social gradient in South Australia in educational attainment³⁹. For example, *The Social Health Atlas of South Australia* confirms that the students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds are far less likely to study for SACE qualifications. There are also clear patterns of regional/urban inequalities of full-time participation in secondary education; where particularly in remote and rural areas (and even more so where

there are high numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people) there is much lower participation than some urban centres.

In an increasingly globalised economy, the importance of having a skilled and well trained labour force is becoming of heightened importance. In this context it is highly striking that South Australia lags behind the rest of the country in terms of its skilled labour force. Figure 31 shows the gap between the share of the South Australian labour force with non-school qualifications compared with the national average.

This situation puts South Australia at a distinct disadvantage when addressing the issues of 'skills shortages' and its baseline position in trying to create a high income, secure and skilled workforce. In a range of

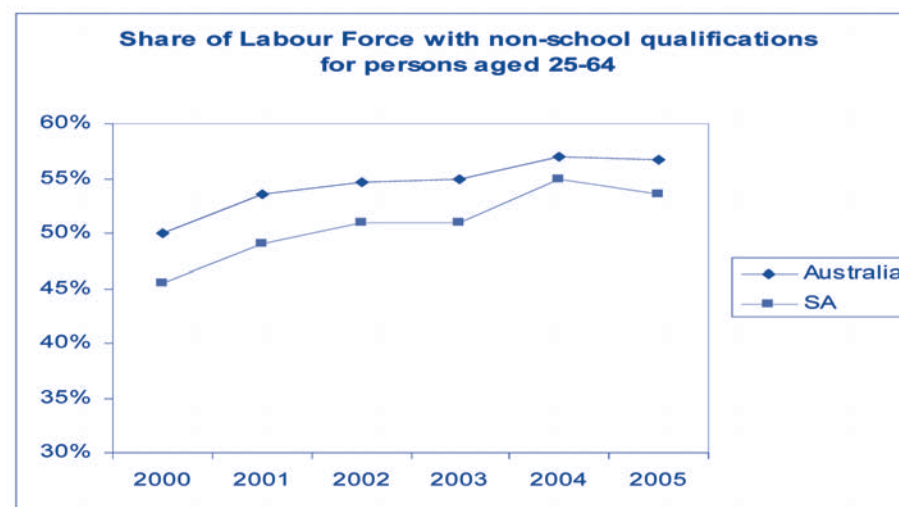


Figure 31

Source: ABS Cat No. 6227.0 (cited from *SASP Progress Report 2006*).

professions and skills, South Australia is not equipping its workforce (both existing and potential) with the relevant skills as quickly as it needs to. While the ‘skills shortage’ crisis has been prominent in industries that require science, technology and engineering skills, it is also playing out in the public sector (which are traditionally the largest employers in advanced industrial countries). For example, according to estimates from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), in 2001 there were 10.9 full-time equivalent nurses per 1,000 population in South Australia, down from 12.4 in 1995⁴⁰. There is an urgent and pressing need for South Australia to equip and skill its workforce, particularly for those groups who face disadvantage, as society deals with the prospect of an increasingly ageing population.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Given the importance of education as a foundation for the health and life chances that a person will enjoy in later life, it is striking that compared with other OECD countries, retention rates for young people remain comparatively low, and have barely shifted for the past 15 years⁴¹. The costs of not completing education are high for young people. It is calculated that a 24 year old who has not completed school is twice as likely to be unemployed as a 24 year old who has completed that level of education⁴².

Increasing youth participation in education and training will lead to potentially huge savings. In 2005, it was estimated that boosting the proportion of young people completing school or an apprenticeship to 90% would increase workforce numbers nationally by 65,000, boost economic productivity, and expand the economy by more than \$9 billion by 2040⁴³.

South Australia lags behind the rest of the country in respect of retention rates. Figure 32 shows the huge gap in school retention in South Australia compared with the national average in recent years. Recent initiatives by the State

government such as raising the school leaving age (to 17 years) are in part a recognition of these educational issues, particularly for young South Australians.

It is also clear that there has to be targeted action at young people from the most disadvantaged backgrounds. South Australia has a persistently high number of young people who face a range of barriers in accessing training, education and employment opportunities. Figure 33 shows the number of young people (aged 15-19) who participate in education, training or employment. 10% of young South Australians are not engaged in any of these activities – this is in excess of 10,300 people⁴⁴.

ACCESS TO TRAINING AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

There are a range of barriers that prevent some disadvantaged groups attaining educational and training opportunities. The costs of education is arguably the most significant factor in why some groups who wish to, cannot access training and development opportunities.

Recent research shows that people living in low income households face a range of difficulties in accessing training and employment⁴⁵:

“A range of issues was identified, with poor education seen as one of the most significant problems, particularly for

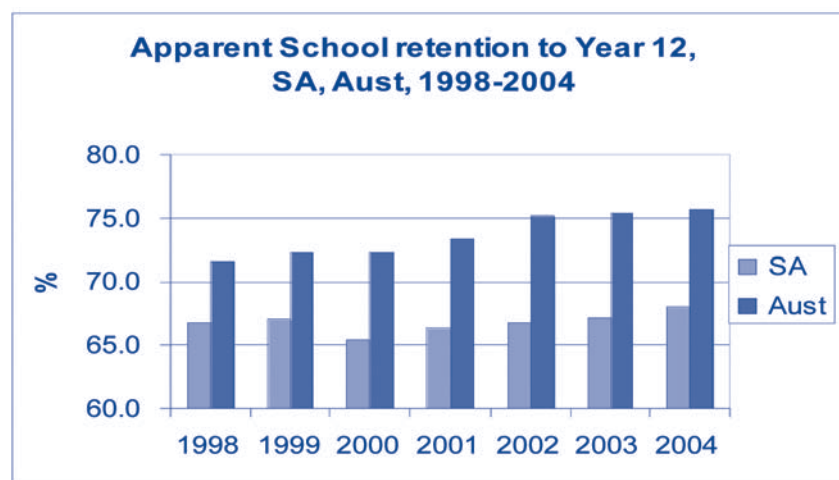


Figure 32

Source: ABS Cat. No. 6227.0

young people, new migrants/refugees and older workers. Moreover, the high costs associated with registration and retraining had prevented many of the client participants from overcoming the problems attributed to poor education...

Another crucial dimension is that not only do disadvantaged groups lack opportunities for training and skilling; they also lack chances to gain broader 'skills-sets' that can help wider social participation:

...Problems associated with poor education were especially relevant for many of the younger participants who felt they had missed out on employment opportunities because the education system did not offer what they

described as 'life skills' – opportunities to gain useful and practical information and knowledge that could be applied in a 'real world' setting⁴⁶.

The research also found that there were other specific issues for particular population groups. For example, in many cases older workers and new migrants/refugees had appropriate qualifications, but felt that they missed out on 'decent' employment as their educational attainments were not recognised by employers.

There are other factors at play which can present barriers for people on low incomes in South Australia. People living in remote and rural areas, for example, face additional transport costs as well as more limited education and training opportunities.

ABS data has shown that in recent years employers are much more likely to provide training opportunities for their staff; the number of employers providing training to their employees rose from 61% in 1997 to 81% in 2002⁴⁷. The implication of this is clear – educational and training opportunities greatly increase for

those already in employment. In this sense, there is a double disadvantage for those people not employed but seeking training, as employers will often bear the brunt of training costs for existing employees.

BLUEPRINT TARGETS: SKILLS, EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The *Blueprint* agenda for eradicating poverty in South Australia sets a number of ambitious targets specifically with the aim of opening up education and training for all South Australians, particularly those from low income households. SACOSS encourages all key stakeholders to work towards these targets to address the wider issues outlined in this chapter.

Blueprint Targets: Skills, Education and Training

- 12 Free Education for all who seek it.
- 13 Ensure all South Australians have training/ education opportunities that will enable them to effectively compete for employment.
- 14 Ensure equity of access and high quality of education/training in rural and metropolitan areas.

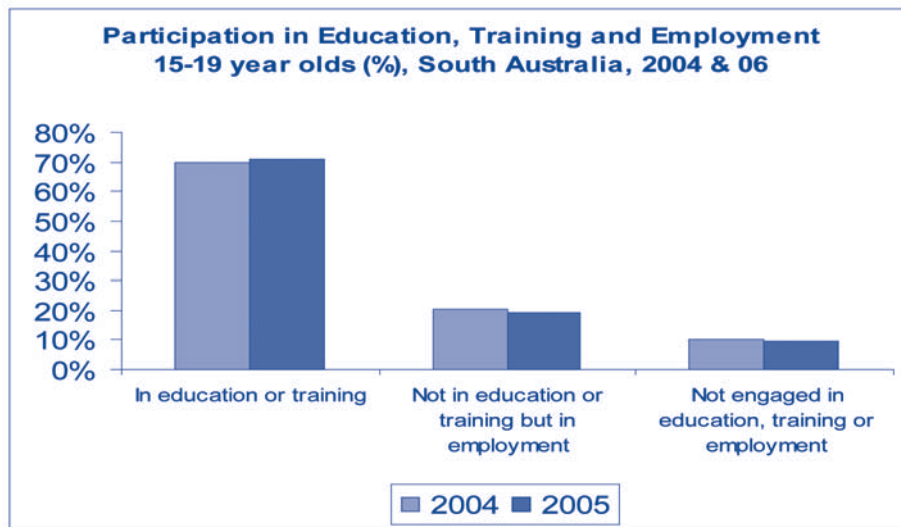


Figure 33

Source: ABS (cited in SASP Progress Report 2006 – p.930)

LINKS TO GOVERNMENT STRATEGIES

There is a range of government activity to address the issue of 'skills shortages' and tackle the barriers that particular groups face in accessing training and other forms of education. Most specifically, the State government produced a *Strategy for the Development of South Australia's Workforce to 2010*⁴⁸ which sets as a priority the creation of 'a highly skilled economy', with a range of programs and initiatives. This strategy is supplemented by *South Australia's Skills Action Plan*⁴⁹, which outlines the government's framework for addressing a range of these issues. Progress on the *Skills Action Plan* was reported in 2006, setting out some of the achievements⁵⁰. While the report card outlines some of the significant investment taking place, it is not clear how far the *Skills Action Plan* is 'on track' or indeed whether it will meet the needs of the most disadvantaged groups in the state.

South Australia's Strategic Plan (SASP) sets out the government's overarching visions and priorities until 2014 and is now one of the main drivers for government activity. *SASP* sets the overarching framework for education, skills and training issues across the state.

The targets relating closely to the issues identified in this section are:

- *T6.15-17 Education*
These are a range of targets which are aimed at improving the overall educational attainment of South Australian, particularly for young people, SACE or equivalent and in the areas of science and maths
- *T6.19-21 Workforce Development and Training*
These three targets relate specifically to Non-school qualifications; Higher education; VET participation
- *T1.21 Strategic Infrastructure*
While this target does not directly relate to the increasing the amount of educational attainment, the

emphasis on infrastructure is a key part of the overall effort needed to break down the barriers that key groups face in accessing education and training opportunities.

Given the overall importance of these *SASP* targets to the *Blueprint* agenda, SACOSS will adopt a 'watching brief' over them and will be closely scrutinising the progress made in meeting them. However, we remain concerned that the 'headline' *SASP* targets are not sufficiently calibrated and differentiated to specifically address the needs of low income and disadvantaged South Australians.

COMMUNITY CASE STUDY — WESLEY 4 TRAINING

Wesley 4 Training is the education and training department of Uniting Care Wesley Adelaide. Wesley 4 Training began in 1994 at Byron Place Community Centre as a pilot program in pre-vocational literacy and numeracy and became a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) in 1996. Wesley 4 Training now offers vocational training in a range of areas.

A range of full certificates, short courses and workshops are available and enrolment is ongoing for most courses. Depending on the area of study, full certificates may be available as fee-for-service, traineeships or Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). Participants who successfully complete a full certificate will receive a nationally recognised qualification.

Further Information: www.ucwesleyadelaide.org.au

STRATEGIES

SACOSS believes that there is a compelling case to ensure that education and employment should be open for all, and that poverty should be eradicated as a factor for the different outcomes achieved by different groups of South Australians. As outlined in the research, in many respects South Australia lags behind the rest of the nation in facing the long term issues of skills shortages, disproportionately high labour ‘under-utilisation’ rate, and the implications of the ageing society.

The SACOSS *Blueprint* sets out the key targets which, if met, could make a significant contribution to the eradication of poverty in South Australia. To help build on this work, SACOSS has developed a series of underpinning strategies from retaining older workers in the labour force to improving school retention and opening up skills and employment opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. These strategies are pathways for meeting the challenges outlined in this section and if implemented they will make a valuable contribution in tackling poverty and inequality in South Australia.

While the strategies that follow seek to suggest practical pathways for dealing with the range of issues outlined in this chapter, they are only part of a wider set of policy initiatives and social investment needed to tackle income inequality in the state.

13 ESTABLISH A JOINT PARLIAMENTARY SELECT COMMITTEE TO ENQUIRE INTO LONG TERM UNEMPLOYMENT

The committee's remit will be to examine the issues of long-term unemployment in the state and elevate the issue to a higher government priority. The major outcome for this proposal and the work of the committee will be the creation of a plan that will seek to improve South Australia's economic performance through increased labour utilisation. The plan would result in a significant reduction in long-term unemployment and an increased rate of labour force participation.

14 REDUCE BY HALF THE FEES OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN SKILLS SHORTAGE INDUSTRIES

A reduction in the training fees for industries with demonstrated skills shortages would provide much needed incentive for new entrants into the arena while also reducing the barriers that exist for people of low incomes to skills training. This strategy aims to increase uptake of VET courses in skills shortage industries.

15 ESTABLISH QUOTAS FOR EMPLOYMENT OF LONG TERM UNEMPLOYED WORKERS ON GOVERNMENT PROJECTS (10% ON GOVERNMENT CAPITAL PROJECTS)

The major economic impacts would be increased production through better utilisation of currently underutilised labour and increased income within disadvantaged communities. This scheme will enable the setting of government targets for employing the long-term unemployed.

16 PROVIDE ENHANCED SUPPORT STRUCTURES FOR THE LONG TERM UNEMPLOYED, AND THOSE AT RISK OF LONG TERM UNEMPLOYMENT (VARIOUS MEASURES)

This strategy would increase the use of underutilised labour, most importantly within lower socio-economic areas. Under the SA works framework, additional support would be offered to the long-term unemployed. Including extension of concessions, fares and financial literacy courses.

17 PROVIDE VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN YEARS 9 – 11 IN ALL HIGH SCHOOLS

The benefits of this strategy will include a more productive workforce with better trained entrants to the workforce and better utilisation of the labour market. The strategy will work by extending vocational training to younger students and will help build partnerships between business and education – particularly for skills shortage industries.

18 ESTABLISH AN ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER-SPECIFIC FINANCIAL AND INCLUSION ASSET-BUILDING PROGRAM (FINANCIAL LITERACY)

Research has convincingly linked financial illiteracy with the increased incidence of poverty and financial exclusion. This pilot program will aim to build personal finance and accountancy skills for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

19 BOOST THE SA WORKS INITIATIVES

The SA Works program has previously sought to identify areas of skills shortages and employment needs in rural and metropolitan Adelaide and to link those shortages with training and skills development. This strategy seeks to increase the SA Works initiative to carry out more thorough mapping of skills shortages and identify population groups most at risk of social exclusion

20 INCREASE THE SKILLS ATTAINMENT AND PRE-EMPLOYMENT JOB READINESS THROUGH SACE INITIATIVES

This strategy seeks to re-engage students with school, create a positive educational environment, increased preparation for job ready school leavers and assist in increased social inclusion. This initiative is a pathfinder program to enable more socially excluded population groups to be in a position to enter the labour market.

21 PROVIDE TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG ADULTS WHO HAVE BEEN UNDER GUARDIANSHIP

A challenge for the community sector is to attract and retain young people. This strategy will provide the opportunity for young people who have been in the care of the Minister to undertake a traineeship in a supportive environment.

22 CONDUCT FULL EVALUATION OF SA WORKS; FOLLOWING REVIEW SET NEW PUBLICLY AVAILABLE BENCHMARKS – IMPLEMENT THE PLAN IN FULL; IMPROVE INTERFACE BETWEEN FEDERAL AND STATE PROGRAMS

SACOSS believes that the SA Works is, potentially, an invaluable mechanism for expanding the employment and training opportunities for some of the most disadvantaged groups across the state. It is a welcome innovation by the State government, and there is much to commend its overall direction and intent. However, SACOSS remains concerned that the SA Works program has not been implemented in full, and that only some elements have been acted on. For this reason, SACOSS is calling for a full evaluation of the SA Works program, to identify which areas require immediate attention, resources, and renewed political will to fulfil its laudable aims. Following the review, a new set of publicly available benchmarks should be produced – and reported on at least annually to demonstrate real progress in opening up employment and training opportunities for the most disadvantaged groups.

23 ‘COMMUNITY EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT’ INITIATIVES– INCLUDING FUNDING FOR ‘EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT OFFICERS’ AND DEVELOPING A ‘JOB READINESS’ SKILLS-BASED TRAINING PROGRAM

A range of initiatives and programs should be developed under the theme of ‘Community Employment Support’. The key issue is that many disadvantaged groups face a range of issues and difficulties trying to access the labour market. In some instances this may involve learning about employment ‘soft-skills’; such as time management or interpersonal relations. In other instances, many disadvantaged groups have a range of issues to contend with outside of the employment sphere that often can cause them to leave employment, such as dealing with household financial budgeting, securing appropriate housing, or dealing with mental ill-health or caring responsibilities.

This initiative aims to support these key groups in entering and remaining in the workplace. Dedicated employment support officers will have a pivotal role in helping meet the challenges of entering the employment market, but also advocate and support on the other external issues. Support officers are a bridge between employee and employer in seeking to gain the maximum potential out of each person. Linked to this strategy is the expansion and rollout of ‘job-readiness’ training programs for key targeted groups.

24 THE STATE GOVERNMENT TO DEVELOP A CO-ORDINATED FLEXIBLE WORKPLACE PROGRAM, INCLUDING CREATING BEST PRACTICE WITHIN THE PUBLIC SERVICE LEADING TO AN EDUCATION PROGRAM FOR EMPLOYERS

The State government should develop its own co-ordinated flexible and family-friendly workplace program. This strategy looks at building and expanding best practice within the public service, which will then lead to a targeted education campaign for the wider private sector (and related activities with employers to adopt create more flexible and family-friendly workplaces). The overall aim of the strategy is to boost employment from key disadvantaged population groups who are seeking employment but face barriers in accessing the labour market (such as sole parent families and family carers).

25 PROMOTE INCENTIVES FOR EMPLOYERS TO RECRUIT AND RETAIN EMPLOYEES FROM DISADVANTAGED GROUPS (E.G. PAYROLL TAX WAIVED FOR RECRUITING LONG TERM UNEMPLOYED PERSONS)

Representative bodies have a key leadership role in helping encourage employers to recruit from all parts of the population, particularly unleashing the potential of many disadvantaged groups. A series of strategies developed with key industry bodies should be developed to support the recruitment and retention of employees from disadvantaged groups such as the long term unemployed and people with disabilities. A series of incentives could be identified such as waiving payroll tax for each employer recruiting an employee who was long term unemployed. Large companies can enhance their leadership role using the matrix of 'corporate social responsibility' by setting and meeting targets for recruitment from key disadvantaged groups, such as Indigenous South Australians. A campaign should be devised with key industry groups to promote awareness and the benefits of recruiting staff from such groups.

26 JOB NETWORK SYSTEM IS REVIEWED LEADING TO FUNDAMENTAL REFORM

The job network system has the potential to play a much greater role in improving employment pathways for key disadvantaged group. However, there are ongoing concerns that the system is not fulfilling its full potential and has moved away from its original aims. A fundamental review of the system is required, leading to much needed reform to ensure Commonwealth funded employment programs reach their full potential.

27 REVIEW OF EXISTING SCHOOL SUPPORT PROGRAMS FOR CHILDREN FROM LOW INCOME GROUPS, WITH A VIEW TO EXTENDING SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITION PROGRAMS.

The State government department for Education and Children Services should undertake a full audit of existing support programs for children from low income groups, with a view to extending these where appropriate, promoting best practice, and linking this to an expansion of existing school-to-work transition programs.

28 REVIEW OF GENDER IMPACT OF VET SECTOR COURSES RELATING TO UPTAKE AND ATTAINMENT

The key VET sector lead agencies should undertake a full gender impact study of the sector and the provision of its courses. There is ongoing concern that in many respects, the sector does not adequately meet the needs of women, nor attract and retain them on key skills and training pathway programs. The study will examine the extent of the issue, address underlying factors and propose a series of reform recommendations to more appropriately attract and meet the needs of female VET participants.

Further details on any of these strategies can be obtained by contacting SACOSS.

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