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School students' views

on their **working** and **learning**

in the **workplace**

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This report has a companion volume *School students' learning from their paid and unpaid work*, by E Smith and A Green, which can also be found on NCVER's website: www.ncver.edu.au

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Executive summary

This report contains additional analysed material from the study reported in the report *School students learning from their paid and unpaid work*. The project was designed to find the extent and learning outcomes of school students' engagement with workplaces. The focus was on work experience, paid part-time work and structured work placements using a questionnaire administered in 13 schools in New South Wales and South Australia to students in Years 10, 11 and 12, supplemented by a number of school and locality-based case studies, and interviews with employers, key policy-makers and researchers.

This report discusses the qualitative comments which students made about their workplace experiences, in response to a number of open-ended questions.

Enjoyment of workplace activities

General comments were divided into three types and a range of examples of each type of comment are given:

- ❖ Positive comments, where the students list those skills that they appeared to find interesting and useful.
- ❖ Negative comments, where the students' comments indicate they were unhappy or dissatisfied with what they were doing.
- ❖ Generic skills, where the students' descriptions of their specific tasks, were in fact, what would generally be viewed as generic.

Paid work clearly appeared to have been the least enjoyable way of experiencing the workplace. Nevertheless, as the original report shows, almost 90% of students liked their jobs at least 'a bit'. However the negative comments about paid jobs were often quite strongly worded. These negative experiences of a minority of student workers might account for the largely negative views about part-time jobs held by a number of education department officials.

Negative comments about work experience were most likely to come from those who had only done work experience, suggesting that it may have been the first encounter with the workplace that alerted them to the negative aspects of being at work. Among those who had paid jobs, negative comments tended to outweigh positive comments. Only 15.6% of students who had jobs volunteered comments that their work was fun or they enjoyed it.

The seeming preponderance of negative comments about placements was of concern. It appeared that in some cases, the students were treated no differently from work experience students although the placement is meant to be far more planned and organised.

Learned skills

The young people were also asked to comment on 'anything else' they had learned in each of their workplace experiences. This gave them the chance to note anything especially of interest or significance for themselves. The responses sometimes included reflective comments or what might be called 'meta-learning' or ability to learn how to learn.

Analysis of these responses reveals differences between paid work and work experience. Generic skills were slightly more often mentioned in relation to paid work while technical skills tended to be more often mentioned about work experience. Learning about the organisation was more common in paid work, while learning about oneself was more common in work experience.

The 'anything else learned' responses about work experience illustrate the huge variety of experiences and workplaces which school students encounter on work experience, as well as the degrees of insight which students bring to their experiences. They are divided into positive and negative comments.

For paid work the comments which were offered were more often negative than positive. There were only a small number of comments about 'anything else learned' on vocational placements. These included both positive and negative comments.

Links between school and the workplace

Students did not report a great deal of transfer of learning from school to work experience. In order to examine what types of learning were transferred, students' qualitative comments were coded into categories. The categories were derived partly from the Mayer generic competencies but extra categories were added.

It is difficult to see clear patterns in the responses. Written communication was the largest category and perhaps significantly, it was referred to most often by those who saw less transfer between school and work experience – perhaps such students were struggling to think of something they did at school that they also did at work. 'Specific skills' and 'how to behave at work' were reasonably substantial categories across all degrees of transference.

Only 9.4% of those students offering comments referred specifically to special preparation for work experience. This might suggest that schools were not being as pro-active as they might in preparing students for work experience—possibly reflecting more general concerns about the role of schools in preparing students for work—assuming that work experience equates to work in general.

Results suggest that transfer of learning back from work experience to school was present but was not substantial, with three-fifths of students reporting transfer but less than a third reporting more than 'a bit' of transfer.

Generic skills and specific skills were the most commonly nominated types of learning that transferred from work experience to school, according to these students. Interestingly, of those who said that a lot of learning transferred back to school, one-fifth said that work experience had helped clarify their career path and one-tenth said it had made them decide to stay on at school.

Specific skills were the most commonly nominated form of learning that transferred from school to paid work. This might suggest that, unlike paid work, work experience was more likely to involve activities which were new to the students. As with work experience, written communication was nominated fairly often, and more often by those who felt that the amount of transfer was least.

Some responses indicate students find paid work in areas where they have undertaken vocational courses.

Students who said that no learning transferred from school to work generally commented that school was different from the workplace or they made disparaging remarks about school. Their comments were similar to those of students who said that no learning transferred from school to work experience.

Generic skills and manners appeared to be more commonly transferred from paid work to school than from work experience to school. Paid work did not appear to have much effect upon career decision making, unlike work experience.

Learning transferring between workplaces

Customer service skills were the most important type of learning that transferred from paid work to work experience. Writing and verbal communication were also reasonably common. A variety of specific skills were mentioned by the students, including handling animals, bookwork and mechanics.

Transfer of learning from work experience to paid jobs was found to be similar to the above, although with less emphasis on customer service. Some of the more insightful comments included:

- ❖ allowed you to negotiate the workplace with an understanding of how things worked and what had to be done
- ❖ having the will and initiative to do well
- ❖ respecting those above you
- ❖ that it is more fun to learn on the job and get paid

Comparing types of workplace experience for effective learning

Students were asked to compare what they learned from their different types of workplace activity. The original report showed that 65.6% of those who had done both paid work and work experience said that they learned most from paid work, although 68.4% said that work experience was still useful. Of those who had done vocational placements as well there was less of a bias towards paid work.

Students heading for apprenticeships or traineeships reported better learning outcomes from work experience than the average, and certainly more than those who wanted to go into full-time work without a contract of training. However those headed for full-time study, particularly at TAFE, showed a greater than average appreciation of learning from paid work.

Among students who said that paid work was the form of workplace experience in which they learned most, 71% said that this was mainly due to the length of time spent in the workplace. 'Getting paid', 'greater responsibility' and 'liking it better' were the most common reasons advanced by students for learning more from paid work than from work experience.

Although students reported learning more from paid work than work experience, they still appeared to feel that work experience was valuable. However work experience could be a time of great learning or of little learning, depending on the environment.

The qualitative data strongly confirms the finding from the case studies in the original report that the special value of work experience is in exploring careers and different types of workplaces. The comments about paid work underline the value of authentic engagement in a workplace as a full member of the paid workforce. It seems therefore that both types of activity are valuable and neither can substitute fully for the other.

Introduction

This study consisted of additional analysis of data produced from the 1999–2000 National Research and Evaluation Committee (NREC) project *School students' learning from their paid and unpaid work*, which involved research in two States, namely New South Wales and South Australia. The project was designed to find out the extent and learning outcomes of school students' engagement with workplaces. The focus was primarily on work experience, paid part-time work and structured work placements. A questionnaire administered in 13 schools in the two States to students in Years 10, 11 and 12 resulted in 1451 responses. The questionnaire was administered in late 2000 and was supplemented by a number of school and locality-based case studies, including employer interviews, as well as interviews with key policy-makers and researchers. The report of the project was published in 2001 (Smith & Green 2001).

The backdrop to the original project and this extension project is as follows:

- ❖ *The growth of vocational education and training (VET) in schools programs.* From a low base in the mid 1990s, the delivery of accredited VET programs in schools has grown considerably (Malley, Ainley & Robinson 2001) and continues to rise. Of Australian schools offering senior secondary programs, 90% now offer VET in schools programs and over 150 000 students were involved in such programs in 2000 (MCEETYA 2001), with just under three-fifths of these undertaking structured work placements as part of the programs.
- ❖ *The prevalence of part-time work among senior school children.* Estimates of participation in part-time work are generally around 50% of students in the post-compulsory years. The original project (Smith & Green 2001) found engagement was slightly higher, although the picture was fairly complex; for example, if students' family businesses were included the figure rose to 60% (of students in Years 10, 11 and 12).
- ❖ *Continuing concern with the safe transition of young people from school to work* (e.g. Frost 1998) and the search for innovative methods of achieving this (MCEETYA 2001).
- ❖ *Renewed interest in, and policy attention to, the traditional work experience programs.* There was some evidence for this in the original project although only at policy level.

The original project report (Smith & Green 2001) contains analysis of the quantitative data from the survey of school students as well as analysis of the case study findings, employer interviews and stakeholder interviews. It was recognised that many of the qualitative questions in the survey warranted further analysis, which would add to the findings already reported, especially as qualitative responses would give more understanding of the lived experiences of school students in workplaces and the reasons for the types of response recorded in the main report.

Accordingly this sequel report provides further analysis on the *qualitative* responses, together with a small amount of extra *quantitative* analysis. It should be noted that this report does not provide any further analysis of case studies and employer and stakeholder interviews. It reports solely on the student perspective. It is recommended that the report be read in conjunction with the original report, which is available on the NCVER web site at <http://www.ncver.edu.au/research/proj/nr9031.pdf>. The original report also contains a copy of the questionnaire (at appendix 2).

Main findings of the original report

Engagement in workplaces

The survey found that, in those schools in New South Wales and South Australia involved in the study, around 60% of students in Years 10, 11 and 12 had had formal part-time work (50% when family businesses were excluded); 68% had done work experience and 11% had undertaken vocational placements. Analysis of Year 11 and 12 figures showed that participation in work experience for those students was 87%, and in vocational placements was almost 18%. Of those in the study, 14.6% had no experience in workplaces at all. Participation rates were found to be higher in government rather than non-government schools. Also, non-government students were over-represented in the study¹, due to better response rates from Catholic and Independent schools, therefore these figures may not be fully representative of Australian school-children. In other words, the findings probably *under*-represent engagement with workplaces. Paid work was highly concentrated in certain industry areas—nearly two-thirds worked in retail or fast food—while work experience was widely distributed across a range of industry areas.

Learning outcomes from workplace activities

There were some fundamental differences between the three forms of workplace engagement:

- ❖ Work experience was viewed as a process of career sampling and of familiarisation with work habits. Even those with paid jobs and/or vocational placements still found work experience useful. However, some employers were not sure how to handle work experience students and seemed to prefer hosting vocational placement students.
- ❖ Vocational placements were clearly seen as sites for developing specific skills. For this reason, employers found them easier to manage.
- ❖ Paid work was primarily undertaken as a way of earning money, but nevertheless significant learning occurred. Much paid work was undertaken alongside other teenage workers rather than with adults.

Employers reported that they gave more training to paid workers than to work experience or vocational placement students. They did not, however, regard themselves as responsible for paid workers' personal learning outcomes in the same way as they did for work experience and placement students. Similarly, student workers reported feeling better trained and more secure in the workplace than did work experience and placement students. Responses to questions about learning, both generic and specific skills, indicated that students learned more from paid work than from other forms of workplace activity, although vocational placements came a very close second.

What they learned and how they learned it

The generic skills which were best developed in all three forms of workplace activity were:

- ❖ verbal communication
- ❖ how to behave at work
- ❖ using your initiative

¹ Only 48.7% of respondents were from government schools, with 40.4% from independent and 10.1% from Catholic schools (a few respondents failed to answer the relevant question).

Written communication was the least well-developed of the generic skills. The most common specific skills mentioned by students were also common to all three forms of workplace activity:

- ❖ dealing with customers
- ❖ communication skills
- ❖ operating a computer

Learning methods were also similar in all three forms of activity: being shown by a supervisor or being shown by fellow workers were the most common forms of learning. Paid workers also commonly learned by watching, and were less likely than work experience or placement students to ask questions (perhaps because they were afraid to appear inadequate). Employers reported that those students who were most motivated received more training and learned most. This was attributed partly to the fact that supervisors and co-workers were more willing to spend time with enthusiastic students. There was not much linkage between school and workplaces, except in the case of vocational placement students.

Research questions for the current study

Such a huge amount of data was generated from the questionnaire responses that not all of it could be analysed for the original report—in particular, the qualitative responses. Yet it was these responses which gave insight into why students undertook certain activities, their motivations, and their subjective impressions of their workplace involvement. In view of the ever-increasing engagement of school students in workplaces, as outlined above, these extra findings were considered important and relevant to policy. Moreover, the findings of the study, particularly those suggesting higher learning outcomes from paid work compared with other forms of workplace engagement, were greeted with surprise by some commentators. Further analysis was thus deemed beneficial and was based around six research questions:

- 1 What was the full range of activities undertaken?
- 2 What were the students' opinions about the three types of workplace activity?
- 3 What were the particular things that students learned in workplaces?
- 4 How did what students learned at school help them in workplaces?
- 5 How did learning transfer between the different types of workplace activity?
- 6 What reasons did the students give for the superiority of one form of workplace activity over another?

These questions were devised by the researchers in consultation with a reference group. The reference group members, who also provided comment on a draft of the report, were:

Anne Byrne	director, Enterprise Partnerships Section, Schools Division, Department of Education, Science and Training
Kym Clayton	executive officer, MCEETYA Taskforce on Transition from School
Reagan Garner	Coles institute manager, SA/NT, Coles Supermarkets
Annette Green	lecturer, VET, Charles Sturt University and co-author of previous project report
Lindy Peisley	senior education officer, VET in Schools Directorate, NSW DET
Edward Slack	project manager, research, Enterprise and Career Education Foundation
Margaret Stewart	senior project officer, Pathways Section, Later Years Branch, Learning and Teaching Innovation Division, Department of Education, Employment and Training
Kym Ward	senior education officer, school-based apprenticeships & traineeships, Education Queensland

Findings

What was the full range of activities undertaken?

The figures in the tables below were drawn from qualitative responses to a question in the survey about the specific tasks which were undertaken in workplaces. The students wrote their own answers rather than selecting from a list of options. The responses were coded into some common categories, to examine the full range of activities carried out by the students (table 1). However, due to the variety and specificity of their tasks many responses still fell into the 'other' category. There was inevitable overlap between categories; for example, 'dealing with customers' could also involve 'displaying patience'. It is interesting to note that the tasks performed in paid work were the easiest to classify, suggesting that paid work involves a more limited range of tasks. The nature of these tasks reflects the predominance of retail and fast food jobs. It is unfortunate that the number of responses by vocational placement students to the question was too low to allow classification.

Table 1: Specific activities undertaken by students in work experience, paid work and vocational placement

	Work experience		Paid work	
	No	%	No	%
Communication	45	22.3	12	12.4
Dealing with customers	27	13.4	12	12.4
Dealing with clients ²	5	2.5	6	6.2
Displaying patience	12	5.9	3	3.1
Operating a computer	8	4.0	4	4.1
Operating other machinery or equipment	5	2.5	15	15.5
Food preparation	26	12.9	17	17.5
Other	74	36.7	28	28.9
Total	202	100.0	97	100.0

Table 1 does not really do justice to the rich variety of workplace tasks undertaken by the students. Some of their individual comments are listed in the box below, to give a better picture of the types of work undertaken. The comments have been divided into three types:

- ❖ *Positive comments*, where the students list those skills which they appeared to find interesting and useful.
- ❖ *Negative comments*, where the students' comments indicate they were unhappy or dissatisfied with what they were doing.
- ❖ *Generic skills*, where the students' descriptions of their specific tasks, were in fact, what would generally be viewed as generic. (It has been pointed out by Smith [2000] in a study of young people's full-time learning, that specific and generic skills have considerable overlap, often depending on the type of work involved).

² 'Clients' is used to refer to the members of the public served in a non-commercial environment, for example a hospital or government office.

Type of comment	Specific task undertaken
Positive	<p>Work experience</p> <p>At the zoo I learnt that enclosures must be kept clean at all times for public viewing.</p> <p>Changing the circuit, and checking if the motor was working</p> <p>Fry pan cooking, garnishing and decorating food</p> <p>Preparing animals for surgery</p> <p>Taking blood pressure, temperature, changing beds, filling a food drip</p> <p>The needs of children – physically, and for development, sensitivity, and caring</p> <p>What goes on behind the scenes in a hairdressing shop</p> <p>Paid work</p> <p>Drive a forklift.</p> <p>Dyeing hair</p> <p>How to gear up harness racing horses</p> <p>How to make burgers, ice cream ... dismantle an ice cream machine</p> <p>How to dock lambs, drench sheep, drive a tractor, write up accounts and cheques</p> <p>Vocational placement</p> <p>Cutting squid</p> <p>How to chop parsley</p> <p>How to join things, put things up, basic building techniques</p> <p>Service and tuning cars</p>
Negative	<p>Work experience</p> <p>How to have fun in a boring job</p> <p>Being able to smoke</p> <p>I learnt nothing</p> <p>How to sit and observe</p> <p>Play Solitaire</p> <p>Sharpening pencils.</p> <p>Paid work</p> <p>I mainly just stuffed around</p> <p>I was given no training at all</p>
Generic skills	<p>Work experience</p> <p>Leadership</p> <p>Organisational skills</p> <p>Team work, co-operation</p> <p>What to do to get the job</p> <p>Paid work</p> <p>Management</p> <p>Keep to work hours</p> <p>Responsibility</p> <p>Teaching, instructing</p> <p>Time management</p>

What were students' opinions about the three types of workplace engagements?

The original project had analysed the 1451 students' responses to a question about their enjoyment of their workplace activities. The following table (table 2) was presented. In each case the percentages represent those students who responded to the particular question. Numbers were highest for work experience and paid work, while only around 150 responded for vocational placements.

Table 2: How much students enjoyed their workplace activity, by type of activity

	Work experience (%)	Paid work (%)	Vocational placement (%)
A lot	57.7	45.5	56.3
A bit	36.1	44.4	37.5
Not at all	6.2	10.1	6.3

Source: Smith & Green 2001, p.58

Paid work clearly appeared to have been the least enjoyable way of experiencing the workplace. Nevertheless, almost 90% of students liked their jobs at least 'a bit'. The percentages for work experience and vocational placement were almost identical to each other.

In order to see whether broader workplace experience might affect students' enjoyment of work experience, the findings were analysed according to students' range of experiences (table 3).

Table 3: How much students enjoyed work experience, by variety of workplace engagement

	Done work exp. only		Work exp. & voc. pl.		Work exp. & paid work		Work exp. & voc. pl. & paid wk		All
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	%
A lot	233	59.0	10	52.6	292	56.0	19	55.8	57.7
A bit	139	35.0	9	47.4	191	36.7	14	41.2	36.1
Not at all	25	6.0	0	0.0	38	7.3	1	2.8	6.2
Total	397	100.0	19	100.0	521	100.0	34	100.0	100.0

The variation between groups was slight in all cases. Students who had done only work experience appeared slightly more likely to enjoy their work experience 'a lot' (59%), although the number who enjoyed it 'a lot' did not vary greatly by range of workplace engagement experienced. Those who had participated in work experience and placements were the only group who all enjoyed work experience at least 'a bit', but on the other hand they appeared to be the least likely to have enjoyed it 'a lot'.

Table 4, in a similar process of analysis, shows students' opinions about their vocational placements by the types of workplace engagement they had experienced.

Students who had experienced vocational placement and work experience appeared to be slightly more likely to have enjoyed their vocational placement 'a lot' (63.2%). Where paid work had also been undertaken, enjoyment of vocational placement was not so high. However the numbers were low and conclusions can only be tentative.

Table 4: How much students enjoyed their vocational placement, by variety of workplace engagement

	Vocational pl. only		Voc. pl. & work exp. only		Voc. pl. & paid work only		Voc. pl. & paid work & work exp.		All
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	%
A lot	3	60.0	12	63.2	3	33.3	20	57.1	56.3
A bit	1	20.0	6	31.6	6	66.7	12	34.3	37.5
Not at all	1	20.0	1	5.3	0	0.0	3	8.6	6.3
Total	5	100.0	19	100.0	9	100.0	35	100.0	56.3

Finally, table 5 shows how much students enjoyed their paid work by the variety of workplace engagement they had experienced.

Table 5: How much students enjoyed their paid jobs, by variety of workplace engagement

	Paid work only		Paid work & work exp.		Paid work & voc. pl.		All three		All
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	%
A lot	82	40.4	232	47.2	2	22.2	19	54.3	45.5
A bit	99	48.8	213	43.3	6	66.7	13	37.1	44.4
Not at all	22	10.8	47	9.6	1	11.1	3	8.6	10.1
Total	203	100.0	492	100.0	9	100.0	35	100.0	100.0

Students who had done paid work only (and one student who had also done a placement) appeared to be the most likely to have enjoyed their job 'not at all' (10.8%). Those who had experienced all three types of workplace engagement were most likely to have enjoyed their paid work 'a lot'.

The above analysis indicates that there was not a great deal of difference in enjoyment of each type of workplace activity between students who had done only one type of activity and those who had done more than one. Probably the clearest finding was that those who had done all three appeared to be the happiest in their paid jobs.

To explore further students' opinions about workplace activities, they were invited to make general comments about their work experience, paid work and vocational placements. After inspection of all the responses they were coded into categories which appeared to cover most of the opinions. The categories used for coding were:

- ❖ I enjoyed it.
- ❖ I didn't enjoy it.
- ❖ Work was boring.
- ❖ Didn't like it for other reasons (apart from 'boring').
- ❖ Clarified my career choice.
- ❖ It gave me an insight into work.
- ❖ I got a job out of it (work experience only).
- ❖ Work was disruptive to schooling/homework (paid work only).
- ❖ Work was fun.
- ❖ They didn't give me anything to do.
- ❖ Other.

Table 6 presents the findings for work experience and paid work. There were not enough replies to present the responses for vocational placements in this table. During data analysis, the results were categorised by the range of students' workplace activities (as in tables 3 to 5). There were few significant differences, and hence this categorisation is not presented in the table, although the more important differences are mentioned in the discussion beneath the table.

Table 6: General comments about work experience and paid work

	Work experience		Paid work	
	No	%	No	%
I enjoyed it	96	25.5	23	12.4
Didn't like it for other reasons (<i>apart from 'boring'</i>)	45	11.9	20	10.8
Clarified my career choice	36	9.5	1	0.5
I didn't enjoy it	25	6.6	5	2.7
Work was boring	19	5.0	7	3.8
They didn't give me anything to do	12	3.2	-	-
It gave me an insight into work	11	2.9	2	1.1
Work was fun	11	2.9	6	3.2
I got a job out of it	6	1.6	n/a	n/a
Work was disruptive to schooling/homework	n/a	n/a	24	13.0
Other	116	30.8	90	48.6
Total	377	100.0	185	100.0

The most common category of opinion expressed by those students who chose to make extra comments was that they had enjoyed their workplace experience. One quarter of work experience students and one-eighth of paid student workers offered this opinion. This table makes an interesting comparison with table 2. Table 2 indicates that 90% and 94% of paid workers and work experience students respectively, when directly asked about their enjoyment of their workplace experience, said they enjoyed it at least somewhat. However, table 6 indicates that the notion of enjoyment was not a dominant feeling in their minds when reflecting on their experience. Many of the 'other' comments were neither negative nor positive but merely gave more information. Interestingly, around 10% of all students said that work experience had clarified their career choice. The percentage was found to be highest among those who had also done paid work.

Negative comments about work experience were most likely to come from those who had only done work experience, suggesting that it may have been the first encounter with the workplace that alerted them to the negative aspects of being at work. Among those who had paid jobs, negative comments tended to outweigh positive comments. Only 15.6% of students who had jobs volunteered that their work was fun or they enjoyed it. The percentage was found to be greatest among those who had not had other forms of workplace experience.

Some representative positive and negative comments, and those illustrating the role of work experience in assisting career choices, are displayed in the box following.

WORK EXPERIENCE: General comments	
Positive	<p>I had a lot of fun; I like picking where I can go.</p> <p>Fantastic.</p> <p>I think that work experience is good for anyone who has trouble knowing what job they want to do.</p> <p>I thoroughly enjoyed my work experience; for me it was an educational and enjoyable week.</p> <p>It may have been a florist, but it was one of the funnest weeks I have ever had.</p> <p>The people were great and I learned a lot.</p> <p>The people there were nice, interesting, motivated etc.</p> <p>Work experience gave me an insight into how to work at this job and I now work there part time.</p> <p>Work experience provides another perspective of education so that when you finish school you know what you are in for.</p> <p>I enjoyed working at [company name—auto manufacturing company] because they treated me like an adult.</p> <p>Everything they did, we were allowed to do.</p> <p>They had a good training program; the staff were friendly and helpful.</p> <p>Allowed me to experiment and figure out what to do.</p>
Negative	<p>I did nothing.</p> <p>I didn't enjoy it because they used me to do the bad jobs and didn't appreciate my hard work.</p> <p>It was very boring. All I did was clean!</p> <p>I would have enjoyed my work experience more if I could have used some of the machines but due to insurance I couldn't.</p> <p>It was a waste of time.</p> <p>It was a horrible experience.</p> <p>It was like hell.</p> <p>It was the worst week of my life.</p> <p>Some places are not experienced enough to have students.</p> <p>It was at a hovel.</p> <p>It was repetitive work, I didn't get to do much except stuff the ticket packs and type up letters. BORING!</p> <p>Procrastinated on the internet.</p> <p>They were very mean and took advantage of me.</p>
Career-related	<p>I know I don't want to work in a hotel.</p> <p>I worked at a nursing home and was quite surprised at what actually happened inside.</p> <p>I found it to be superficial working in this industry.</p> <p>Helped develop my interest in seeking a career in the health industry.</p> <p>Work experience helped me to get an introduction into working life.</p> <p>It above all else has helped me decide my future career path.</p> <p>Gave me an insight into a career related to the minerals industry.</p> <p>I made great connections.</p> <p>It changed my mind; I don't know if that's what I really want to do.</p> <p>It gave me experience in child care but made me realise I won't enjoy working in that area.</p> <p>Made me decide not to become a teacher.</p>

Some of the individual comments made by students about their paid work are reproduced in the following box. A separate category is included for balancing school and work, as this issue was raised in many responses.

PAID WORK: General comments	
Positive	<p>I enjoy my job and I am glad I have it.</p> <p>I clean at the school; it's good pay and I enjoy it.</p> <p>I babysit for a number of different families. I put a flyer in letterboxes.</p> <p>It develops time management skills.</p> <p>It was party time.</p> <p>It's the best job in the world.</p> <p>My job is very physical but enjoyable.</p> <p>You get more satisfaction from a job if you get paid for it.</p> <p>Lots of fun!!</p> <p>The more I work the better because I am getting better at the job.</p> <p>They had respect for employees.</p> <p>I was given a \$29 tip.</p>
Negative	<p>Working at [company name—fast food outlet] is like child labour, it's slavery.</p> <p>It was the most horrible, abusive environment I have ever been in.</p> <p>Burnt myself.</p> <p>I work at [company name—fast food outlet] the managers are unfair and the uniform is horrid.</p> <p>I worked at [company name—supermarket] and hated it because the supervisors were horrible.</p> <p>I hated working there.</p> <p>It was not what I wanted.</p> <p>It sucked.</p> <p>I absolutely hate it.</p>
Balancing school and work	<p>I find it hard to put the effort into my homework after arriving home from work.</p> <p>I worked to 3 am on school nights, that's why I quit.</p> <p>It can be difficult to do homework while babysitting, but I usually plan my time so that I can fit in my homework some other time.</p> <p>It's on Thursday nights so it's hard if you have homework due in on Friday.</p> <p>Occasionally the job is disruptive to my schooling that is why I am cutting back my hours.</p> <p>Part time work and Year 12 is hard to cope with an uncaring boss.</p> <p>At first I enjoyed it but I was on 29 hours which made it hard to cope with school.</p> <p>My job is my release from school. I can't afford to think about school work at my work place. This means I can relax a little during Year 12.</p>

Students' opinions about vocational placement were not coded into categories because the number of responses was too small for categories to have any meaning. Some of the comments were as follows:

VOCATIONAL PLACEMENTS: General comments	
Positive	<p>Friendly environment.</p> <p>Enjoyed being part of a team.</p> <p>After having done work experience it was good.</p>
Negative	<p>The real estate agency treated me like a slave. It was not a proper placement. I learned nothing.</p> <p>Jobs were repetitive and I felt in the way and not welcome.</p> <p>The placement was boring.</p> <p>I washed dishes.</p> <p>Serving people was great but working in the kitchen was awful and the cooks were not nice.</p> <p>Even though I had been trained for the job they treated me like a five year old – that was pretty bad.</p>

The seeming preponderance of negative comments about placements was of concern. It appeared that in some cases, the students were treated no differently from work experience students although the placement is meant to be far more planned and organised³.

What were some particular things that students learned in workplaces?

A number of questions about learning were asked of students and the quantitative responses are fully analysed in the original report (Smith & Green 2001). In addition, the young people were asked to make comments on 'anything else' they had learned in each of their workplace experiences. This gave them the chance to note anything especially of interest or significance for themselves. The responses sometimes included reflective comments or what might be called 'meta-learning' or ability to learn how to learn (R M Smith 1984, p.57).

Table 7: 'Anything else learned' from work experience and from paid work

	Work experience		Paid work	
	No	%	No	%
Technical skills	24	12.1	4	5.3
Generic skills	20	10.1	21	27.6
Knowledge	6	3	1	1.3
Learning about the occupation	12	6.1	4	5.3
Learning about the organisation	8	4	7	9.2
Learning about the industry	1	0.5	1	1.3
Job keeping and political skills ⁴	1	0.5	-	-
Learning about employee relations	1	0.5	4	5.3
Learning about oneself	24	12.1	1	1.3
Learning about learning	9	4.5	-	-
Other	92	46.5	33	43.4
Total	198	100	76	100

³ It was noted in the original report (Smith & Green 2001) that as well as being few in number, the vocational placement respondents did not appear to be typical of vocational placement students in general – for example in industry area – and so these findings may not be of significance.

⁴ In this context, 'political skills' denotes an ability to understand and get on within organisational political processes.

The students' responses were coded into categories (table 7). These categories were drawn from domains of learning utilised in a study of young people's learning in their first year of full-time work (Smith 2000). A little over half of the responses could be captured by these categories.

This analysis reveals some differences between paid work and work experience. Generic skills were slightly more often mentioned in relation to paid work while technical skills tended to be more often mentioned about work experience. Learning about the organisation was more common in paid work than work experience while learning about oneself was more common in work experience.

These 198 'anything else learned' responses about work experience contained a fascinating range of learning experiences. Some of these are listed in the box below, and they illustrate the huge variety of experiences and workplaces which school students encounter on work experience, as well as the degrees of insight which students bring to their experiences (Petherbridge 1997). They are divided into positive and negative comments. The final comment in the 'positive' section is especially poignant.

Work experience: Anything else learned

Positive

After all the hype of teachers stressing how 'formal' and 'serious' work experience was, I found it relaxed, casual and heaps of fun – the teachers went a bit overboard with their warnings.

I learned a lot about the organisation itself, and what goes on behind the scenes.

I learned to do things on my own and not to rely on others.

I learned to communicate with others.

Learned to be flexible.

It was good to see how people could work efficiently as a team to get things done.

I learned how to be more patient.

I really enjoyed work experience and can't wait to get out of school.

I loved it and learnt many new and old skills.

A great experience and a helpful insight into the world of the workplace.

Flight attendant work is easy and they get good money. The hours are shocking though.

How to juggle three plates at once.

Learned about the socio economics of the area in which the kindergarten is situated.

I learned a lot about teamwork.

I was observing doctors and operations so I learnt a lot about different roles and activities of doctors and how to diagnose/treat some problems.

It involved a lot of interviews at the CSIRO, it was task oriented and learning based.

Work experience gave me a sense of direction and of what I want to do and where I want to go after school.

I experienced a woman giving birth to her child. I helped it breathe and touched it before she did; that was amazing. I also watched a mother decide whether to let her baby die, for it was having seizures at a young age. That was hard.

Negative

I learned that I didn't like hospitality.

I always thought working would be great instead of going to school but it taught me that work wasn't.

Working as a waitress hurts your feet and is boring.

It is a soul-destroying experience.

I learned absolutely nothing.

I learned how to use the photocopier extremely well.

For paid work the comments which were offered were more often negative than positive. Some examples in each category are given in the box below.

Paid work: Anything else learned
<p>Positive</p> <p>Dealing with other workers, taking responsibility.</p> <p>Helped me to be more independent, less obsessive, learned about life.</p> <p>How to deal with angry annoying customers and staff.</p> <p>How to handle difficult situations, to always stay calm.</p> <p>How to have fun at work at 4.30am on a Saturday morning.</p> <p>I learned to work in a team.</p> <p>My job made me a better person.</p> <p>To look after and care for young children.</p> <p>I learned more in my induction than I learned in school in work ed class.</p> <p>That you have to treat people differently because everyone is the same.</p> <p>This job is a great learning experience for me. I would recommend it to anyone.</p> <p>Too many to list because it's in the building trade.</p>
<p>Negative</p> <p>I've learned why I am trying to get an education when I see the wasted lives of my colleagues doing menial, low paid jobs.</p> <p>I learned it's very easy to exploit young people and my company saw nothing wrong with it.</p> <p>No I don't want to work in a kitchen, I want to be a historian.</p> <p>Made me appreciate Australia's working class and to work harder at school to avoid being part of it.</p> <p>I hated my job so much.</p> <p>I have learned nothing.</p> <p>It is simply boring.</p> <p>Managers need to listen to staff.</p> <p>I learned how to be ripped off.</p> <p>That everyone is meant to be equal but not at work.</p>

There were only a small number of comments about 'anything else learned' on vocational placements. These included both positive and negative comments, as follows:

Vocational placement: Anything else learned
<p>Positive</p> <p>Generally how to work.</p> <p>I enhanced my work experience.</p> <p>I learned about the industry.</p> <p>I learned teamwork.</p> <p>Phone skills, computer and reception work.</p>
<p>Negative</p> <p>How to sell your soul.</p> <p>I learned that it is as easy to get a bad work experience as a good one.</p> <p>It's a harsh industry – it discouraged me from pursuing a hospitality career.</p> <p>Work placement is a waste of time.</p>

How did what students learned at school help them in workplaces?

This section examines how student learning transferred to the workplace and vice versa. Table 8 shows the students' views about how much their school learning helped them in work experience.

Table 8: How much what was learned at school helped in work experience

	No	Percentage
A lot	124	12.7
Some	275	28.1
A bit	265	27.1
Not at all	315	32.2
Total	979	100.0

This table depicts the *amount* of learning which students thought was transferred. In general, students did not report a great deal of transfer of learning from school to work experience. In order to examine *what types* of learning were transferred, students' qualitative comments (where given) were coded into categories. The categories were derived partly from the Mayer generic competencies (AEC/MOVEET 1993) but some extra categories were added. In table 9, the findings from this analysis are categorised by the *extent* to which students found that school helped them on work experience.

Table 9: Learning transferred from school to work experience

	A lot		Some		A bit		All	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Communication in writing	11	23.9	20	18.7	28	34.1	59	25.1
Verbal communication	2	4.3	10	9.3	7	8.5	19	8.0
Planning and organising	1	2.2	3	2.8	1	1.2	5	2.1
Working in teams			5	4.7	2	2.4	7	3.0
Using your initiative	6	13	3	2.8	6	7.3	15	6.4
Solving problems	1	2.2	3	2.8	3	3.7	7	3.0
How to behave at work	4	8.7	17	15.9	9	11.0	30	12.8
How to behave properly/manners	2	4.3	2	1.9	8	9.8	12	5.1
Specific skills	6	13	16	15	7	8.5	29	12.3
Specific preparation for work experience	5	10.9	10	9.3	7	8.5	22	9.4
School had no value	3	6.5	4	3.7	4	4.9	11	4.7
School and work are different	1	2.2					1	0.4
Other	4	8.7	14	13.1			18	7.7
Total	46	100.0	107	100.0	82	100.0	235	100.0

It is difficult to see clear patterns in these responses. Written communication was the largest category and perhaps significantly, it was referred to most often by those who saw less transfer between school and work experience – perhaps such students were struggling to think of something they did at school that they also did at work. 'Specific skills' and 'how to behave at work' were reasonably substantial categories across all degrees of transference.

Interestingly only 9.4% of those students offering comments referred specifically to special preparation for work experience. This might suggest that schools were not being as pro-active as they might in preparing students for work experience. This may or may not reflect more

general concerns about the role of schools in preparing students for work (if an assumption can be made that work experience can equate to work in general).

Some of the individual comments made by students about how their school learning helped in work experience are recorded in the box below.

Transfer of learning from school to work experience
I used many of my subjects.
School taught me how to be polite, courteous, organised etc.
By asking questions.
Computer skills, communication (written and oral).
I knew how to act and could carry out and understand the instructions.
I learned over the years how teachers taught.
School told me how to dress appropriately for the work experience job.
How to speak to people on the phone.
English skills in writing especially grammar.
Doing stocktaking, adding things up.
How to get young students to co-operate.
Computing lessons paid off.
Just general social skills and problem solving.
Learning how to work in a group with others.
When the teachers yell it's like the boss.
Wearing a uniform, being polite.
Cooking skills.
I need the knowledge I learnt at school to understand what was happening.
Just how to act (politely), ask questions, wear the right clothes, take the initiative.

The comments of students who said that learning had not transferred from school to work experience at all were coded in a different way to capture the different types of answers given by this group (table 10).

Table 10: Reasons for no learning transferring from school to work experience

	No	Percentage
School had no value	5	15.2
Didn't like school	1	3.0
School is different/not relevant to work	26	78.8
Other	1	3.0
Total	33	100.0

Most of these students saw little connection between school and work experience, and a smaller number generally felt negative about school. Some of their comments included:

Transfer of learning from school to work experience – negative comments

Because you don't get taught customer skills at school.
 I didn't learn anything at school.
 Nothing in school curriculum relating to type of work undertaken.
 Because the skills learnt weren't relevant to school.
 School has nothing to do with work.
 All I was allowed to do was observe.

How much learning transferred in the opposite direction – from work experience to school – is set out in table 11, which is reproduced from the original report.

Table 11: How much learning transferred from work experience to school.

	No	Percentage
A lot	95	9.8
Some	207	21.3
A bit	278	28.6
Not at all	391	40.3
Total	971	100.0

Source: (Smith & Green 2001, p.70)

The results here suggest that some transfer of learning back from work experience to school was present but was not substantial, with three-fifths of students reporting transfer but less than a third reporting more than 'a bit' of transfer. Student comments on *how* learning was transferred from work experience to school were coded into categories for further examination (table 12). 'Generic skills' covers all responses relating to the first six categories in table 9. As previously, the table presents the responses in separate columns depending on *how much* the student felt their learning had transferred.

Table 12: Learning transferred from work experience to school

	A lot		Some		A bit		All	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Helped decide career path	8	21.1	6	12.2	6	6.8	20	11.4
Encouraged to stay at school	4	10.5	1	2.0	2	2.3	7	4.0
Specific skills	6	15.8	8	16.3	13	14.8	27	15.3
Generic skills	8	21.1	16	32.7	37	42.0	61	35.7
Manners/how to behave properly			2	4.1	2	2.3	4	2.3
Work experience of no value			1	2.0	6	6.8	7	4.0
Didn't like work experience							1	0.6
Work experience and school are different things					3	3.4	3	1.7
Other	12	31.6	15	30.6	19	21.6	46	2.6
Total	38	100.0	49	100.0	88	100.0	176	100.0

Generic skills and specific skills were the most commonly nominated types of learning that transferred from work experience to school, according to these students. Interestingly of those who said that a lot of learning transferred back to school, one-fifth said that work experience had helped clarify their career path and one-tenth said it had made them decide to stay on at school. Some individual comments are listed in the box below.

Transfer of learning from work experience to school

Able to choose my career path.
Helped me excel in computers course.
I know an employer is looking for good grades.
It made me want to stay at school rather than leave and get a job.
My marks have gone up, I realise the importance of a job, I feel very confident.
To know that you can work as hard in an office as in a factory and get paid twice, three times as much.
Working better with people I don't know.
Better medical knowledge.
Experience of the real world.
Different aspects or ways to go about different tasks.
I can apply techniques I learned socially and physically.
Knowledge about mining and the environment helps at school.
Made me a person.
More sensible than I used to be.
I ask teachers questions more often.
I realised school is useless.
My creative side.
Sometimes I see relationships between advertising and what I am learning.
All of my schoolwork is written, not hands on.
Answering the telephone doesn't help with school.
I didn't learn anything.
It had nothing to do with school.

Table 13 displays the extent of learning which students said transferred from school to paid work.

Table 13: How much learning transferred from school to paid work

	No	Percentage
A lot	42	6.2
Some	143	21.2
A bit	140	20.8
Not at all	349	51.8
Total	674	100.0

The 169 comments offered about *how* learning transferred from school to their paid jobs were coded into the same categories as for work experience (see table 9) to illustrate the types of learning that transferred (table 14).

Table 14: What type of learning transferred from school to paid work, by amount of learning

	A lot		Some		A bit		All	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Communication in writing	-	-	5	6.2	10	14.5	15	18.9
Verbal communication	1	5.3	6	7.4	7	10.1	14	8.3
Planning and organising	1	5.3	2	2.5	1	1.4	4	2.4
Working in teams	-	0.0	8	9.9	5	7.2	13	7.7
Using your initiative	1	5.3	1	1.2	1	1.4	3	1.8
Solving problems	-	0.0	1	1.2	1	1.4	2	1.2
How to behave at work	1	5.3	-	0.0	5	7.2	6	3.6
How to behave/manners	1	5.3	4	4.9	9	13.0	14	8.3
Specific skills	10	52.6	35	43.2	17	24.6	62	36.7
Preparation for job	1	5.3	-	-	-	-	1	0.6
School had no value	-	-	1	1.2	-	-	1	0.6
Other	3	15.8	18	22.2	13	18.8	34	20.1
Total	19	100.0	81	100.0	69	69.0	169	100.0

Specific skills were the most commonly nominated form of learning that transferred from school to paid work. At 36.7% of all students who chose to comment, this category was noticeably bigger than for work experience (table 9), where only 12.3% of students gave this response. This might suggest that, unlike paid work, work experience was more likely to involve activities which were new to the students. As with work experience, written communication was nominated fairly often, and more often by those who felt that the amount of transfer was least. Some individual comments are given in the box below. Some of these responses (e.g. 'using a cash register') indicate that students were finding paid work in areas where they had undertaken vocational courses.

Transfer of learning from school to paid work

Maths.
 I was well prepared and knew what terms meant.
 Food and nutrition classes.
 Dealing with children, using a cash register.
 Taught me to be polite, level headed, to listen and do what I am asked.
 To sing.
 Computer work.
 How to get along with people.
 Logic.
 Problem solving classes.
 Responsibility.
 A bit of background knowledge in woodwork.
 Business studies.
 Discipline.
 Healthy food handling.
 I knew not to argue with my managers.
 Using your brain.

Students who said that no learning transferred from school to work generally commented that school was different from the workplace or they made disparaging remarks about school.

Their comments were very similar to those students who said that no learning transferred from school to work experience.

Transfer from paid work to school was very similar to the other way around, although slightly lower (table 15).

Table 15: How much learning transferred from paid work to school

	No	Percentage
A lot	39	5.9
Some	128	19.4
A bit	148	22.4
Not at all	346	52.3
Total	661	100.0

Student comments on learning that transferred from paid work to school were coded into categories for analysis similar to those used for transfer from work experience to school (table 16).

Table 16: What type of learning transferred from paid work to school, by amount of learning

	A lot		Some		A bit		All	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Helped decide career path	1	5.0	-	-	1	2.0	2	1.5
Encouraged to stay at school	1	5.0	1	1.6	-	-	2	1.5
Specific skills	2	10.0	11	17.5	9	18.4	22	16.7
Generic skills	8	40.0	32	50.8	32	65.3	72	54.5
Manners/how to behave	5	25.0	7	11.1	-	-	12	9.1
Other	3	15.0	12	19.0	7	14.3	22	16.7
Total	20	100.0	63	100.0	49	100.0	132	100.0

Generic skills and manners appeared to be more commonly transferred from paid work to school than from work experience to school. Paid work did not appear to have much effect upon career decision making, unlike work experience. Some individual comments are listed below.

In the study 71 placement students answered questions about links between school and placements. Analysis in the original report (Smith & Green 2001, p.70) showed that 33 (46%) of these students said that a lot of learning had transferred to the placement from their related course of study, 19 (27%) said that some learning transferred and 12 (17%) said 'a bit' of learning transferred. Only 7 (10%) students thought there was no transfer of learning. One student said 'I wouldn't have managed the week without it (having done the course)'. Others mentioned specific skills or industry knowledge. There appeared to be less transfer from the placement back to the related course; 28% said there was no transfer of learning and only 25% said there was a lot. Those who commented referred mainly to 'experience' and 'practical work'. However, the original report noted that vocational placements were more likely to assist at school in general than either work experience or paid work.

Transfer of learning from paid work to school

Confidence.
Handling stress.
I want to finish school and get a real job. I never want to work in a place like that again.
Patience, initiative, independence.
Time management.
Communicating with teachers.
Better at maths through experience.
Computer skills.
I'm more organised.
I am more polite to everyone.
More accurate in schoolwork.
Using tools.
First aid.
In music lessons – performing.
Money handling.
Team work.
Helps to understand relevance of school work.

How did learning transfer between the different types of experience?

This section examines how learning transferred *between* the different types of workplace experience. Unfortunately, only a small number of placement students answered relevant questions, so only work experience and paid work are discussed here. Table 17 shows the types of learning which transferred from paid jobs to work experience, taken from students' qualitative responses to a question on the transfer of learning, which were coded into the categories in the table.

Table 17: Types of learning that transferred from paid job to work experience

	Frequency	Percentage
Communication in writing	19	11.7
Verbal communication	7	4.3
Planning and organising	1	0.6
Working in teams	5	3.1
Using your initiative	5	3.1
How to behave at work	5	3.1
Specific skills	9	5.5
Preparation for work experience	1	0.6
Students did not value paid job	13	8.0
Paid job and work experience are different	5	3.1
Customer service skills	43	26.4
Other	50	30.7
Total	163	100.0

Table 17 shows clearly that customer service skills were the most important type of learning that transferred from paid work to work experience. Communication in writing and verbal communication were also reasonably common. A variety of specific skills were mentioned by the students, including:

- ❖ handling animals
- ❖ bookwork
- ❖ mechanics

When the responses for transfer of learning from work experience to paid jobs were analysed they were found to be very similar to the above, although with less of an emphasis on customer service. Some of the more insightful comments included:

- ❖ allowed you to negotiate the workplace with an understanding of how things worked and what had to be done
- ❖ having the will and initiative to do well
- ❖ respecting those above you
- ❖ that it is more fun to learn on the job and get paid

What reasons did the students give for the superiority of one form of workplace engagement over another?

Students were asked to compare what they learned from their different types of workplace activity. The original report (Smith & Green 2001, p.67) showed that 65.6% of those who had done both paid work and work experience said that they learned most from paid work, although 68.4% said that work experience was still useful. Of those who had done vocational placements as well there was less of a bias towards paid work.

In order to see whether different types of students learned more from paid work or from work experience, the findings were cross-tabulated against (self-reported) family finances, school marks⁵ and intended post-school destinations. Vocational placements could not be analysed because the numbers were too small. Tables 18, 19 and 20 show the results.

Table 18: Learned more from work experience or paid job? By family finances (self-reported)

Family finances	Learned more from work experience		Learned more from paid job		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Above average	48	36.9	82	63.1	130	100.0
About average	140	34.6	265	65.4	405	100.0
Below average	10	27.0	27	73.0	37	100.0
Total	198	34.6	374	65.4	572	100.0

Table 19: Learned more from work experience or paid job? By school marks (self-reported)

School marks	Learned more from work experience		Learned more from paid job		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Above average	59	36.6	102	63.4	161	100.0
About average	127	34.8	238	65.2	365	100.0
Below average	9	22.0	32	78.0	41	100.0
Total	195	34.4	372	65.6	567	100.0

⁵ The percentages of students who classed themselves as below average family finances and below average academically were lower than might be expected; hence it can be assumed that those who classed themselves as below average were firmly in these categories.

Tables 18 and 19 suggest a tendency for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds and with lower academic achievement to report more learning from paid work than work experience. This is consistent with the findings in the original report that such students also enjoyed paid work more than work experience (Smith & Green 2001, p.58). These findings suggest that such students might be more likely to identify more closely with, and be open to learning more from, workplace experiences which are more closely aligned to the 'real' world of work.

Table 20: Learned more from work experience or paid job? By intended post-school destination

Post school destination	Learned more from work experience		Learned more from paid job		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
University full-time ⁶	111	33.8	217	66.2	328	100.0
TAFE full-time	15	28.3	38	71.7	53	100.0
Apprenticeship	15	44.1	19	55.9	34	100.0
Traineeship	5	45.5	6	54.5	11	100.0
Other full- or part-time work	6	21.4	22	78.6	28	100.0
Not sure	33	38.8	52	61.2	85	100.0
Other	10	40.0	15	60.0	25	100.0
Total	195	34.4	372	65.6	564	100.0

Table 20, which divides respondents according to their intended post-school destination, is slightly more difficult to interpret. Those students who were headed for apprenticeships or traineeships appeared to be more inclined to report better learning outcomes from work experience than the average, and certainly more than those who wanted to go into full-time work without a contract of training. In addition those who were unsure of their post-school destination were also slightly more inclined than the average to learn more from work experience, possibly because they appreciated its function of allowing them to try out a different working environment. However those headed for full-time study, particularly at TAFE, showed a greater than average appreciation of learning from paid work.

Among those students who said that paid work was the form of workplace experience in which they learned most, 71% said that this was mainly due to the length of time spent in the workplace. Table 21 analyses the qualitative responses of the 29% who attributed it to other factors. The responses were coded into six categories, which covered all of the responses.

Table 21: Reason learned more from paid job than work experience ('Other' factors apart from length of time spent in the workplace)

	No	Percentage
More hands on	6	14.3
More responsibility	10	23.8
Like it better	10	23.8
More interesting	3	7.1
Treated better	3	7.1
You get paid	10	23.8
Total	42	100.0

⁶ The percentage of students who gave university as their post-school destination was 54.7%, well above the percentage of Australian school students who do go straight to university. This indicates that the sample might have been somewhat biased and also that some students were probably hoping or intending to go to university but were unlikely to achieve that goal.

'Getting paid', 'greater responsibility' and 'liking it better' were the most common reasons advanced by students for learning more from paid work than from work experience. Some of the individual comments are given in the box below. It was clear that these students felt more engaged both with workplace tasks and with other workers; the environment to them was more authentic. Such observations are in line with findings of writers such as Billett (1994) concerning the authenticity of workplace learning.

Reasons for learning more from paid work (apart from length of time)
Able to interact with people more.
Because of the constant learning.
Because I only observed in work experience.
Better experience, longer period of time, better training, completely different job to my work experience.
I had to learn everything as soon as possible to avoid losing profit from the business.
I had to learn to keep the job; people relied on me.
I think you learn more because there are more responsibilities.
I was more comfortable and treated like an adult.
In work experience the workers see you as not really mattering because you are only there for a while.
I was able to take part and have more fun.
More hands on.
The employers are more willing to teach because you are contributing to their workplace.
You felt more alive.
People were nicer, I was trained properly, different atmosphere.

Although students reported learning more from paid work than work experience, they still appeared to feel that work experience was valuable. As already mentioned 68.4% who had engaged in both types of workplace activity said that, despite having had paid work, they still found work experience useful. Table 22 analyses the responses of the 83 students who gave reasons for this opinion. Responses were coded into categories. This table is followed by a box displaying a selection of individual comments.

Table 22: Why work experience was still useful even if you had paid work

	Frequency	Percentage
Gave me positive direction for career path	18	21.7
Gave me negative direction for career path	4	4.8
Gave me experience of a different area of work	32	38.6
Gave me an insight into an industry	7	8.4
The two were connected	22	26.5
Total	83	100.0

Once again there were very small numbers of placement students answering the relevant qualitative questions. Those who valued paid work more than placements appeared to attribute their preference mainly to being paid. The students were asked if they still found the placement useful if they had paid work; 61.2% said they did. The small number of students who gave reasons mainly referred to the placement being in a career area and also to the opportunity in their placement for learning communication skills.

The qualitative data strongly confirms the finding from the case studies in the original report that the special value of work experience is in exploring careers and different types of workplaces. The comments about paid work underline the value of authentic engagement in a workplace as a full member of the paid workforce. It seems therefore that both types of activity are valuable and neither can substitute fully for the other.

Reasons for finding work experience useful despite having had paid work

Because I get a good view of the working world.

Because I was able to experience a different occupation.

Because it gave me a clearer idea of my career path.

Because it was different.

Because work experience is in an area where I would like a future career.

Focus on younger children.

Gave an insight into working.

It broadened my view of careers.

I got to learn about different business methods and ideas.

It wasn't for a family member.

It was fun.

More serious, offered different kind of work.

Work experience was in different area from paid work, learnt what hospital life is like for health workers.

Working with skilled people.

Conclusion

The analysis of the qualitative data from the 2000 survey, and the additional quantitative analysis, provides some interesting insights into students' experience while in workplaces and the differences between their experiences, particularly between paid work and work experience. While there are no outstanding new discoveries that were not covered in the original report, other literature and anecdotal evidence from those working in the field, nonetheless the students' comments provide supporting evidence for some major perceptions about workplace experiences. These include:

- ❖ The major learning outcomes of work experience are to gain initial experience of workplaces (broader experience for those already working) and to give insights into possible career areas.
- ❖ Work experience can be a time of *great* learning or of *little* learning depending on the workplace environment.
- ❖ Paid work can be unpleasant and one of its learning outcomes can be to nudge students into completing their schooling.
- ❖ Students vary in the amount of learning which they are able to attain from their workplace experiences.
- ❖ Students of lower academic achievement and lower socio-economic status are more likely than the average to value paid work above work experience.

While the comments about paid work were quite often negative, they need to be offset against the general finding that the vast majority of students did enjoy their jobs, at least a little. Also the quantitative responses to the survey (as reported in Smith & Green 2001) indicated good learning outcomes from paid work. However, the qualitative responses did indicate that some student-workers felt exploited and very negative about their jobs. The preponderance of negative comments amongst those who chose to make qualitative comments about paid work helps to explain the negative views held by some policy-makers and school teachers about part-time work. Clearly these views are informed by anecdotes which are confirmed by the analysis in this paper but which do not appear to be representative of the experiences of the majority of student-workers. The negative comments that were made may be of interest to those companies which employ large numbers of student workers. Such companies often find it difficult to retain their student workers on a longer-term basis and these comments may help to explain why.

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