

Department of Labour  
TE TARI MAHI



# School Children in Paid Employment: A summary of research findings

Strategic Policy, Research and Evaluation

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## **Acknowledgement**

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## Introduction

New Zealand has a tradition of school children (including young adults under 18 years) participating in paid employment on a part time basis during the school term and, often for longer hours, during term breaks. Reflecting the Department of Labour's high level goal of *productive work and high quality working lives*, the Department is actively working to develop productive, high performing work places that have fair, safe and healthy workplace cultures<sup>1</sup>. For school children in work its particularly important that these early work experiences are rewarding (productive for employers and beneficial to employees), fair (reflecting reasonable working conditions, where employers and employees comply with employment relations regulatory standards) and safe (workplaces and workplace practices are healthy and protect individuals from physical or psychological harm). Further, reflecting the Department's strategic interest in building a skilled workforce, that participation does not compromise medium term educational outcomes and longer term employment prospects.

Consequently, the Department of Labour, and New Zealand society more generally, is building its understanding of school children's participation in employment. While still in development, our knowledge base has improved markedly since the turn of the century, when Alison Todd observed that "In New Zealand there is little investigation into adolescent employment" (Todd, 2001, p10). Since this time there have been a number of studies that have helped to build a picture of the extent to which children and young adults aged 11-17 years are engaged in employment, their employment conditions and experiences and the effects of their employment upon educational and subsequent employment outcomes. This paper summarises the state of knowledge in New Zealand, drawing a picture based on published research and more recent analysis of new and existing data sets over the past decade.

The broader context is the international and local debate surrounding the effects of employment on school children (Larson et al., 1999, Todd, 2001; Bachman et al., 2003; Woodhead, 2004; Gasson, et al 2005; Ramchand et al., 2007). Supporters of children's' participation in employment say that moderate amounts of part time work is positive for children, building life experience, confidence, financial and time management skills, a sense of responsibility and other human capital qualities likely to facilitate improved employment outcomes in later life. Others, echoing an international debate on "child labour", worry that children are vulnerable to exploitation, may be more acutely exposed to occupational stress, injury or illness, may be more susceptible to negative behaviours (e.g. substance abuse) and, due to competing time commitments, risk poor educational outcomes. While some concerned voices argue for the abolishment of "child labour" others want tighter restrictions placed on children's employment in NZ (e.g. introduction of a minimum age for paid work outside the home) and/or existing regulations more rigorously enforced (e.g. restricted 'light' duties only for children under 15).

While NZ educators are generally supportive of students engaging in part time work in principle (Gasson et al., 2003), they do voice concerns. Concerns relate to some students working long hours (impacting on school performance) and/or being exposed to health and safety risks through the

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Labour Statement of Intent 2009/10 – 2012/13.  
<http://www.dol.govt.nz/publications/general/gen-statement-of-intent.asp>

course of performing their duties. International studies have identified that most students gain positive educational and personal outcomes from participation in part time work and do not necessarily suffer personally or academically so long as it is kept within moderate or “reasonable” limits - up to a general threshold. Pinpointing of this threshold varies across authors from 10 -20 hours (e.g. Quirk, Keith and Quirk, 2001; Mihalic and Elliot, 1997; Stern and Briggs, 2001). In the New Zealand context this has been estimated to be about 15 hours per week by Gasson et al (2003) and, more liberally, twenty hours per week by Maloney (Maloney, 2004).

This paper summarises the state of knowledge surrounding New Zealand school children in employment to early 2010. It brings together formative publications from earlier in the decade, more recent research findings and reports summary findings from analyses undertaken by the Department of Labour (with support from key research partners) on a number of existing (and previously unanalysed for this purpose) data sets. Key themes in research finding are identified and gaps in our knowledge, along opportunities for further research, are proposed.

## **Discussion**

### **Key Findings**

Currently we know a lot about the extent to which school children participate in paid employment in New Zealand, and the conditions of their employment. There are gaps in our understandings however, indicate that this knowledge is substantive but not comprehensive.

#### *Participation*

We do know that participation in part time employment is a common activity for many NZ school children, with children, particularly females, increasingly likely to participate as they get older. While around a fifth of 11 year olds are in regular part time work (mainly boys), by age 16 more than half of students are (with a slightly higher proportion being female). Overall European and Maori school children are more likely to work than students identifying as Pacific or Asian.

Students appear to be primarily motivated by money to work – typically for spending on things for themselves, while a small proportion, typically older students, are saving for study related reasons. While relatively few students are working to get money for their families, students from higher deprivation areas and Pacific students are more likely than other groups to. Notably, these populations are also more likely to work longer hours.

Students are participating in a range of roles – which vary substantially by sex and change as school children get older. Younger students are most likely to be doing babysitting and cleaning (mainly females) and outdoors work like gardening and newspaper deliveries (mainly males). As children get older they become increasingly likely predominantly work in the retail and hospitality industries.

Most students in part time work, work moderate hours – with two thirds working less than ten hours a week, while around 15%, mainly older, female students, are working more than 15 hours a week. Most young students (14 and under) work less than 5 hours a week. Students typically work 1-3 days per week, with more than half of those in work working on the previous Saturday. While it appears that relatively brief periods of work after school is more common during the week, particularly for younger students, many students, particularly older students, are undertaking longer day and (likely)

evening shifts on the weekend. Of concern six percent of students are working more than 20 hours a week – a figure generally considered excessive and likely to impact on educational outcomes. Students working excessive hours are most likely to be older, male, from rural and/or high deprivation areas and of Pacific, and to a lesser extent Maori, ethnicity. It appears that long hours are being primarily accumulated during the weekends, in combination with weekday work

### *Employment Conditions*

The research literature suggests that awareness of employment rights is low, coupled with low rates of union membership and a fifty/fifty likelihood of having a formal written employment agreement. Larger organisations appear to be more likely to have formal written agreements, while smaller or less formal family related arrangements are less likely. Lack of awareness of rights coupled with low union membership presents risks for school children, who are generally seen as being more vulnerable than older workers. While incidences of low pay and exposure to health and safety hazards are reported, the evidence suggests that economic exploitation and hazardous work environments are not the norm.

As expected school children earn more money per hour and each week as they get older, reflecting the skills and responsibilities attached to particular occupations, along with legal obligations for paying 16 and 17 year olds a minimum rate. We know that most school children are reasonably well paid. School children are increasingly likely to receive the minimum wage set for 16 and 17 year olds as they get older, with many 14 and fifteen year olds receiving the traditional 80% of the adult wage for 16 and 17 year olds and many 16 and 17 year olds receiving the adult minimum wage. Reflecting age related rates of pay and hours worked, 13 and 14 year olds are most likely to take home between \$20-50 per week, while 15-17 year olds are more likely to take home \$50-100, with over a third of 16 year olds and over 40% of 17 year olds taking home more than \$100 per week.

Of concern, nearly 10% of 16 year olds and 5% of 17 year olds reported earning less than the Youth Minimum Wage at the time of the study. Further, there is some indicative data that some students may be earning low hourly rates, with a small proportion earning less than 2 dollars an hour in 2003 (less than a third of the minimum wage for 16 and 17 year old youth at the time). While this may reflect a lack of rights awareness for some school children, or lack of assertiveness or choice, it may also reflect confusion for children in the calculation and reporting of hourly rates and methodological issues employed in the research. Without more context surrounding these findings, and more robust methodology, its difficult to say if these instances of low pay are inappropriate, or indeed, represent evidence of a measurable rate of unfair employment practices and economic exploitation of school children in New Zealand.

Injuries are a common and occasionally serious occurrence in children's workplaces, with one sixth of secondary school students in part time work injured in the past year and one fifth reportedly injured *at some stage* in their current part-time job. While half of these injuries appear to be relatively minor, a fifth were severe enough to warrant a visit to a medical professional or facility. While relatively few of the injured children blamed their employers, it appears that employers are not particularly effective in raising school children's awareness of hazards nor their HSE rights and responsibilities, with a third of workers indicating that their employers had not provided any information about work place hazard, and may be lacking in providing adequate training and supervision for the tasks at hand. This indicates that many employers are not acting in compliance

with Health and Safety legislation which gives responsibility to an employer for identifying, managing and providing information on hazards. Many young workers appear to trust their employers to the extent that they will do work that they consider unsafe, while a small proportion will do an unsafe task because they are afraid they will lose their job if they do not. This may be putting young people at greater risk of injury.

### *Impacts*

Echoing the international literature, New Zealand studies indicate that part time employment during the school term, when limited to a moderate number of hours, does not have a negative impact on scholastic achievements or subsequent employment outcomes and may in fact provide more than financial benefits to students – in terms of qualifications achieved and later employment outcomes. For Meyer et al (2009) optimal levels of year 10 and 11 students sit at around 6-10 hours per week, however any level of work appears to be better than none, up to a detected threshold of 15 hours per week. Similarly, some participation in sport is associated with higher NCEA level achievement than none at all or too much, suggesting that care givers may have a critical role to play in supporting and monitoring their children's out of school extra-curricular activities.

## **Gaps in Data Availability**

While we know a lot about school students' employment practices, there are a number of gaps to our knowledge base. This section highlights key information gaps identified during the process of this review.

### *Participation*

- *Primary and Intermediate populations:* We know a lot about secondary school students' participation in work, but relatively less about intermediate students, due to reliance on fewer, less recent and non-nationally representative surveys. We do know that a small proportion of intermediate students started working during their primary school years, however we know very little about these students' work participation and conditions. Future research could focus on building up our knowledge of employment practices for primary and secondary school children, including extent, types of work, pay, hours and other conditions of employment, accident rates and possible impacts on schooling and other developmental activities
- *Occupations and types of work:* Our knowledge of occupations and tasks performed by students is broad ranging and informative but at times sketchy. In part this is because there is little consistency in occupational typology used across studies. Further, in the only nationally representative study capturing occupations for secondary students, large proportions were doing 'other work'. In this context we cannot be confident we know the extent of roles youth are undertaking and the true proportions there-in. A more comprehensive list of options for youth in future studies would be desirable. Further we could be clearer about the types of work young students are doing and the extent to which they may be transgressing 'light duty' restrictions for under 15 year olds. It may be that the categories available from official statistics do not provide meaningful categories for younger students.

- *Reasons for working long hours:* While we know that a small proportion of secondary school students work excessive (20+) hours, and that students from low deprivation areas and Pacific students are most likely to work long hours, we do not know reasons why and the extent to which this may be due to factors such as cultural values or financial necessity. There is some evidence that family needs may be underlying this choice for some families and it would be good to know more about this as the wider research literature suggests that excessive hours may impact negatively on educational outcomes.
- *Times of study:* People working excessive hours are likely to be working both during the week and on weekends. As there is evidence to suggest that long hours may be impacting on student's academic performance, it would be useful to know more about when students working long hours are studying and the number of hours they spend in study and other extracurricular activities relative to other students.
- *Times of work:* While we have a good understanding of how many hours per week students are working and the number of days these are spread across (typically 1-3 days), we are currently not able to determine times of work for each day in work (e.g. morning, afternoon and nights over weekdays vs weekends). Overall this is a gap in our knowledge that requires more considered research and analysis. Further, we do not have a good understanding of which industries and occupations people working long hours are working in, though it is likely that rural students are working in agriculture. Future research might usefully focus on determining which industries are most likely to have students working long hours and, if this is indicative of this industry more generally.
- *Late night work:* We know there are a substantial number of students of all ages undertaking early morning and late night work (between 10pm and 6am). We do not know the extent to which this is illegal and the extent to which this may be during the school week vs weekend work. If it is during the week, this may be of concern as the risk of interference with school work may be higher.

#### *Conditions*

- *Employment agreements:* While we know that around half of students in work have employment agreements, and that these tend to be older students working for larger organisations, we know relatively little about the nature of these agreements, including whether they are collective or individual agreements, whether employees are considered casual or permanent employees, union membership and leave provisions (e.g. holiday pay, sick leave, special leave and annual leave). Also, we do not know the reasons why some employers, likely to be smaller organisations and those reflecting family related arrangements, are less to have agreements and if this absence is reflected in other elements of employment law not being implemented (see below).
- *Provisions of health and safety information:* With student awareness of hazards and reported receipt of health and safety information from employers appearing low, we most visibly lack a profile of who is most likely to be providing students with health and safety information as required under the HSE Act (1992). Future research could focus on employers practice and perceptions of meeting HSE acts requirements to inform employees of workplace hazards and providing adequate levels of training and supervision. Are

employers with formal agreements more likely to be mindful of these responsibilities? Are some industries more likely than others?

- *Awareness of Employment Rights:* Relatedly, research suggests employees lack awareness of their basic employment rights. Again, are employers with formal agreements more likely to be mindful of their responsibilities to impart this information to employees? This seems to be an important milestone in preventing exploitative or unsafe practices, as Pugh (2007) found that just under three percent did something unsafe because they did not want to be fired.
- *Pay rates:* While we have a good sense of pay ranges we do not know the full extent to which some children may be being poorly paid or not paid for the work they do. In the absence of a minimum hourly wage rate for youth under 16 years of age, there remain strong risks of exploitation as cheap labour. While some surveys indicate low pay rates may be happening to a small degree and even below minimum levels for 16 and 17 year olds, methodological issues regarding national representativeness, definitions of paid work and the level of detail in data collection compound our ability to fully understand these outcomes. More systematic research on wage rates is required, for us to determine the extent to which low pay rates are being paid to school children and which groups may be more vulnerable to this. In part, researchers may need to work with students to robustly determine the hourly rate of pay – which would need to be collected in meaningful categories that would capture low pay rates or with specific amounts. Definitions of work would need to be tightly defined in this instance and linked to employer and industry and occupational types.
- *Prevalence of injuries, accidents and workplace hazards:* While it appears that injuries at work are common for school children, and some industries are more prone to injury and harm than others (in Taranaki this is construction, postal/transport and agriculture), we currently do not have nationally representative profile of injury rates for school children by industry and the types of injury sustained by and risks exposed to individuals in particular environments. Some studies (e.g. the Caritas report discussed in the introduction to this paper which uses open ended questions) have indicated that some children have been exposed to a number of health related risks (including exposure to alcohol and heavy machinery), but while these appear to be relatively isolated incidents we do not know how prevalent they may be. Direct questioning may be useful in a nationally representative survey – possibly along the lines of “Have you even been offered X or done any of the following...?”

### *Impacts*

- *Educational and employment outcomes:* While we can be confident that moderate amounts of employment do not impact negatively on secondary school children’s educational grades and qualifications and later employment as an adult, we do not know where, specifically any threshold lies and how this could vary by age. Current estimates appear to lie around 10-20 hours per week for secondary school students. While one study suggests that 6-10 hours part time work per week is optimal, and that up to 15 hours a week can also have a positive effect on educational grades, this outcome was not consistent for each year of investigation, and, as more detailed analysis was not possible due to data collection methods, the issue

remains somewhat ambiguous. Ideally a means to more confidently and specifically identifying the threshold for the number of hours in work, after which point positive effects are not observed or negative effects are detected, is required. Further, we do not know if optimal amounts of work vary according to the level of involvement in other extra-curricular activities such as sport or babysitting.

- *Health behaviours:* Another area of interest missing from the New Zealand research literature concerns the influence of adult workplaces and early exposure to negative health behaviours and lifestyles on children's subsequent development. The international literature suggests that exposure to alcohol, drugs and tobacco in workplaces can increase the likelihood of students subsequently taking up these negative health behaviours from a young age (Ramchand et al, 2003; Bachman, et al.,2003). In this context the Caritas (2003) study, which found that some students reported being able to access alcohol in the workplace, highlights at least one possible longer term risk for students.

## Research in the Pipeline

A number of research projects are currently under way which will assist in building our understanding of school children's experience of employment as an extracurricular activity. We plan to keep abreast of these developments, to provide input where required, and to provide links to relevant publications moving forward. Current activities include:

1. *Impacts analysis: Two studies using data from the longitudinal Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development study:*<sup>2</sup>
  - a. *Effects of part time employment on education and employment outcomes:* As indicated in the Impacts on Education and Employment Outcomes section to this report – the DMHDS research on the effects of part time employment for children aged 11-15 years on educational and subsequent employment outcomes is currently being reviewed for publication in an international journal. This has resulted in details not being able to be included in this report. As previously indicated, advanced viewing of this research suggests that this report, once published, will compliment, validate and add new insights into the existing NZ literature. It is expected that this research will be published in 2010/2011.
  - b. *Effects of working on employees' health behaviours.* As indicated by the international literature (e.g. Bachman et al., 2003; Ramchand et al., 2007) many school children mixing in adult work environments are prematurely exposed to many negative health behaviours including use of alcohol, drugs and tobacco. This study, planned for 2010, will explore the impact of employment on health behaviours and, if feasible, will explore effects across industries.

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<sup>2</sup> The Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development study (DMHDS) is a longitudinal study of health and behaviour with over 1000 participants born in Dunedin – between April 1972 and March 1973.

2. *Cultural attitudes to and experiences of work*: Qualitative research, conducted through the Otago College of Education and lead by Dr Ruth Gasson, scheduled for 2010, will follow-up on some of the cultural differences observed in the formative Gasson et al.(2003) study. In the forthcoming study, researchers will investigate Maori, Pacific, NZ European/Pakeha and Asian care-givers' and school children's perceptions regarding appropriateness of work for school children. Using interviews, diaries and focus groups the research will explore how work is seen to impact, positively and negatively, on the well-being of ethnically and culturally diverse groups of New Zealand children aged 11-15 years.
3. *Youth 2000*: It is likely that the Youth 2000 project, which gave birth to the Youth 2007 survey, will repeat the survey of secondary school students with a large nationally representative sample in 2012 or 2013. This will provide an opportunity to update prevalence of employment knowledge and, possibly, gather additional information. A priority for the next iteration, from a Departmental perspective, will be to link questions relating to days and times of work so that we are better able to know when students are working.(for example prevalence of late night work on school days). If feasible, some occupational typology development could also be undertaken and additional information on employment agreements and health and safety information and risks exposure could be collected.

## **Priority Research Activities**

To build on our current understanding of participation in, conditions of, and outcomes from school children's employment, further qualitative and quantitative research above and beyond current research projects is required. The Department has identified the following research activities as priorities.

1. *Additional analysis of existing data sets*. Where feasible, the Department seeks to undertake additional analysis of recently collected survey data . These include:
  - Youth 2007 dataset: In particular, specific analysis will enable the exploration of reasons for work for people working long or excessive hours, vs students working few or moderate hours. It may be that, as Caritas (2003) has suggested, students working excessive hours may be doing this work to supplement family income. Further it would be useful to know the extent to which students affected by injuries requiring medical interventions are clustered in particular types of work.
  - Taranaki Health Study (2007): The extent to which students with formal agreements, and students across industries and age groups, are more likely to have received Health and Safety information from employers. Also is there any relationship between receiving this information and reduced negative health experiences?
2. *Analysis of school children in the Survey of Working Life*: The *Survey of Working Life* (SoWL) is the first official dataset that investigates people's work arrangements and working conditions. The SoWL was a supplement to the Household Labour Force Survey (HLFS) in the March 2008 quarter. As an official data set this survey is limited to people aged 15 years and older. Despite this limitation, the data set will provide useful insights into older school children's working

conditions, which we will be able to compare to the wider working population. Useful points of analysis are likely to include usual working times, leave entitlements, types of employment agreements and rates of union membership. Of particular interest the SoWL will also be able to provide information on the health and safety experiences of school children in work, including experiences of stress, bullying and harassment and pain resulting from employment. Further, the survey will provide useful insights into how well health and safety issues are being managed by employers (as perceived by the school children) and perceptions of job satisfaction and overall work life balance.

3. *Support for the 'Growing up in New Zealand' longitudinal survey.* The Ministry of Social Development and University of Auckland led *Growing up in New Zealand* study aims to track into adulthood 7800 children born in the Greater Auckland and Waikato regions in 2009. One aim of the study is to gaining a better understanding of how a child's sphere of influence impacts on their education and employment outcomes. Building on indications cited in this report that a small proportion of seven year olds are engaging in part time work, the Department has signalled a keen interest in exploring transitions into the labour market from this early age. We are currently reviewing options for financial support for the study. Ideally the research would cover work experiences and employment conditions while in primary and intermediate schools – including types of jobs, hours in and earnings from employment, and elements of the employment relationship. This work, collected from age seven years in 2016, may also provide a useful opportunity to determine more precisely hours and times worked during the school week and weekends. Content for the 2016 data collection, and subsequent data collections, is to be confirmed closer to the time.
4. *Exploration of educational and employment outcomes:* The Department has an ongoing interest in refining our knowledge surrounding educational and later employment outcomes for school children participating in paid employment. Two pieces of work are currently being pursued:
  - In the short term, the Department is discussing with the Motivation and Achievement research team from Victoria University further analysis of time in work and NCEA credit impacts. These include (i) analysis focusing on merit and excellence NCEA credit outcomes and (ii) analysis focusing on optimal levels of engagement in part time work in the context of a wider range of extracurricular activities, including sport and babysitting. It may be that a combination of activities has a threshold effect for NCEA outcomes, providing a broader context for considering optimal levels for hours in employment.
  - Over the longer term, findings from the Growing up in New Zealand longitudinal research (discussed above) will enable users to assess what effect, if any, working while at school has on children's education (in terms of performance at school etc) and later employment outcomes. The Ministry of Education, another partner agency involved in this work, also has a keen interest in the effects of school aged work on subsequent and concurrent educational outcomes. With two core social agencies prioritising this question, its highly likely that this research question is likely to be addressed through the research. Ensuring the right questions are asked will be crucial (types of work, times of work, hours of work). Further, given the volumes of participants in the study, more subtle effects are likely to be detected – which may enable us to be more specific about thresholds for particular age groups. It

should be noted however that this is a long term project, literally in its infancy, with educational outcomes unlikely to be detected for at least 10-15 years.

5. *Focus Groups*: The Department would like to engage more closely with key stakeholders in this area – educators, students and employers, to gather their views and perceptions of what types, hours and conditions of work are appropriate for school children of all ages. It is envisaged the focus groups would be the most appropriate means to undertaking this work. Selected elements of the current document could serve as a useful reference document.
6. *Qualitative fieldwork* in particular industries and occupations where health and safety concerns and a lack of employment agreements have been identified. This would enable a more detailed picture of the underlying influences on practices and particular for school children in employment. In this respect, the SoWL will be useful for validating Pugh's (2007) work - identifying industries and occupation where may problems are most likely to emerge.

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