

STAYING AT SCHOOL

Post-compulsory schooling in an area of high unemployment. Paper presented to the Australian Association for Research in Education, Annual Conference, Deakin University, Geelong, November 1992. N. Barling and C. Barnett Ballarat University

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... This paper draws upon a major study of employment in a large regional centre of Victoria completed in 1991*. It yielded data suggesting that youth unemployment was considerably greater than official Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) and the Department of Social Security (DSS) figures. The methodology and findings of this study will be discussed with particular emphasis on youth unemployment rates which will be compared with retention rates for the centres Secondary Schools. Implications for social policy makers and educationalists

will be explored along with suggestions for further research.
... The Victorian regional city of Ballarat is a city in economic transition as established manufacturing industries experience the impact of restructuring and the general economic recession. The ABS estimate of unemployment for the September quarter (1991) was 10.5% whilst the DSS data indicated a level of 13% unemployment for the Ballarat urban area. One year later the figures had "blown out" to 11.6% ABS (September 1992) and DSS reported a level of unemployment of 17.4%. However, human service agencies believed unemployment to be more widespread than government data suggested. A study was undertaken in September 1991 to try to find a more accurate measure of Ballarat's unemployment problem since it was argued that Government figures were subject to the following criticisms and shortcomings:
1) ABS national employment and unemployment statistics were only broken down to the Western part of Victoria which extends from Bacchus Marsh to Swan Hill. On the occasions when ABS employment figures were given, only 110-130 households were surveyed from the City of Ballarat and surrounding Shires of Ballarat, Grenville, Bungaree, Buninyong and the Borough of Sebastopol;
2) The ABS identified as employed any person who was, "aged 15 and over (and) who, during the referenced week worked for one hour or more for pay, worked for one hour or more without pay, employees who we

As such, the definition of employment clearly represented a very broad categorisation of employment and was likely to over-estimate the number of employed persons while at the same time minimising the number of unemployed. These limitations suggested the ABS figures may have underestimated the level of unemployment in Ballarat. Compounding the problem of definition was the source of the data which incorporated urban Ballarat into a large rural area of Western Victoria.
3) The Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) data from the Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) and the Department of Social Security (DSS) reported persons registered as unemployed and all those who receive unemployment benefits. Four points of issue were identified with the

data: not all unemployed people register as unemployed nor do they receive unemployment benefits; CES figures are calculated on one particular day in a month

and do not include those who have become unemployed on that day; the time-lag for unemployment benefits to come through may exclude some people who are unemployed; the geographic base for CES unemployment figures included the City of Ballarat and twelve rural local government areas which may have distorted the level of unemployment in the Greater Ballarat City area. With DSS and ABS reporting data for different populations and using different criteria and methods, there remained no accurate way of comparing the two sets of data.

In order to overcome these limitations this study defined a full-time employed person as one who "during the reference week worked more than three days". Part-time employment was defined as, "more than one day but less than three days worked during the reference week". Unemployed persons were considered to be "those who didn't have a job, during the reference week and considered themselves to be generally unemployed". The other major limitation on Government data was its inadequate sampling procedures. The present study overcame this problem by implementing a rigorous ABS methodology on a large sample of the Greater Ballarat City area, incorporating the residential zones of the city, but excluded outlying rural residential areas. With these limitations in mind, this study was designed to measure the level of youth unemployment, (suspected of being above that indicated by Government statistics), it was also hypothesized that such a study would yield

valuable information. The methodology used for the project was utilised which followed Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) methodology. A sample of 30 Collector's Districts was randomly generated by the ABS from a population of 118 Collector's Districts in the Greater Ballarat City area. This sample represented 601 dwellings from a population of 22,372 occupied dwellings (ABS 1986). Within each Collector's District, 20 occupied households were surveyed using a bank of questions. The starting point in each Collector's District was determined by a randomly selected point. Interviewers then approached 20 occupied houses determined by a proportional interval spacing. Household members were asked to indicate the employment status of each member of the household, aged more than 15 years, during the previous week. Employment was categorised as being in either full or part-time paid work in that week. Separate categories were provided for voluntary work, unpaid home duties, students and retirees. Unemployment was defined as having no work, whether voluntary or paid part-time during that week. Individuals engaged in home duties, who were seeking paid work were recorded as a separate category. The number of days each person worked during the week was noted. Questionnaires were administered during the week of Monday 16th September to Friday 20th September (1991) during the early evening. Data was analysed using SPSSx. RESULTS The survey located 1,879 people in 601 households. In terms of gender, there was an equal distribution of males (49.6%) and females (50.3%). In terms of age, 40.7% of the sample was described as

who could be employed full-time becomes 51.5%. With a standard error of 6.1% we can be 95% confident that the youth under-utilisation figure is between 63.7% and 39.3% for 15-19 year olds in Greater Ballarat City. While these figures highlight the high proportion of youth unemployment in Greater Ballarat

City

Unemployed	Full-time	Part-time
150	114	20
100	109	2
15-19	181	24
32	200	103
2	20-24	182
37	73	25
34	13	25-34
249	27	129
33	35-54	464
50	247	68
54	>295	50
42	14	Missing
data	9	-
10	-	TOTALS
1494	1450	525
160		

For the 15-19 year olds the number of unemployed expressed as a percentage of those 15-19 it can also be argued that the figures represent a considerable under estimation of youth unemployment. The figures do not include those students who are staying at school rather than leave and face almost certain unemployment. The preceding calculations yielded high standard errors which translated into a broad range of percentage points which we can be 95% confident of the youth unemployment. The reason for this is the small number of subjects between the ages of 15-19 years who were unemployed and in the workforce. Thus, the youth unemployment figures need to be cautiously interpreted and the limitations of the sampling procedure acknowledged in the standard error calculations.

Comparative Data

When the data collected in this study are compared to ABS and CES data for the quarter it becomes apparent that the Government figures are indeed under-estimations. Further, any comparison between data becomes a problem of definition, geographical collection, district compatibility, method of collecting the data, and method of calculating the level of unemployment. The following table compares CES, DSS, ABS and the present study for the September 1991 quarter.

Percentage	Source	Unemployed	Area	Age
10.2%	ABS	10	Nationally	Adult
10.5%	ABS	10	Western Victoria	
13.36%	CES	13.36	Greater Ballarat	
13.67%	DSS	13.67	Urban Ballarat (U.B.)	
18.3%	This study	18.3	UB Unemployed / Ft employed	
			+ Pt employed and unemployed	
31.5%	UB Under-utilised	31.5		

Under-utilisation was calculated by summing the unemployed and the under-employed (part-time workers wanting more work) and expressed as a percentage of those who could be employed, i.e. full-time employed and part-time workers.

What is clear from the data in Table 3 is that the ABS data is inadequate in its measurement of the Urban Ballarat area. The CES data, even for the Ballarat Urban area was an under estimation when compared to

realistically define employment and unemployment; (2) take a large sample of 601 households in randomly allocated collectors districts in Urban Ballarat, compared to ABS sampling of only 120 households in Ballarat; (3) through ABS door stop interview methodology this study has accessed a better estimate of unemployed during the target week since it was able to include those who were unemployed and not on DSS benefits and unemployed housewives who were looking for work.

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While figures claim to give an objective and comparative basis to discuss issues and initiate policy they do not explain the human cost and misery associated with such high levels of unemployment. The ABS and DSS figures do not include the 16 year old who works 10-20 hours at McDonalds and who is counted as full-time employed. Within this study those youths who were working part-time and wished to work full-time were counted as under-employed and thus incorporated in the under-utilisation figures. These figures better express the human cost of high unemployment as they include people who are keen to work, who are working, yet they are being under-utilised and would like to work full-time. Even so, these figures of under-utilisation while more graphically expressing the problems, do not express the plight of the unemployed as well as case study material. While the preceding data from this study and Government sources can individually be used to interpret the situation in Ballarat, it is virtually impossible to go beyond a comparison with similarly derived figures for the State and Nation. For example DSS figures cannot be compared with ABS figures because of the different methods of collection, different definitions and different geographical areas of collection. Thus any comparison between data from different sources needs to be closely examined for its basic assumptions and means of collection. Acknowledging this problem, what can be done is the analysis of trends and rates of growth in individual measures which can then be argued to be indicative of trends and changes which can be integrated into a broader picture. In relation to the data presented in this study and the comparative data from Government sources, a composite picture of the status of 15-19 year old youth in Urban Ballarat can be constructed. What is evident from the comparison between this study's data and Government figures is that the Urban Ballarat youth were a good 10% higher in their unemployment compared to National figures. Further, this study's data would be a more reliable estimate than other sources, particularly the DSS figures which are for 15-20 year olds. Even if the DSS figures are taken as accurately representing the number of youth unemployed the movement to a consistent 10% higher unemployment rate among youth in Ballarat than National data is evident in Figure 1. Thus far, for September 1991 it has been established that for Ballarat, youth unemployment was approximately 31% of the youth who were not at school or 10% above the National average DSS figures. What was the status of the remainder of Ballarat's youth? By examining the retention rate data in Table 5 it can be seen that of the 1989 and 1991

cohorts that started secondary school in 1983 and 1985 approximately 13% more students were completing secondary school. This figure was in the same order and rate of increase as State and National averages. However this figure is not a percentage of the 15-19 year olds who are still at school. It is a cohort figure and further, it doesn't include a measure of 18019 year olds who are studying at TAFE or University. From this study the data revealed 57% of the 15-19 year olds sampled were students. This figure suggests that a

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6% retention rate of 60% may be close to the percentage of 15-19 year olds still at school, TAFE or University. However, when the figures for Tertiary enrolment are examined it can be seen that the State average of 9% of 15-19 year olds in higher education in 1990 (The Finn Report 1991), would mean that at least 9% of the Region's students are absorbed into study at University. Thus, 60% is probably an under-estimate and it is more likely to be closer to 70% of the 15-19 year olds who are studying. This leaves 30% who are either unemployed or employed. Since we have DSS figures of 979 unemployed in urban Ballarat aged between 15-20 years, we may assume that approximately 800-900 would be aged between 15-19 years, or an average of 22.5%. With the above estimates and a youth population estimated to be 3700 then raw data calculations suggest that those 15-19 year olds who are employed are between 6% and 9% with a mid-point of 7.5% of the 15-19 year old population in Urban Ballarat. While this figure is relatively small it reflects both the need for industry to take on a better educated employee as well as the small number of jobs available for 15-19 year olds. However it is only when contrasted to 1989 estimates does a truly comparative picture emerge. In 1989 the total Urban Ballarat population of 15-19 year olds could be estimated at approximately 3600, since the total populations has a 0.15% annual growth rate. Applying the same logic and estimations as the 1991 calculations above it can be estimated that the 48.3% retention rate could be extended to 60% to include 19 year olds who are studying. With 60% studying that leaves 40% not at school, now since we know that 522 were unemployed in the urban Ballarat area between the ages of 15-20 years we may assume that between 400-500 or an average of 12.5% were 15-19 year olds. Similarly we can now calculate the number of employed 15-19 year olds in Urban Ballarat as approximately 27.5% of this age group. In summary, Table 6 presents the data argued in the previous paragraphs. It should be stressed however that except where acknowledged the figures have been estimated and should be used only with recognition of the basic assumptions that apply to each set of figures.

Category	Percentage
Urban Ballarat 15-19 year old population	3600
In Education	60%
Unemployed	12.5%
Employed	27.5%
Urban Ballarat 15-20 years	3700
Unemployed	22.5%
Employed	7.5%

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discussion, several conclusions can be drawn. First, comparing the 1989
and 1991 estimations we find a relatively stable population which has a 10%
increase in the number of 15-19 year olds who are "in education" either
secondary school, TAFE or University. Second, unemployment has increased
by 10% of the 15-19 year old Urban Ballarat population from 1989-1991.
Third, these increases have been=˘ accompanied by a 20% decrease in the
number of employed 15-19 year olds in Urban Ballarat. While these changes
can be expressed in percentages, it should be realised that they are
indicative of trends and that the changes are based on estimations.
However, the changes, while estimates do logically fit. That is to say, a
20% decrease in the number of jobs has been accompanied by a 10% increase
in the number of unemployed and a 10% increase in retention rates at school
and those "in education". However>˘, what the trends don't allow us to
conclude is causation. A closer examination of each trend leads to the
realization that there are a number of possible reasons which deserve
further research.ÆÆIn relation to the increase in retention rates during
secondary schooling, a future research project of the authors will be to
investigate why retention rates in Ballarat have increased and to seek
answers to the research questions, "Why are you staying at school? What
are your career/study aspirations? What a?˘re your likes and dislikes of
the VCE years 11 and 12?" Answers to these questions will enable policy
makers and educationalists to better respond to student needs as well as
teachers and employer needs. Besides providing the employer with a better
educated worker the retention of more students at secondary school may
provide a pressure on teaching resources as well as pressures of having to
cope with more students who don't really want to be there. The students
who are remaining at school because, "it@'s better than being unemployed"
could become disciplinary problems and distract those who aspire to higher
education. An investigation into these areas of concern may provide
insights to reduce the tension in schools.ÆÆThe increase in youth
unemployment is a particularly serious problem for society in that it is a
waste of human potential and ability. Some youths of the current
generation may experience their entire adult life as unemployed persons.
While some people can optimize and accept such situaA˘tions, others feel
worthless and become a burden on the rest of society. Social welfare
agencies such as the Brotherhood of St. Laurence with a strong commitment
to the facilitating training and employment opportunities for youth will be
increasingly called upon to provide more services to those who are in need.
Of course the level of youth unemployment don't occur in a vacuum from the
current economic and political reality, however in Victoria a special
effort to cater for the young unemployed would se˘em to be justified,
especially in rural Victoria. More research into youth unemployment needs
to be conducted to ascertain why youths leave school to become unemployed.
What is it about school that facilitates their early departure? How can
employers find rewarding work for the relatively uneducated and unskilled?
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youth "in education". Since 1988 an increase in retention rates has been characteristic of Government post-primary schools, this study would provide local data to compare with National data in order to discern whether the Urban Ballarat population had any unique characteristics.Æ

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