

Encouraging youth employment in South Africa

Youth employment in South Africa is low – only one in eight working age adults under 25 have a job compared with 40% in most emerging economies; and many young people lack work experience or other signals which can help employers identify their productivity.

Research by the Department of Economics contributed to a better understanding of the South African youth labour market, and is apparent in the design of the official Employment Tax Incentive, signed into law in December 2013. This incentive allows companies to claim back some of the wages of newly hired young workers as a tax break.

Spatial distortions of the Apartheid-era mean that many people live far away from jobs, and wage floors prevent wages for young people falling enough to encourage employers to hire them. In the mid-2000s the International Growth Advisory Panel,

labour market. A randomly selected group of these young people were given vouchers which enabled their employers to claim up to half their wage for a period of at least six months. This randomised control trial was one of the first large tests of a potential economic policy in South Africa.

The results indicated that the young people with wage subsidy vouchers were more likely to find and stay in jobs, even after the subsidy was no longer valid. It showed that companies were unlikely to substitute subsidy holders for existing workers and that the jobs which the subsidised young people were employed in

12,5%

of adults in South Africa under the age of 25 have a job

the ‘Harvard Group’, suggested that a wage subsidy for young people could be one way to tackle youth unemployment.

International evidence suggests that the success of wage subsidies depend on many context-specific factors. Given this, and the relatively large amount of money which the policy would cost, a group of researchers coordinated by Neil Rankin of the Department of Economics, approached the National Treasury in 2008 and argued that an impact evaluation of a wage subsidy would provide information on how this might work in South Africa.

The research began in 2009 and entailed collecting data from over 2 500 young people for four years as they entered the

were no different to those they normally found. However, the team did find that the value and duration of the subsidy were too low to encourage large-scale hiring and that firms struggled with some of the administrative issues of claiming the subsidy.

Neil Rankin, Department of Economics
neilrankin@sun.ac.za

Supporting new teachers

All students who study to become teachers spend at least eight weeks a year in a school, where they observe practising teachers, teach their own lessons, and participate in school life.

For some this is the highlight of their teacher education programme as they become immersed in the realities of being a teacher. For others, this can be a stressful experience, as they may not receive the necessary mentoring and support that they need as beginner teachers.

This research asks how schools and universities might cooperate better in order to fully support student teachers during the school-based component of the teacher education programme. The research was commissioned by the Department of Higher Education and Training as part of a national strategy to improve the quality of education in the country. The research team was led by Prof Maureen Robinson, Dean of the Faculty of Education, and included Prof Peter Beets, Prof Chris Reddy, Dr Linda Rutgers and Dr Louise Botha, all from the Department of Curriculum Studies, as well as two colleagues from Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

School principals, teachers and university staff members, as well as members of provincial departments of education were interviewed in the Western Cape, Eastern Cape, Gauteng, Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal. Overall, there was full agreement that schools and universities could improve their capacity to support student teachers. Certain conditions will however need to be in place: a good culture of teaching and learning, a caring and welcoming environment, and teachers who share knowledge and skills and who are willing to learn. Similarly, from the university side, there is a need for better communication with schools, more discussion about assessment criteria, and more discussion about the purpose and design of the teacher education programme. While resources are a challenge in all cases, the willingness and commitment of all involved was clear.

Maureen Robinson, Faculty of Education
mrobinson@sun.ac.za