

## Experts to debate lift in school leaving age

Sarah Price Education Reporter  
March 16, 2008

NSW teenagers could be forced to remain at school until 18 to give them skills for life in the 21st century.

A summit in Sydney tomorrow will debate the benefits of raising the compulsory school leaving age, and incorporating more TAFE studies, apprenticeships or work into the school program.

In January the NSW Government said it would look at raising the school leaving age from 15 to reach a target of 90 per cent of students completing year 12.

The last time the NSW school leaving age was raised was in 1943.

The Government released a discussion paper with options including raising the age students stay at school or in compulsory training to 16, 17 or 18. Associated vocational training - such as in hospitality, trades or tourism - could also be expanded.

Teenagers could then have the opportunity to stick with traditional school subjects or combine part-time school with training or work.

"The Premier has announced his intention to consult the community about a historic change, recognising that school leavers require higher level skills in the 21st century to maximise their life opportunities," Education Minister John Della Bosca said.

The Government's paper will be discussed tomorrow at the School Leaving Age Summit at the TAFE Ultimo campus.

Speakers include Professor Margaret Vickers from the University of Western Sydney, Neil Dodimead of Sydney City Toyota, Commissioner for Children and Young People Gillian Calvert, NSW Secondary Principals' Council president Jim McAlpine, Wyndham College student Benjamin Brown, NSW Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations president Dianne Giblin, Sydney Chamber of Commerce executive director Patricia Forsythe, TAFE apprentice Assari McPhee and school students, including Justin McMahon, Elise Wood, Andrew Bryan and Leena Mourad.

"Research shows that students who stay longer at school receive higher wages, have less unemployment throughout their lives and are more likely to go on to further study," Mr Della Bosca said. "We live, work and compete in a global economy and our students have higher expectations as they enter the workforce."

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*Source: The Sun-Herald*

*This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/03/15/1205472159212.html>*