

# School careers advice

## well received by students

An ACER study of young Australians' perceptions of the career advice received in secondary school has found that almost all students accessed career advice between Years 10 and 12 and believed the information provided met their individual needs. **Kylie Hillman** describes the study and its findings.



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Since the 1980s there have been dramatic rises in the number of young Australians completing Year 12. Over the same period there have been changes in the diversity of programs that schools offer to students as they have attempted to cater to the needs of students with differing career aspirations. With a wide range of choices on offer from traditional high school programs to TAFE and apprenticeship courses, decisions can be baffling for young people and career advisors play an important role.

Previous research in the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) has stressed the importance of providing students with quality careers advice during their secondary school years to help ensure that they make informed decisions about course choices and the impact poor choices can sometimes have on future career prospects.

This latest LSAY study, published in October 2008, found that the vast majority of young people had participated in some type of careers advice program in school and they had been generally satisfied that the advice had met their individual needs. It also concluded that a school's career advice program needs to encompass as many career advice activities as possible.

The study was based on information collected from a group of more than 8000 young Australians who had been 15-years-old in 2003. Most were in Year 10 at that time. Information on how much career advice they received and their perceptions of the usefulness of that advice was collected through annual phone interviews from 2003-2005.

Four major questions guided the study:

1. How widespread is the provision of career advice in Australian schools?
2. How useful do students in Australian schools find this advice, and what types of advice appear to be most useful?

3. Are there some types of student who find career advice more useful?
4. Is there a relationship between perceptions of career advice and school-based measures?

Seven types of career advice activity were identified and the study's participants were asked if they had participated in one or more of these activities and for their perceptions of the usefulness of the activity. The activities considered were:

- listening to a talk from the school's career advisor;
- receiving hand outs or written material about careers;
- taking part in a group discussion about careers;
- speaking individually to the school's career advisor;
- looking online for career guidance or advice;
- listening to a talk by an employer representative; and
- listening to a talk by someone from a TAFE or university.

Almost all students were found to have taken part in at least one type of career advice activity across Years 10, 11 and 12. Most activity occurred in Year 10, when 99 per cent of students accessed at least one of the activities. On average, Year 10 and Year 12 students reported accessing five different types of activity, and Year 11 students reported four out of seven selected activities.

The most common type of career advice activity was the distribution of written material and handouts. In Year 10, 95 per cent of students received such material. This was followed by a talk from the school's career advisor, with 87 per cent of students reporting this activity. Just over half of Year 10 students (54%) reported having a talk from a representative of a TAFE institution or a university. By contrast, 76 per cent of Year 12 students reported this activity.

Those surveyed were generally positive about the value of the career advice they received at school, although some types of advice were seen as more useful than others. In Years 10, 11 and 12, an individual conversation with the career advisor was considered most useful. Group discussion was seen as the least useful by students at all three year levels.

Two groups of students – those who were unsure about whether or not to complete Year 12 and those who were lower academic achievers – appeared to have most appreciated the career advice they had received.

The relationships with academic achievement – as measured by students' performance on the 2003 administration of the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests in mathematical literacy, reading literacy, scientific literacy and problem-solving skills – was statistically significant, with lower-achieving students reporting that career advice was more useful, although the contribution of this factor was very small.

Young people who were unsure about whether they would complete Year

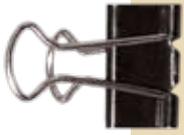
12 also had more positive comments about career advice. These findings indicate that career advice programs are valued by young people who are more vulnerable when making the transition from school, and that career advisors should continue to provide support to these young people.

The influence of a number of background factors such as gender and socio-economic status on how useful students perceived career advice at school was extremely small. This is a pleasing finding as it indicates that career advice is being delivered equitably to students across all schools and within schools. Regardless of their background, students see career advice as useful and believe the advice they receive at school meets their particular needs.

One of the strongest associations was between perceptions of the usefulness of career advice and the number of career advice activities during the year. As young people participated in more activities, they found career advice overall to be more useful. This underlines the importance for career advice programs to offer students a variety of activities.

The study concluded that almost all students obtain career advice between Years 10 and 12 and believe the information provided met their individual needs. Students have different needs from career advice and these needs can change over time, which indicates that breadth in programs is important. Young people appear to appreciate a wider variety of activities in their career advice program as it may provide them with more opportunities to find a career they wish to pursue.

Further information and additional findings are available in the report, *Career Advice in Australian Secondary Schools: Use and Usefulness*, by Sheldon Rothman and Kylie Hillman. The study is research report number 53 in the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY), a program funded by the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) with support from state and territory governments. The full report can be downloaded free-of-charge from the ACER website at [www.acer.edu.au](http://www.acer.edu.au) ■



## LSAY and careers advice

Other recent LSAY reports have stressed the importance of assisting young people to gather information about career opportunities and the education and training pathways that are necessary to achieve their career goals.

*School Non-completers: Profiles and Initial Destinations* (LSAY Research Report 54) by David D Curtis and Julie McMillan found that only four per cent of 17-year-olds who had not completed Year 12 had participated in an alternative vocational program or found full-time employment. However, it also found that many of the young people surveyed did not have a realistic plan for achieving their career goals. For example, 20 per cent of those nominating professional careers and one-third of those planning trade occupations were intending to gain qualifications below the level typically required for their intended careers.

In *VET Pathways Taken by School Leavers* (LSAY Research

Report 52) David Curtis found that recent school leavers could improve their employment prospects and earning power by participating in vocational education and training (VET) programs.

It again highlighted the importance of career guidance, especially in the early years of secondary school when students begin forming ideas about the school to work pathways they might take. The report concluded that school leavers who plan to do no further study should be identified at or before leaving school and advised about their prospects. A lack of clear information about potential VET courses and careers is likely to lead to individuals having poorer labour force outcomes than they might otherwise achieve.

These and other reports in the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) series are available at [www.acer.edu.au](http://www.acer.edu.au)