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Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth

COHORT REPORT

THE YEAR 9 CLASS OF 1995 IN 1999: ACTIVITIES AND EXPERIENCES

Phillip McKenzie

This report forms part of the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth:
a research program that is jointly managed by ACER and the
Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST).

The views expressed in this report are not necessarily those of the Department of Education,
Science and Training.

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The Year 9 Class of 1995 in 1999: Activities and Experiences

1. INTRODUCTION

This is a new type of report from the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) program. It examines in detail the activities and experiences of one of the program's longitudinal cohorts at a single point in time. In this case the cohort is the national sample of Year 9 students who were in Year 9 in Australian secondary schools in 1995, and the reference period is 1999. Hence, the use of the term *Cohort Report*.

Purposes of the Cohort Report

Most of the analyses conducted by ACER as part of the LSAY program concentrate on particular groups of young people, such as early school leavers, or university students, or students who hold part-time jobs. There is clearly a demand for focused studies from a wide range of user groups, and they will continue to be an important part of the LSAY analytical program.

However, there is also merit in providing an overview of the education, training and labour market experiences of the whole cohort on a regular basis. For example, discussions of Year 12 school participation rates are more informative if viewed in the context of the other forms of education and training that young people are involved in. An overview document such as this cohort report assists users of LSAY data and reports to judge the significance of the particular sub-groups in which they are interested.

There is increasing interest in Australia in States, schools and other educational institutions following up the activities of their exit students to know where young people are moving to, and with what success. Such tracer studies are intended to help States, schools and other institutions assess the effectiveness of their programs, identify young people who may be at risk in the transition process, and provide a basis for reporting and accountability. The provision of data on a national sample of exit students, as in this report, will provide benchmark indicators for those involved in more localised studies.

The Cohort Reports are also intended to help researchers and other potential users of LSAY to see the potential of the database. By detailing the experiences and activities of a cohort at a single point of time, each report will use a wider range of the variables than is usually done.

Finally, the annual Cohort Reports will help to reinforce the longitudinal nature of the data by linking the current circumstances of the cohort to those in the previous year or two. This should also help increase awareness of the potential of the LSAY database and stimulate possible questions for more detailed analysis.

1999—An Important Year for the Y95 Cohort

In 1999 almost all of the Y95 cohort had left secondary school and had commenced further education, employment or some combination of activities. The majority had been enrolled in Year 12 in 1998. In the first year after Year 12 young people are typically engaged in a wide variety of activities. An overview such as this can provide policy makers with an indication of the numbers and composition of those in activities that have been shown by earlier research to be problematic in terms of making a successful transition to work.

The 1999 data collection from the Y95 cohort has enlarged the scope of measures of learning activity in two ways: (a) through a set of items that attempt to tap interest in learning about new ideas and skills; and (b) the extent of participation in learning activities outside study and work. This report includes a brief section that reports, from a lifelong learning perspective, the extent to which young people have an interest in learning, and participate in non-formal learning activities after leaving school.

Structure of the Report

The report draws on some analyses concerning the Y95 cohort from previous LSAY reports as well as new analyses of variables that have not been reported before.

Section 2 provides an overview of the main characteristics of the Y95 cohort in 1999. Since a common concern about longitudinal studies is the extent to which the sample's representativeness is affected by non-random attrition, that section also includes a brief discussion of the techniques used to ensure that representativeness has been maintained since 1995. In section 3 the education and work activities of the group are mapped in some detail. In the final section other elements of young people's activities are investigated: their living arrangements, participation in a range of activities outside education or work, and interest in learning.

2. WHO IS IN THE YEAR 9 CLASS OF 1995?

In 1995 ACER drew a national sample of 13,613 Year 9 students from 286 Australian secondary schools (an average of 48 students per school). This sample, termed the Y95 cohort, has been surveyed each year since 1995. Smaller States and Territories were over-sampled to provide sufficient numbers to give reliable State estimates on a number of the key variables.

The modal age of the sample in mid-1995 was 14 years – about 65 per cent were aged 14 years, 25 per cent 15 years and the remainder either 13 or 16 years. Thus by 1999 the modal age of the sample was 18 years.

Between 1995 and 1996 the number of active sample members declined by 28 per cent to 9,897. As is typically the case with longitudinal surveys, the sample attrition was most marked in the first year. Contact details change, a number of people decline to participate in the second wave of the survey, and the survey methodology used in 1996, a mail survey, tends to have a relatively high non-response rate. By 1997, when the telephone-based surveying commenced, the active sample numbers had been rebuilt to 10,307, or 76 per cent of the original sample. Since that time, sample attrition has typically averaged about 6 per cent per year. By 1999, the focus of this particular report, the active sample stood at 8,783, or 65 per cent of the original sample.

The sample attrition has not occurred uniformly across social groups. Attrition from the original sample has been slightly higher among males, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, students attending Government schools, students from low socio-economic status background families, and students who performed less well in the achievement tests.

ACER uses weighting procedures to compensate for the effects of non-random attrition from the sample and to adjust for the clustering effects of the original sample design (schools were sampled first, then whole Year 9 classes within schools were randomly selected). Comparison of the weighted frequencies for waves 2 to 6 with the equivalent frequencies from the original sample show that the weighting procedures are effective in reducing the impact of differential attrition (Marks & Long, 2000). The weighted data are used in the remainder of this report.

The main background characteristics of the sample are shown in Table 1. Some key features are that:

- 2 per cent were of Indigenous background;
- 89 per cent came from a home in which English was the main language spoken;
- 68 per cent had attended a government school in Year 9, 20 per cent attended a Catholic school and 12 per cent attended an Independent school;
- 55 per cent had a home address in a metropolitan area in 1995, 24 per cent lived in regional centres, and 21 per cent had a home address in a rural or remote area; and
- 49 per cent had a father who worked in a professional, para-professional or managerial occupation, and 16 per cent had a father who worked as a plant or machine operator, or a labourer.

Table 1 Key background characteristics of the Year 9 class of 1995 in 1999

Variable (measured in 1995)	Weighted	
	Number	Per cent
Gender		
Male	4,292	49
Female	4,491	51
Indigenous status		
Indigenous	188	2
Non-Indigenous	8,051	98
Main language spoken at home		
English	7,506	89
Other language	911	11
State of school attended		
New South Wales	2,887	33
Victoria	2,097	24
Queensland	1,736	20
South Australia	654	7
Western Australia	914	10
Tasmania	260	3
Australian Capital Territory	165	2
Northern Territory	70	1
School sector		
Government	5,977	68
Catholic	1,748	20
Independent	1,058	12
Location		
Metropolitan	4,848	55
Regional	2,119	24
Rural/Remote	1,815	21
Father's occupation		
Professionals and para-professionals	1,573	24
Managers and administrators	1,650	25
Clerical, sales and personal service	970	14
Tradespersons	1,441	22
Plant and machine operators	270	4
Labourers and related workers	785	12

Note: Percentages do not necessarily sum to 100 due to rounding.

3. EDUCATION AND WORK ACTIVITIES IN 1999

Seventy-six per cent of the cohort had been enrolled in Year 12 in 1998, and so for the great majority of them 1999 represented the first post-school year.

Information from the sample was collected in the October to December period 1999. The main patterns of activity at the time of the 1999 survey are expressed graphically in Figure 1 and provided in more detail in Table 2.

Approximately two-thirds of the group were enrolled in education in 1999, which indicates a high rate of transfer from Year 12. Most of those enrolled in education were also employed. Overall, around 46 per cent of the Y95 cohort were both studying and working in 1999. Australia has one of the highest rates of “student-workers” among OECD countries (OECD, 2000).

Analysis of longitudinal data from an earlier sample (those who were born in 1975) suggests that, at secondary school level at least, combining studying and working provides benefits in terms of later finding full-time work, and does not appear to have an adverse effect academic performance unless the work hours are long (Robinson, 1999).

Although part-time work seems to provide a useful function for students—by financing their study and teaching them general work skills—doubts have been raised about the extent to which part-time work provides a stepping stone to full-time employment for non-students (Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 1999). Six per cent of the cohort were in this category. Analyses are planned within the LSAY program to examine the longer-term implications of part-time work.

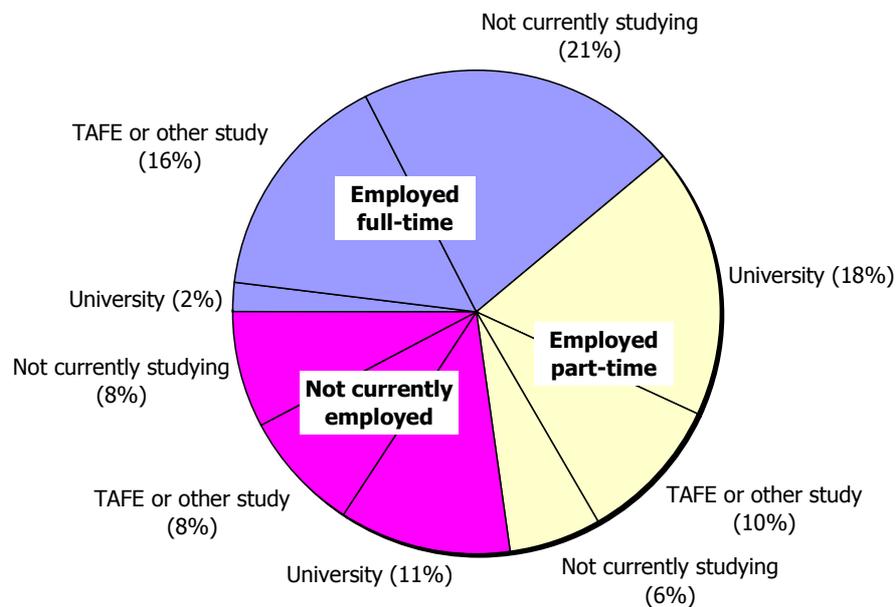


Figure 1 Education and work activities of the Y95 cohort in 1999

Analyses based on early longitudinal samples (those who were in Year 10 in the late 1980s) indicated that those who would appear to be at the greatest risk of not making a successful transition to full-time employment are those who are neither working nor studying in the period immediately after leaving school (Lamb & McKenzie, 2001). As Figure 1 shows, around eight per cent of the Y95 cohort were in this category in 1999. Subsequent work in the LSAY program as the cohort ages will examine the impact of these early experiences.

Gender Differences in Activities

At the aggregate level, there are few major differences evident in the principal education and work activities of males and females in 1999. Table 2 records the broad categories shown in Figure 1 by gender. Approximately the same proportion of both genders were employed (73%) although males were slightly more likely to be employed full-time (46% versus 32%) and females were correspondingly more likely to be employed part-time (41% versus 26%). There was little difference between males (20%) and females (21%) in the proportions who were not in the labour force.

Table 2 Education and work activities by gender, 1999

Males (%)					
In education	In the labour force			Not in the labour force	Total
	Employed full-time	Employed part-time	Unemployed		
Enrolled full-time	2	20	--	18	41
Enrolled part-time	21	1	1	<1	23
Not in education	23	5	6	2	36
Total	46	26	7	20	100

Females (%)					
In education	In the labour force			Not in the labour force	Total
	Employed full-time	Employed part-time	Unemployed		
Enrolled full-time	3	31	--	18	52
Enrolled part-time	9	3	1	<1	13
Not in education	20	8	5	3	35
Total	32	41	5	21	100

Persons (%)					
In education	In the labour force			Not in the labour force	Total
	Employed full-time	Employed part-time	Unemployed		
Enrolled full-time	2	26	--	18	47
Enrolled part-time	15	2	1	<1	18
Not in education	22	6	5	2	36
Total	39	34	6	21	100

Notes: The table records activities at the time of the 1999 survey, which was conducted in the October to December period. Full-time employment is defined as being employed for 30 or more hours per week, and part-time employment is defined as less than 30 hours per week. Apprentices and trainees are classified in the "Employed full-time" and "Enrolled part-time" category. Percentages do not necessarily sum to 100 due to rounding.

The main differences evident in 1999 concerned the nature of education enrolments and the nature of work:

- females were more likely to be enrolled full-time in education (52%) than males (41%); and
- females were more likely to be working part-time (41%) than males (26%).
- Correspondingly, 31 per cent of females were enrolled full-time in education and working part-time, compared to 20 per cent of males. 21 per cent of males were working full-time and enrolled part-time in education, compared to 9 per cent of females.

Education Activities

The distribution of education enrolments by gender is shown in Table 3. The proportion of males and females from the Y95 cohort who were enrolled in education in 1999 were similar—64-65 per cent, or nearly two-thirds of each group. The differences in education enrolments among males and females essentially reflect the fact that females were more likely than males to be enrolled in university (36% and 26%, respectively). Correspondingly, males were more likely than females to be enrolled in TAFE and other studies (34% of males and 26% of females), where the enrolments are largely part-time.

It is noteworthy, though, that the proportion of the Y95 cohort enrolled full-time in TAFE is comparatively high (13% full-time compared to 17% part-time) for this cohort—certainly higher than for TAFE enrolments in general—which indicates that education immediately after leaving school is substantially full-time.

Around 13 per cent of the Y95 cohort indicated that they were enrolled in an apprenticeship (8%) or traineeship (5%) in 1999. The large majority of apprenticeships were being undertaken by males, and a majority of the traineeships were being undertaken by females.

Table 3 Education activities by gender, 1999 (per cent of total cohort)

Sector	Full-time enrolment		Part-time enrolment		Total enrolment	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
School	4	3	--	--	4	3
University	26	35	1	1	26	36
TAFE & other	12	14	22	12	34	26
Total	41	52	23	13	64	65

Note: Percentages do not necessarily sum to the totals due to rounding.

Around 4 per cent of the Y95 cohort were still enrolled in Year 12 in 1999. This figure suggests that apparent retention rates calculated from data that focus just on those who reach Year 12 in the minimum time may be understating the true level of Year 12 completion by a few percentage points.

The recent LSAY report by Marks, *et al* (2000) provides considerable detail on those from the Y95 cohort who enrolled in the first year of university in 1999. In addition to the gender differences noted above, other important background variables associated with participation in higher education were found to be:

- young people from the top quartile of literacy and numeracy achievement in Year 9 were substantially more likely to enrol in higher education;
- students from language backgrounds other than English are consistently more likely to participate in higher education;
- young people living in non-metropolitan areas are less likely to participate in higher education, but these differences are comparatively small; and

- occupational background, school type and achievement have become more weakly associated with participation in higher education over time.

Experiences with Work

Approximately 47 per cent of the Y95 cohort who were employed in 1999 were working part-time. Most of the part-time jobs were held by students. Perhaps not surprisingly, only 30 per cent of those in work indicated that their job was the type of job that they would like to have as a career. Yet in terms of particular aspects of their jobs, Y95 cohort members expressed quite high levels of satisfaction (see Table 4).

On most aspects of their work, at least 80 per cent of the Y95 cohort members in work indicated that they were either very or fairly satisfied. The two areas in which relatively low levels of satisfaction were reported were opportunities for training (73%) and opportunities for promotion (60%). The relatively low levels of satisfaction reported on these two aspects may well reflect the fact that most of the jobs held by the Y95 cohort are held by students, and nearly one-half are part-time jobs. These are not necessarily the types of jobs that they intend to hold for the long-term. The relationship between type of job, occupation and job satisfaction is the subject of ongoing LSAY research.

Table 4 Work satisfaction among cohort members in employment, 1999

Satisfaction with ...	Very or fairly satisfied (%)
The kind of work you do	91
The people you work with	96
Your immediate boss or supervisor	91
The pay you get	84
Opportunities for training	73
The tasks you are assigned	91
Recognition for tasks well done	82
Your opportunity for promotion	60

The survey data underline the strong influence that social networks play in how young people obtain their jobs. Of those working in 1999, over one-third (35%) indicated that they got the job through a friend or relative. Around 28 per cent indicated that they directly approached the employer for a job. More formal methods of obtaining the job were reported by smaller proportions of those in work: responding to an advertisement (17%), through the school or tertiary institution (5%), or being referred by Centrelink (4%). To the extent that the knowledge and networks that can uncover employment opportunities are likely to be distributed unevenly among young people, such data suggest that some groups will face considerable difficulties in securing work.

There is evidence of high job mobility among this group of young people. Around 40 per cent of them had had changed jobs in the preceding 12 months, and about one-third of these had held at least two other jobs. The most common reasons given for changing jobs were “to get a better job” (43% of those who had changed jobs) and “not satisfied with the job” (18%). Only a small proportion of those who changed jobs indicated that it was because they had been laid off (4%) or that it was a temporary job (3%). This suggests that much of the job mobility among the young is self-initiated and derives from self-exploration and an expanding awareness of what other job opportunities are available.

4. LIVING ARRANGEMENTS AND OTHER ACTIVITIES

Although the LSAY surveys focus primarily on the school-to-work transition, they do collect data on a variety of other aspects of young people's lives. These other data provide indicators of young people's transition to adulthood and independence, broadly defined. They also canvass areas that are affected by the transition to work, as well as being influences in their own right on that particular transition.

Figure 2 provides a snapshot of the main place of residence of the Y95 cohort in 1999. In that particular year, which in most cases was their first post-school year, greater diversity in their living arrangements were starting to emerge. The main features were:

- although the majority (77%) of the sample were still living in the parental home in 1999, this was 13 percentage points lower than a year earlier (1998), when over 90 per cent lived with their parents;
- around one in eight (12%) were renting or buying their own home;
- approximately 5 per cent were sharing in a house or flat; and
- approximately 4 per cent were living in a university or TAFE residence

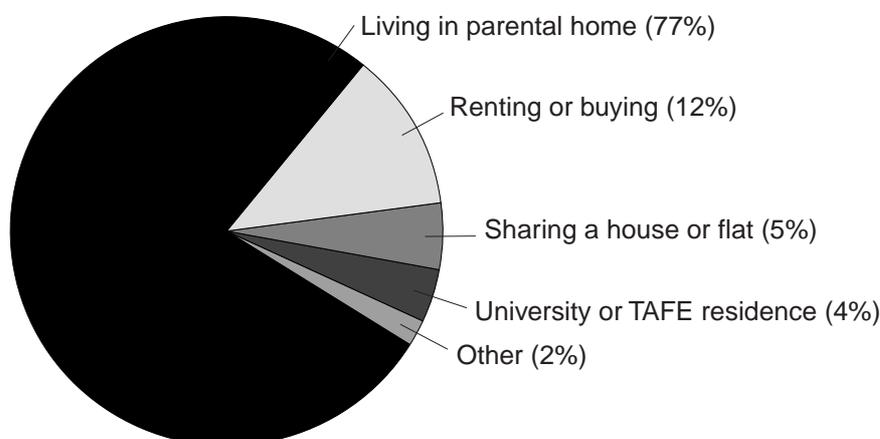


Figure 2 Main residence of the Y95 cohort in 1999

Very few of the Y95 cohort (2%) were living alone in 1999. The most common household size involved four people (31% of the cohort were in this category). Other common household sizes involved three people (22%) and five people (20%). These patterns reflect the fact that the majority of the cohort were living in the parental home in 1999.

Activities outside Education or Work

Questions added to the 1999 survey sought information on the extent of young people's involvement in a range of activities outside education and work. The intent was to develop indicators of the ways in which young people engage in non-formal learning, with the wider

community, and in volunteer activities. Subsequent analyses in the LSAY program will use these data both as outcome measures of their social and educational backgrounds and as input measures to explain their subsequent transitions in education and work. For example, there is evidence that participation in voluntary activities provides a pathway into employment for some types of young people, or at least complement the transitions to work they are experiencing (Hopkins, 2000).

Figure 3 summarises some of the main findings from this set of questions:

- During 1999 the large majority of the 1995 group participated at least once a week in reading newspapers or magazines (91%), or playing sport or doing exercise (81%).
- Around half the group used the Internet in their spare time at least weekly, and 38 per cent reported reading books at least once a week.
- Eleven per cent participated in some form of community volunteer work at least once a week. The most common forms of volunteer activity were sport coaching or officiating, and church and youth group work.

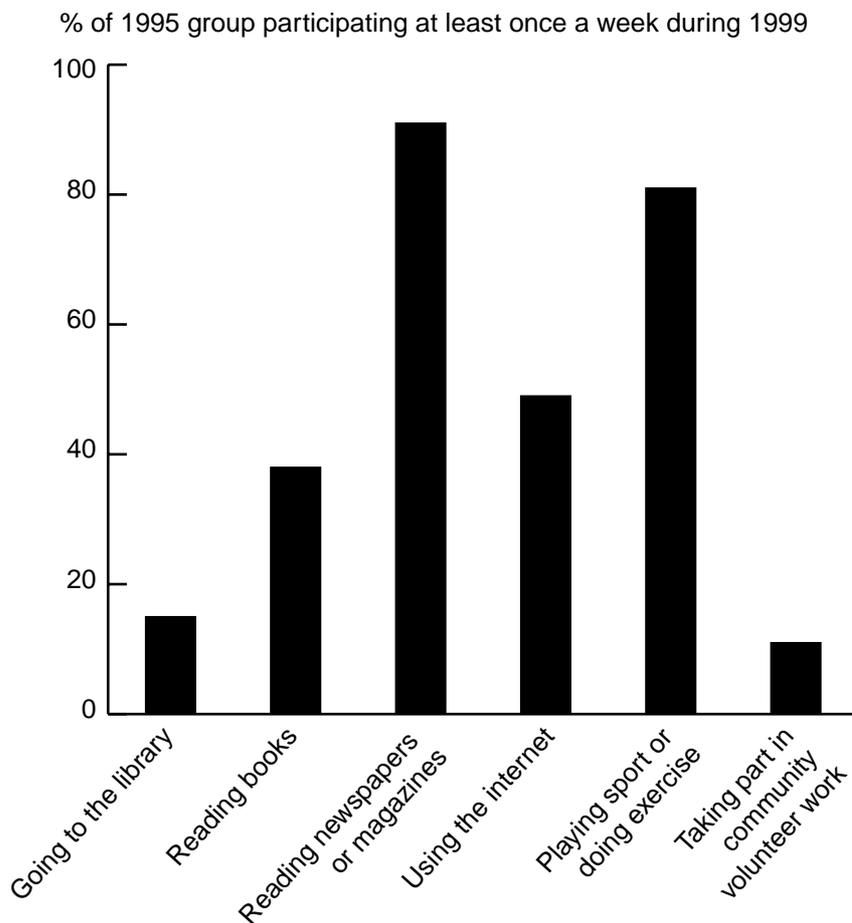


Figure 3 Percentage participating in selected activities, 1999

A reference point for these LSAY data on volunteer activity is provided by a 1995 ABS survey of volunteer activity by young people and adults (ABS, 1997). That survey reported that 9 per cent of young men and 13 per cent of young women aged 15-24 were involved in voluntary work, which were around half the participation rates respectively of men and women aged 25 and over.

The LSAY data for the Y95 cohort reported in Figure 4 are consistent with these figures. Although the ABS survey indicated that altruism is the strongest reason reported by both young people and adults in becoming involved in voluntary work, the opportunities that voluntary work provide—to gain new skills or work experience were more commonly acknowledged by young people (around 15 per cent) than adults (about 5 per cent) as key reasons for becoming a volunteer.

Interest in Learning

One of the key policy objectives in Australia over the past decade has been the promotion of lifelong learning. As well as increased educational participation, this means interest and engagement in a wide range of learning activities outside of formal education and training, and well past the years of compulsory schooling. Formal education and training institutions are increasingly framing their objectives within a lifelong learning perspective, aiming to develop in young people the knowledge, skills and motivation for on-going learning.

To help shed some light on the extent to which young Australians are, in fact, exhibiting behaviours consistent with lifelong learning, the 1999 survey of the Y95 cohort included a set of items that attempted to measure interest in learning. These items had been developed for an earlier ACER survey of primary and secondary students conducted in 1997 (Ainley, *et al*, 1998). That particular study focused on Year 10 students at secondary level, and therefore provides a point of comparison with the Y95 cohort in 1999. The results are reported in Table 5.

Table 5 Interest in learning

How much interest do you have in ...	A lot or a great deal of interest (%)	
	Y95 cohort in 1999	Year 10 sample in 1997
The prospect of learning new things	81	76
Thinking about why the world's in the state it is	42	53
Finding out why something happened the way it did	61	62
Finding out more about things you don't understand	74	73
Finding out more about a new idea	60	65
Finding out how something works	63	62
Improving your skills after you have started work	82	83
Learning new skills after you have started work	83	83

Note: The 1997 data from the Year 10 sample are from Ainley, *et al* (1998). This was a different sample from the Y95 cohort.

Among the Y95 cohort the results indicate that the majority of the sample have a strong interest in learning. In particular, more than 80 per cent expressed a strong interest in learning and improving their skills after starting work. The only item on which relatively little interest was expressed concerned thinking about “why the world's in the state it is”. This may reflect some lack of breadth in the young people's outlook and/or a sense of a lack of influence on wider events.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This report has provided a snapshot of the 1999 activities of the LSAY Year 9 class of 1995. By 1999, all but four per cent of the sample had left school and were engaged in a wide range of education, training and work activities. This Cohort Report has outlined the major categories of activities. In terms of education and work, 45 per cent of the sample were engaged concurrently in both education and employment, most commonly through full-time students holding part-time jobs. More than one-quarter (28%) of the sample were employed and not enrolled in education in 1999. A smaller proportion (20%) were enrolled in education and did not have jobs. Those who would appear to be at the greatest risk of not making a successful transition to full-time employment are those who are neither working nor studying in the period immediately after leaving school. Among the Y95 cohort, eight per cent were in this category in 1999. LSAY has an on-going program of research to identify the relationships between these early experiences in the labour market and longer-term outcomes.

As young people's education and work activities become more diverse after leaving school, so do their living arrangements. Whilst the LSAY survey program is primarily concerned with the transition from school to work, it also collects data on a wide range of other aspects of young people's lives and attitudes. By 1999 almost one-quarter (23%) of the Year 9 class of 1995 were no longer living at home. This Cohort Report has also reported on young people's activities outside education and work, and their interests in on-going learning. These other data are not only interesting in their own right, but also for the light they can shed on the transition to work and adult life more generally.

It is hoped that by highlighting some of the data concerning the Year 9 class of 1995 at just one stage in their lives—in the year 1999—this Cohort Report has helped to show other analysts the potential of the LSAY database and linkages to other aspects of the LSAY research program.

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