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Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth

COHORT REPORT

THE YEAR 9 CLASS OF 1998 IN 1999: ACTIVITIES AND ASPIRATIONS

Sue Fullarton

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, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA).

The views expressed in this report are those of the author and not necessarily of the
Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs

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The Year 9 Class of 1998 in 1999: Activities and Aspirations

1. INTRODUCTION

This report examines in detail the activities and aspirations of one of the Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth (LSAY) 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 1998, and the reference period is 1999.

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 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, and of their activities and aspirations earlier in their school lives. 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.

The Cohort Reports are also intended to help researchers and other 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.

Structure of the Report

Section 2 of this report outlines who the Year 9 class of 1998 were in 1999. It describes the surveys used to elicit the information and provides characteristics of the entire cohort. Section 3 looks at those students remaining in school; their characteristics, beliefs about ability, views of classroom and school climate, engagement with school, participation in part-time employment and plans for leaving school. Section 4 deals with those students who have already left school before the end of Year 10. It looks at the characteristics of this group, their reasons for leaving and their main activity since leaving school.

2. THE YEAR 9 CLASS OF 1998: WHO ARE THEY?

In 1998, a nationally representative sample of 14,118 Year 9 students was selected to form the second cohort of the new program of the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth. This sample, termed the Y98 cohort, was surveyed again in 1999. The sample was constructed by randomly selecting two to three Year 9 classes from a sample of schools designed to represent State and sector. Smaller States and Territories were over-sampled to provide sufficient numbers to give reliable State estimates on a number of key variables.

The 1998 Y98 Survey

In the first year of surveying for this cohort, reading and numeracy tests were administered to students in their schools to provide information on early school achievement for use in later analyses of educational and labour market participation. Students also completed a background questionnaire that provided demographic details, as well as asking about their educational and vocational plans and their attitudes to school.

The modal age of the sample in 1998 was 14 years – about 57 per cent were aged 14 years, 38 per cent 15 years and most of the remainder were 13 years. Thus in 1999 most of these students were 15 years of age.

The 1999 Y98 Survey

The 1999 Y98 Survey was mailed to the 14,118 students who formed the 1998 Year 9 Sample. Of that group 9289 useable responses were received (this sample has since been rebuilt). This survey asked about their beliefs about their own ability in comparison to their classmates, participation in extracurricular activities, employment, and for those who had left school, why they had left and what they had been involved in since doing so.

Between 1998 and 1999 the number of active sample members declined by 34 per cent to 9,289. Typically the case with longitudinal surveys the sample attrition is most marked in the first year. Contact details change, a number of people decline to participate in the second wave of the survey and in general the use of a mail survey (as used in 1999) tends to have a relatively high non-response rate. Nevertheless, the attrition rate between 1998 and 1999 was higher than usual in the LSAY program; since 1999 there have been substantial efforts to contact non-respondents and increase the number of active sample members.

The sample attrition between 1998 and 1999 did not occur uniformly across all groups in the sample. Attrition was higher among males, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, students attending Government schools, 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 also to adjust for the clustering effects of the original sample design (schools were first sampled and then intact Year 9 classes within the

schools). The data is thus weighted in subsequent years in terms of the composition of the original sample. The weighting procedures are described in Marks & Long (2000), and it has been shown for the Y95 cohort that these attrition weights are effective in reducing the impact of differential attrition. It is the weighted data that are used in the remainder of this report.

3. THOSE IN SCHOOL

Of the Y98 cohort, almost 99 per cent of the students who were surveyed in 1999 were, as expected, still in school. The following section provides details of the activities and aspirations of these students.

Characteristics

Table 1 shows the distribution of schools that students in this sample were attending, by state, and the sector in which they were enrolled, as well as national comparative data (ABS, 1999). It is clear from this table that the LSAY sample is representative of Australian schools by both state and sector.

Table 1 Distribution of the sample by state and school sector (%)

	LSAY Y98 cohort	All Australian Schools
State		
NSW	33	33
VIC	23	24
QLD	20	20
SA	7	8
WA	11	11
TAS	3	3
NT	1	1
ACT	2	2
Sector		
Government	66	65
Catholic	21	21
Independent	13	14

The main background characteristics of the sample in 1999 are shown in Table 2. The distribution of the characteristics is broadly representative of 15-16 year olds in Australia. Each of the variables recorded in Table 2 has been found to play an important role in influencing educational participation (eg Long, Carpenter & Hayden, 1999; Marks, Fleming, Long & McMillan, 2000).

Some key features are that:

- Around 2 per cent of students were of Indigenous background;
- Nine in ten students were born in Australia;
- Almost one-third had a father born in a country other than Australia and just fewer than three in ten had a mother born in a country other than Australia;
- In around one in ten households a language other than English was regularly spoken;
- Around half of the mothers and fathers had completed secondary school;

- Almost one-quarter of the fathers had completed an apprenticeship and another quarter a university qualification; and
- More than one third of mothers had no qualifications and one-quarter had completed a university qualification.

Table 2 Summary of background characteristics for those of the Y98 cohort in school in 1999

	Weighted n	% of cohort
Gender		
Male	4358	49
Female	4548	51
Indigenous status		
Indigenous	207	2
Non- Indigenous	8599	98
Respondent's country of birth		
Australia	7959	90
Other	897	10
Father's country of birth		
Australia	6008	68
Other	2790	32
Mother's country of birth		
Australia	6341	72
Other	2506	28
Home Language		
English	7924	89
Other	802	11
Father's level of education		
Did not complete secondary	3959	47
Completed secondary	4431	53
Father's qualifications		
None	1854	26
Apprenticeship	1677	23
TAFE qualification	701	10
University qualification	1812	25
Other	1139	16
Mother's level of education		
Did not complete secondary	3887	46
Completed secondary	4635	54
Mother's qualifications		
None	2608	37
Apprenticeship	412	6
TAFE qualification	1026	15
University qualification	1710	25
Other	1192	17
Achievement Quartiles		
Lowest quartile	2223	24
Second quartile	2284	25
Third quartile	2292	25
Highest quartile	2346	26

Figure 1 shows the distribution of birthplace for those students not born in Australia. Most students born in other countries were born either in other English speaking countries (United Kingdom, Ireland, New Zealand, United States) or Asian countries. Around 30 per cent of students' parents were born in countries other than Australia, primarily in other English speaking countries, but also significant proportions in Southern European or Asian countries.

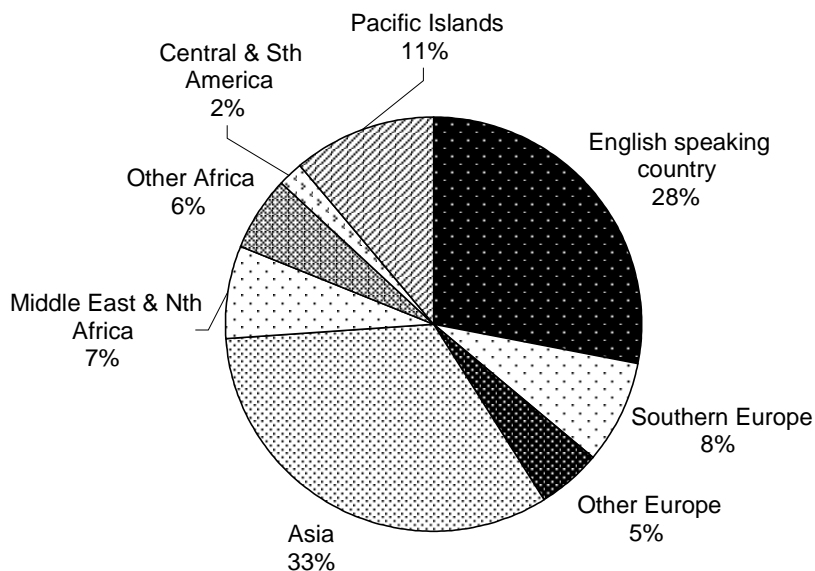


Figure 1 Students' birthplaces for those not born in Australia

Parents' occupations

Respondents were also asked their parents' occupations. The responses were assigned occupational prestige scores based on the ANU2 scale (Broom *et al.* 1977), and then into six broad occupational groups. Table 3 shows the distribution of mothers' and fathers' occupational groups.

Table 3 Parents' occupational groups

	Fathers	Mothers
	%	%
Professional	33	37
Managers	17	4
Clerical and personal service	9	42
Trades	22	4
Plants labourers	13	3
Unskilled manual	6	10
	100	100

It is apparent from these data that females are clustered in two occupational groups: professionals and clerical and personal service, together accounting for around eight in ten women in the workforce. A further one in ten are employed in unskilled manual work. The distribution of occupations for men, however, is more evenly spread. While around one third of men were employed in professional positions, there are between one in ten and two in ten employed in each of four other groups. Only one in 20 was employed in an unskilled manual position. Four times the proportion of males than females were employed in managerial positions, in trades and as plant labourers, whilst four times the proportion of females than males were employed in clerical and personal service positions.

Participation and self-concept

Psychological factors such as self-concept of ability also play a role in students' progress through school, and on their choice of subjects in senior secondary school. Marsh (1990) provided evidence from a longitudinal study that low self-concept of ability results in lower achievement. As well, students who have more positive attitudes about their own abilities are more likely than less-satisfied students to continue in school until Year 12 (Marks *et al.*, 2000, p. 36).

In the 1999 Y98 survey, students were asked to respond to a set of items "compared with most of the students in your school, how well are you doing in ..." for each of the Key Learning Areas (KLA). Table 4 shows the level of self-concept of ability for each Key Learning Area by gender and for all students, and the participation rates for each KLA.

Participation rates

Participation rates for this group of students primarily reflects what is compulsory in most states of Australia in Year 10. The study of English, of a mathematics subject and a science subject and usually a physical education or sport unit, is usually compulsory at this level, while students may choose a range of elective subjects both from these areas and from the other Key Learning Areas.

Participation rates for other units showed the beginnings of the gender differentiation that is evident in Year 12 subject selections (Fullarton & Ainley, 2000). More females than males are enrolled in units in the Arts and LOTE KLAs while more males than females are enrolled in units in the Technology and Computing KLAs.

Self-concept of ability

In general, females tend to be more conservative than males in their assessment of their own ability. The self-confidence of males is significantly higher than that of females in six of the ten KLAs. These are mathematics, humanities and social sciences, economics and business, science, computing and health and physical education. Those in which females were more self-confident are traditionally gendered as female in schools; English, the arts and languages other than English. In the KLA that showed very little difference in perceptions by gender, it must be noted that the subject stereotypes are very strong in this area, affecting participation a great deal. The Technology KLA encompasses a range of subjects, including technical studies such as woodwork and textiles, and home science subjects such as home economics, and we are unable to "unpack" differences in perceptions using these data.

Table 4 Self-concept of ability 1999 in each Key Learning Area (%)

	% participation	Self-concept of ability compared to others in your school					Very poorly	
		Very well	Better than average	About average	Not very well			
English								
Males	100	14	32	46	7	1	100	
Females	100	24	33	38	4	0	100	
All students	100	19	32	42	6	1	100	
Mathematics								
Males	100	22	31	36	10	1	100	
Females	100	18	27	40	13	2	100	
All students	100	20	29	38	12	1	100	
Studies of Society and Environment								
<i>Humanities and Social Sciences</i>								
Males	86	19	34	40	7	0	100	
Females	87	20	33	41	5	1	100	
All students	86	19	33	41	6	1	100	
<i>Economics and Business</i>								
Males	46	19	32	42	6	1	100	
Females	47	22	30	42	5	1	100	
All students	46	20	31	42	6	1	100	
Science								
Males	97	22	31	38	8	1	100	
Females	98	18	29	42	10	1	100	
All students	98	20	30	40	9	1	100	
Arts								
Males	52	31	32	32	5	1	100	
Females	74	38	32	28	2	0	100	
All students	63	34	32	30	3	1	100	
LOTE								
Males	30	25	28	30	13	4	100	
Females	39	30	29	32	7	2	100	
All students	35	28	28	32	9	3	100	
Technology								
<i>Computing</i>								
Males	58	35	33	28	4	1	100	
Females	54	25	34	37	4	0	100	
All students	55	30	33	32	4	1	100	
<i>Technology</i>								
Males	68	34	36	27	3	0	100	
Females	52	29	37	31	3	0	100	
All students	60	32	36	29	3	0	100	
Health and Physical Education								
Males	90	34	34	27	4	1	100	
Females	88	22	28	43	5	1	100	
All students	89	28	31	35	4	1	100	

Classroom and school climate

Students were asked to describe several aspects of their classroom and school climate. Some research findings have indicated that an intention to remain at school to complete Year 12 is influenced by students feeling successful in their work and by general satisfaction with school (Ainley et al, 1984). There are a number of items in this survey that tap into students' perceptions of their classroom climate, and relationships between these perceptions and continuing engagement with school are worthy of further investigation.

For their classes, respondents were asked whether students were eager to learn, whether they felt students made good progress, whether students worked hard and were well-behaved. Figure 2 shows the proportion of students who agree or strongly agree with these items.

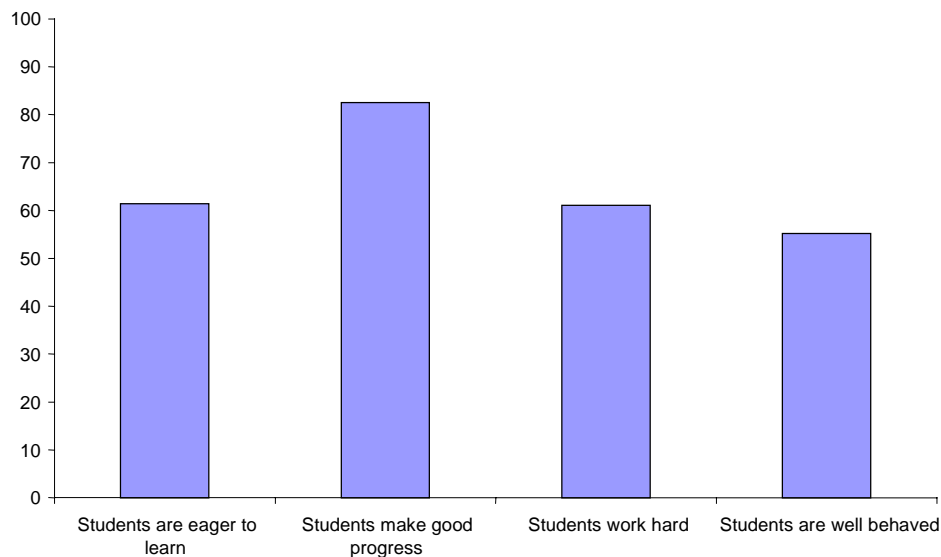


Figure 2 Student perceptions of class climate

Most respondents feel that in general students make good progress, that they are eager to learn and that they work hard. About 45 per cent of students feel that in their classes students are generally not well behaved. Students were also asked to rate their school climate on overall quality of teachers, effective discipline, student learning and school spirit. The responses to these questions are shown in Figure 3, grouped into excellent or good, fair, and poor or very poor.

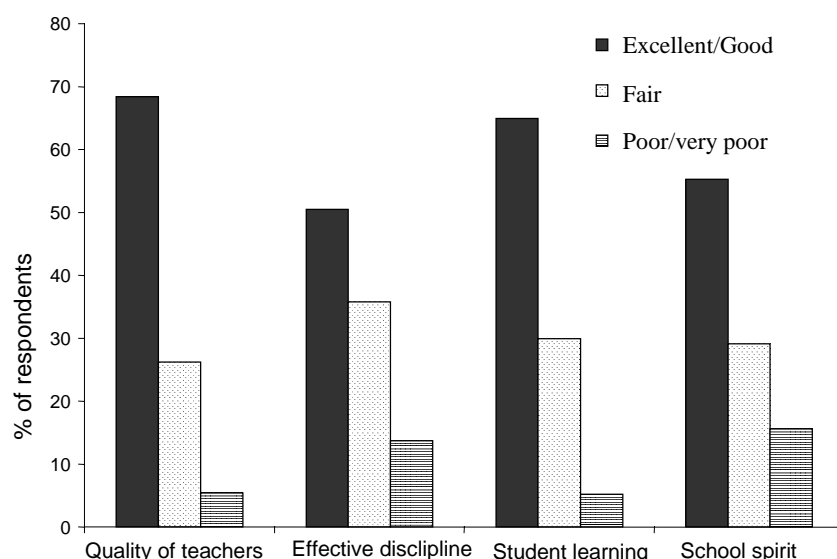


Figure 3 Student perceptions of school climate

Most of these items had strong positive responses from respondents. Students felt quite strongly that they have good quality teachers and that student learning is also of a good standard. However it can be seen that students were less positive about the discipline in their school and of the school spirit overall.

Engagement with school life – extra-curricular activities

It has been argued that participation in extra-curricular activities indicates a greater engagement with school life, and that such engagement is a critical factor in determining whether or not students complete school. Finn (1993) suggests that this is the highest level of participation in school life, and that such participation leads to a sense of identification with the school. Finn argues that students who do not develop a sense of identification with their school are at risk of a number of adverse educational outcomes, including lower academic achievement and early school leaving (Finn, 1989). In the 1999 survey, students were asked the frequency with which they participated in a range of activities typically provided by schools. These are summarised in Table 5.

Table 5 Participation in extra-curricular activities (%)

Activity	Available	Participation rates			
		At least once a week	At least once a month	Once a year or less	Never
Sport	97	58	13	16	13
Music	91	15	4	9	71
Debating	87	3	6	17	74
Drama	93	11	9	27	53
Community work	91	7	20	41	32

Most students participated in sporting activities organised by their school on a regular basis; most of them at least once a week; however, participation in the other extra-curricular activities that were listed was not as frequent.

Working at a part-time job while at school

Australia has one of the highest rates of “student-workers” among OECD countries (OECD, 2000). Of this group of students overall, almost 40 per cent of those still at school in 1999 were also employed part-time. Analyses on the earlier cohorts of longitudinal data suggest that combining studying and working provides benefits in terms of later finding full-time work and does not appear to adversely affect academic performance unless the work hours are long (Robinson, 1999). Table 6 summarises the findings about part-time jobs.

A higher proportion of females than males held part-time jobs, and it was more common for students with an English-speaking background than for students with an Asian language background or another language background other than English.

Most commonly students worked for less than 10 hours per week; however around one in five males and one-quarter of females worked between 11 and 20 hours per week. Given this difference, however, the amount of money earned by females is, on average, only marginally higher than that of males.

Table 6 Involvement in part-time work by gender (%)

	Males	Females	All Students
Participation rate	34	40	37
Language background			
English speaking	36	43	39
Asian language	20	21	21
Other language	32	36	34
Number of hours worked			
0.5 – 10	76	71	73
10.5 – 20	18	26	23
20.5 – 30	2	1	2
31 – 40	1	-	-
More than 40	3	2	2
Average	8.0	8.4	8.3
Amount of pay per week			
\$1 - \$50	59	54	56
\$51 - \$100	32	39	36
\$101 - \$150	6	5	5
\$151 - 200	2	1	2
More than \$200	1	-	-
Average	\$47.66	\$47.79	\$47.98

The benefits of part-time work are many. Primary among them at this age level is teaching young people general work skills. The 1999 survey asked students to rate how much their part-time job had taught them about getting along with other people, organising their own time, and thinking for themselves. It also asked them to rate how well the job had taught them about particular skills required in that job, and the career they would like after school. Agreement with these statements is shown in Figure 4, where responses of “Quite a bit” and “a fair bit” are grouped together.

Clearly, while students see benefits from working part-time in terms of developing organisational and social skills, it is not widely perceived by them as being a stepping stone for their future career.



Figure 4 Student perceptions of the benefits of a part-time job

Leaving school

In an analysis of early school leavers from the Y95 cohort of LSAY, Marks & Fleming (1999) found that aspirations were the strongest correlate of early school leaving. Students who in Year 9 think that they will leave school before completing Year 12 have a tendency to do just that. However those who do not complete Year 12 have been shown to be increasingly unlikely to obtain secure employment as well as facing a risk of exclusion from a society that requires active learning beyond the school years (Lamb, Dwyer & Wyn, 2000). In this survey, students were asked after which year of schooling they planned to leave.

Fourteen per cent of males and 8 per cent of females planned to leave school prior to completing Year 12. Of these students, most wanted to leave to get a job, an apprenticeship, other study not available at school, or to earn their own money. For more than half though, the reason given was that they were not doing well at school or that they did not like school.

Student self-concept of ability, perceptions of classroom and school climate and participation in extra-curricular activities have all been shown to affect the likelihood of a student remaining at school to complete Year 12. This section examines broadly the differences in these dimensions for two groups of students: those who want to stay and complete Year 12, and those who wish to leave school.

Table 7 shows students' self-concept of ability in English and mathematics in 1999, and demonstrates quite clearly that the self-concept of those who wish to leave school is a great deal more negative than those who wish to remain to complete Year 12.

Table 7 Self-concept of ability in English and mathematics, 1999, by intention to remain at school

	Self-concept of ability compared to others in your school					
	Very well	Better than average	About average	Not very well	Very poorly	
English						
Intend to leave	6	18	59	15	2	100
Intend to complete Year 12	21	34	40	4	1	100
Mathematics						
Intend to leave	6	22	48	21	3	100
Intend to complete Year 12	22	30	37	10	1	100

Table 8 presents the proportion of students holding positive views on classroom and school climate for each of these two groups. It can be seen that on all aspects of these two dimensions, students who wish to leave school early hold more negative views than those who wish to remain to complete Year 12.

Table 8 Student perceptions of classroom and school climate, 1999, by intention to remain at school

	Intend to leave	Intend to complete Year 12
Classroom climate		
	% Strongly agree or agree	
Students are eager to learn	51	62
Students make good progress	74	85
Students work hard	54	63
Students are well-behaved	42	56
Rating of school on		
	% Excellent or good	
Quality of teachers	47	71
Effective discipline	41	54
Student learning	48	66
School spirit	47	59

Similarly, Table 9 presents the proportion of students participating in extra-curricular activities, where these activities were available to them. Other than for sport, participation in all other activities is substantially lower for those students who plan to leave school early.

Table 9 Participation in extra-curricular activities (%), by intention to remain at school

	Intend to leave				Intend to complete Year 12			
	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Never	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Never
Sport	57	14	14	16	58	13	16	13
Music	8	2	12	78	16	4	9	71
Debating	2	3	13	82	3	6	18	73
Drama	7	8	21	64	12	9	27	52
Community work	6	13	36	45	7	21	41	31

The data from these three tables indicate that these factors may indeed play a part in students' wishes to remain at school to complete Year 12, or to leave early.

Completing Year 12 and afterwards

Students who were planning on completing Year 12 were asked what they wanted to do after completing Year 12, what their parents wanted them to do, what their teachers wanted them to do, and what most of their friends planned to do. Table 10 summarises these data.

Table 10 Plans after completing Year 12, percentages of students

	Student's plans		Friends' plans		Students' perceptions of what			
					Parents want them to do		Teachers want them to do	
	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>
Work	9	8	13	10	7	6	4	2
Apprenticeship/Traineeship	20	5	17	4	18	4	9	2
TAFE	13	18	15	21	10	14	10	10
University	44	54	27	41	46	55	34	41
Other / Don't know	14	15	28	24	19	21	43	45
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Most students who plan to complete Year 12 also plan to proceed to university, and believe that this is also the preferred outcome for their parents and teachers. It is noteworthy that there appear to be higher levels of expectation to do this for females than males, balanced by a much higher proportion of males whose plan is to go on to an apprenticeship or traineeship. Students reported that about one-quarter of their

friends plan to proceed to university, and this proportion is also higher for females than males.

Table 11 details students' post-Year 12 plans and their perceptions of their parents' plans for them by their father's occupational grouping. The proportions are similar when examined by mother's occupational group.

Table 11 Students' post-Year 12 plans and their perceptions of their parents' plans for them, by father's occupational group (%)

Parents' occupational status	University	TAFE	Apprenticeship	Work	Other/ Don't know	Total
Professional						
Self	63	11	7	6	13	100
Parents	65	8	5	4	18	100
Managers						
Self	55	14	11	6	14	100
Parents	55	9	10	6	20	100
Clerical						
Self	48	15	12	8	17	100
Parents	51	11	10	6	22	100
Trades						
Self	44	17	16	9	14	100
Parents	45	15	13	8	19	100
Labourers						
Self	39	19	17	10	15	100
Parents	40	17	16	11	16	100
Unskilled						
Self	35	22	16	9	18	100
Parents	40	16	13	9	22	100

It is apparent from Table 11 that parents' occupational group has an influence on the aspirations of both the student and on their view of their parents' aspirations for them. Students whose fathers are employed in professional or managerial positions are most likely to plan on attending university, and this is congruent to a large extent with their perceptions of their parents' plans. Around four in ten students with fathers in labouring or unskilled jobs believed that their parents wanted them to go to university, however a slightly greater proportion of these students plan on attending a TAFE or entering into an apprenticeship or traineeship.

Table 12 examines students' post-school plans by gender within father's occupational group. The main thing that is evident from this table is that more females from each socioeconomic level plan on pursuing further education after completing Year 12, particularly university. Whether this is because they perceive they have fewer options open to them than young males is worthy of further investigation. Males are up to four times more likely to pursue an apprenticeship or traineeship than females, and are more likely to seek out employment directly after completing Year 12.

Table 12 Students' post-Year 12 plans and their perceptions of their parents' plans for them, by fathers' occupational group and gender (%)

Parents' occupational status	University	TAFE	Apprenticeship	Work	Other/Don't know	Total
Professional						
Male	59	11	12	6	12	100
Female	66	11	3	5	15	100
Managers						
Male	48	13	18	9	12	100
Female	62	15	4	4	15	100
Clerical						
Male	43	11	20	8	18	100
Female	53	19	4	7	17	100
Trades						
Male	36	15	26	9	14	100
Female	51	19	6	9	15	100
Labourers						
Male	36	11	28	10	15	100
Female	43	25	7	10	15	100
Unskilled						
Male	29	18	27	12	14	100
Female	41	24	7	7	21	100

Summary

This section of the report has examined the characteristics, aspirations and experiences of those in the Y98 cohort who remained at school in 1999 and responded to the survey. In all there were 9 289 students in this category, and they were found to be broadly representative of 15-16 year olds in Australia.

A range of background variables that have been shown to influence student achievement and retention to Year 12 are summarised in this section of the report, as are several other groups of variables relating to student perceptions of their classroom and school climate and engagement with school life.

Some 40 per cent of students in Australia are working in part-time jobs while they are at school, and this section of the report briefly examines and describes their participation in such work, hours worked and money earned as well as perceptions of the benefits of such jobs. The chapter concludes with an examination of the aspirations of this group of students; whether they plan to leave before completing Year 12 and post-school plans.

The next section of this report looks at the profile of the early school leavers group; that is, those students who left school before the 1999 survey was carried out. While this only represents some 1 per cent of the entire sample, these very early school leavers are at risk of very negative employment outcomes, and so need to be examined in as much detail as possible.

4. EARLY SCHOOL LEAVERS

As stated in part 1 of this report, very few of the students in this sample had left school by the end of Year 10. This section of the report provides some characteristics of this group, and details their reasons for leaving school and their activities since doing so.

Characteristics

Table 13 looks at the proportion of each of the original cohort that had left school early. For example, in the original cohort, there were 209 students with an ATSI background, and 8695 non-ATSI. Of the 209 ATSI students, 2 had left school in 1999, representing 1 per cent of the original group. Of the 8695 non-indigenous students, 95 had left school in 1999, representing 1.1 per cent of that group.

With the caveat that we are dealing with very small numbers, the following summary points could be made:

- Similar proportions of males and females had left school early
- A greater proportion were Australian-born
- A much greater proportion were from families in which the father or mother had themselves not completed secondary school
- Children of fathers or mothers with university qualifications were the least likely to leave early
- Students in the lowest two quartiles of achievement were most likely to leave early.

Table 13 Background characteristics of the Y98 group who had left school in 1999

	Weighted n	% of 1999 group
Gender		
Male	56	1.3
Female	52	1.1
Indigenous status		
Indigenous	2	1.0
Non- Indigenous	95	1.1
Respondent's country of birth		
Australia	92	1.1
Other	4	0.4
Father's country of birth		
Australia	73	1.1
Other	27	0.9
Mother's country of birth		
Australia	75	1.1
Other	25	0.9
Home Language		
English	93	1.1
Other	7	0.9
Father's level of education		
Did not complete secondary	65	1.4
Completed secondary	35	0.7
Father's qualifications		
None	27	1.0
Apprenticeship	33	1.4
TAFE qualification	8	0.8
University qualification	8	0.3
Other	24	
Mother's level of education		
Did not complete secondary	39	1.4
Completed secondary	61	0.8
Mother's qualifications		
None	48	1.2
Apprenticeship	5	0.7
TAFE qualification	17	1.2
University qualification	12	0.5
Other	18	
Achievement Quartiles		
Lowest quartile	52	2.5
Second quartile	31	1.4
Third quartile	15	0.7
Highest quartile	2	0.1

Why they left school

Other LSAY reports have examined the reasons that respondents gave for leaving school (Marks & Fleming, 1999). The students' responses are informative since they tell us whether they left school for positive reasons (such as wanting to get a job or apprenticeship) or for negative reasons. Respondents were asked to rate the reasons they had left school on a four-point scale that ranged from very important through to not important. Figure 5 summarises the proportion of respondents who agreed that the particular reason was a "very important" or "somewhat important" influence on their decision to leave school.

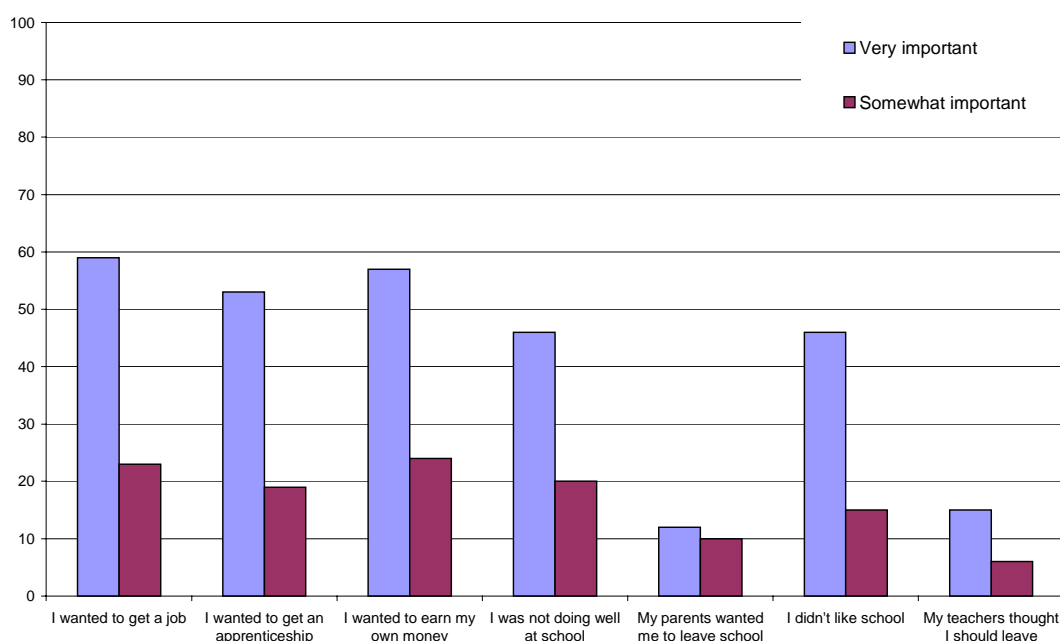


Figure 5 Importance of reasons for leaving school

Of the reasons for leaving school before completing Year 12, "I wanted to get a job" was judged as very important by around six in ten early school leavers, and somewhat important by a further two in ten. "I wanted to get an apprenticeship" was judged as very important by just over half of the respondents, and as somewhat important by a further one in five. The next most important reason was "I wanted to earn my own money", followed by "I was not doing well at school" and "I did not like school". It is noteworthy that the positive reasons outrank the negative.

Main activity since leaving

Overall, 29 per cent of these respondents' main activity was working, while a further 11 per cent were looking for work, 19 per cent engaged in an apprenticeship, 4 per cent in a traineeship and 9 per cent undertaking further study. A further 9 per cent indicated that they were involved in something other than those activities provided in the list, while 18 per cent gave a double response.

Table 14 summarises the main activities of the early school leavers by gender and for the whole group.

Table 14 Summary of employment, education and training activities for the early school leavers (%)

	Males	Females	All students
Main activity in 1999			
Work	35	19	28
Looking for work	14	15	15
Apprenticeship	17	16	17
Traineeship	9	2	6
Study	1	16	8
Other	9	8	9
Double response	14	24	19
	<i>n=53</i>	<i>n=47</i>	<i>n=101</i>
Time fraction			
Full-time	72	37	55
Part-time	28	63	45
	<i>n=35</i>	<i>n=33</i>	<i>n=68</i>
Average salary	\$117	\$81	\$100
Average hours per week	20	15	18

Summary

This section has examined the characteristics of the 108 students who had left school before the 1999 survey was conducted. Similar proportions of males and females had left school early, and a much greater proportion were from homes in which the father and mother had not themselves completed secondary schooling. Not surprisingly, the students were predominantly those in the lowest two achievement quartiles. Most students left for reasons such as wanting to get a job or an apprenticeship or wanting to earn their own money, however for just under one-half of the students a major factor was that they did not like school. This chapter provides a breakdown of the activities of these students since leaving school, as well as the amount they are paid and the working hours.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This Cohort Report has provided an overview of the data available for researchers in the LSAY Y98 1999 survey. These reports are intended to help researchers and other users of the LSAY database to see the potential of the database in terms of the breadth of the variables collected.

Section 3 of the report looked at the 99 per cent of students who were still enrolled in school: their backgrounds, their aspirations and their perceptions of school and classroom climates. Section 4 of the report looked at those few who had left school early; their background, their aspirations, and their reasons for leaving school at such a young age. Subsequent LSAY reports will follow through some of these early analyses over time.

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