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The movement of non-metropolitan youth towards the cities

More than one third of young Australians from non-metropolitan areas relocate to a major city in the years immediately after leaving school and, although some return, non-metropolitan areas experience a net loss of a quarter of their young people.

A new report, released by ACER on 22 February, is the first Australian national longitudinal study of young people's geographic mobility. It focused on the experiences of around 5000 young Australians who were living in a non-metropolitan area in their final years of school. They were tracked from 1997 (when most were in Year 11) until 2004 when most were 23 years old.

Those making a move to a major city were typically drawn by the pursuit of further study, most often at university. Over the project's seven year period, approximately 40 per cent of the non-metropolitan youth who had moved to a city were studying either at a university or a TAFE institution or were undertaking an apprenticeship or traineeship.

By contrast, those with full-time employment in their non-metropolitan homes were more likely to stay there. Full time employment also worked to keep young people in the city after completing their studies.

The report suggests that young people are leaving their rural communities because those communities are not able to provide as many further education and training, employment and other opportunities to the same extent as they are available in the major cities of Australia.

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On the other hand, no significant difference was found in rates of employment, average income, work hours and life satisfaction of young people who left non-metropolitan areas for the city in comparison to those who stayed in a non-metropolitan area or returned to a non-metropolitan area after a time in the city. Home ownership was slightly higher among those who had chosen to remain in non-metropolitan areas.

The report concluded that non-metropolitan youth are likely to continue to leave their homes to pursue university study. Rural communities therefore have a challenge ahead of them to convince young people to return after completing their education in the cities.

Further information and additional findings are available in the report, [*The movement of non-metropolitan youth towards the cities, by Kylie Hillman and Sheldon Rothman*](#). The study is research report number 50 in the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY), a program conducted jointly by ACER and the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST).

[Download full report from ACER Website](#)

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Time is right for a common curriculum

ACER chief executive Professor Geoff Masters was invited by The Advertiser newspaper in Adelaide to write an opinion article in response to the release of the ALP position paper on a national school curriculum. The following article was published on 2 March 2007.

This week saw Federal Labour leader Kevin Rudd release an ALP position paper on a national school curriculum. The paper proposes a national curriculum in the core areas of mathematics, English, science and history from Reception to Year 12. The curriculum would identify essential knowledge and skills that all Australian students should be taught, but would leave room for 'sensible' local, regional and state variations.

The ALP paper comes hot on the heels of Federal Education Minister Julie Bishop's call for greater national curriculum consistency and her decision to seek the support of state education ministers to achieve this. Minister Bishop hinted at the possibility of using federal funds to ensure the introduction of a national approach.

So, whether the government or opposition is returned to power after the next election, it seems likely that we will see more common school curricula across Australia.

And it's not before time. Consider, for example, what is happening in the senior secondary school. With a population less than some American states, Australia now has seven government authorities developing nine senior certificates, including the SACE. It has to be asked, in a country of 20 million people, do we really need nine senior certificates? As part of these nine certificates, the seven authorities develop 27 different mathematics courses and more than 20 history courses that can be used for tertiary entrance. They also develop other non-TER mathematics and history courses.

The closer one looks, the more obvious the problem becomes. A recent ACER study showed that 95 per cent of the chemistry taught across Australia is common to all states and territories. In other words, the seven government authorities are busily developing essentially the same chemistry curriculum seven times.

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Despite this, each state has its own method for assessing students' mastery of this curriculum and its own system for reporting student results, making it impossible to compare chemistry results between any two states. This observation is not limited to chemistry: 90 per cent of advanced mathematics and 85 per cent of physics content are common to all states and territories.

A national approach to curriculum should have as an objective the elimination of unnecessary differences. Across this country there are bewildering variations in terminology, requirements that make it harder to achieve a certificate in some states than in others, and as many different schemes for reporting Year 12 results as there are agencies responsible for doing this. And the situation is becoming worse. With proposed changes in a number of states, including Queensland, SA and WA, senior secondary arrangements in this country are about to diverge further.

A national curriculum also should have as an objective the elimination of unnecessary duplication. States and territories are staunch defenders of their own systems. Each appears to consider its curriculum superior to those of the rest of the country, which are variously described as lacking in academic rigour, unresponsive to local and student needs, too rigid and bureaucratic, based on narrow and limited forms of assessment, and captured by educational fads. But a dispassionate analysis suggests that state curricula have much more in common than is often suggested.

However, more important than removing unnecessary differences, minimising duplication and achieving comparability across states is the opportunity that now exists to re-think the school curriculum. This is a national priority and it requires a national response. For example, too few students are choosing to study advanced mathematics and science. Better teaching will be part of the solution, but bold new approaches to school curricula also are required.

The answer will not be found in a return to curricula of the 1950s, but in new high-quality multi-disciplinary curricula that are grounded in contemporary issues such as global warming, salinity, nuclear energy, genetically-modified foods, cloning and stem-cell research. The current bipartisan agreement provides an opportunity for a federal minister to provide genuine leadership in the development of an Australian curriculum for the 21st century.

This article was originally published in the *The Advertiser*, 2 March 2007, page 20.

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ACER UPDATE

ACER opens Perth office

ACER's new West Australian office was officially opened on Wednesday 21 February 2007 by chief executive Geoff Masters. The opening of a Perth office follows ACER's recent acquisition of Unicom Education, a supplier of special needs and speech and language resources for teachers, established in the late 1990s. Shane Thompson, who has owned and managed Unicom for the past five years, joins the staff of ACER Press as an Education Consultant for Western Australia.

The Perth office is located at 7/1329 Hay Street West Perth, WA 6005, Telephone 08 9485 2194, Fax 08 9485 2195

ACER named Employer of Choice for Women

ACER has been successful in obtaining a 2007 Employer of Choice for Women citation from the Federal Government's Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA) for the second successive year. ACER is one of 131 organisations across Australia to receive the award this year and it has done so on the basis that its policies and programs support a commitment to fully utilising, developing and retaining its staff, including women.

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Centre for Research on Educational Testing (CRET) Japan

ACER welcomed a group of five researchers from the newly formed Centre for Research on Educational Testing (CRET) Japan in early March. CRET has been formed by its parent organisation the Benesse Centre for Educational Research and Development with a mission to research and develop educational testing and technology for the future. CRET is currently developing items for large scale assessment of reading literacy. ACER staff worked with the key members of CRET over several days to further develop their understanding of large scale assessment and item construction.

Leading Lights of Learning Seminar

ACER will conduct the first in a series of Leading Lights of Learning lectures with the Queensland Studies Authority at the Hilton Hotel in Brisbane on 26 April. Professor Janette Elwood from Queen's University Belfast will give a presentation entitled Views of assessment, learning and mind. Professor Elwood will explore the links and the implications for emerging trends and perspectives in assessment. In particular, she will outline some links between assessment, theories of learning and theories of mind; present a continuum as a framework to consider these ideas; and critique the emerging trend of 'assessment for learning' within this framework. The 45-minute presentation plus question time will be followed by drinks and canapés.

Professor Elwood is Director of Research in the Queen's University School of Education and is responsible for the research cluster of Assessment and Curriculum. She is also responsible for the MPhil/PhD course.

It is hoped that three lectures on Leading Lights of Learning will be held at ACER in Brisbane during 2007. For further information including a registration form visit the ACER website or contact Carmel Cranitch, ACER Brisbane office by email: [.JavaScript must be enabled to view this email address\)](#) or phone on 07 3831 5062

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