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## Literacy and numeracy achievement influences ENTER scores

Achievement in literacy and numeracy in Year 9 has the strongest impact on the Equivalent National Tertiary Entrance Rank (ENTER), according to research conducted as part of the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY).

The report, *Tertiary Entrance Performance: The Role of Student Background and Social Factors*, investigated the relationship between ENTER scores and a variety of factors. It focused on a national cohort of more than 13 000 students who were in Year 9 in 1995 and examined their experiences up to 2001 as they moved from school into post-compulsory education, training and work.

Dr John Ainley, Deputy Director of ACER, said that the strongest influence on tertiary entrance scores is a student's proficiency in literacy and numeracy in earlier years, which represents an accumulation of students' skills in foundation areas of learning.

'Literacy and numeracy achievement reflects students' capacity to read, interpret and process text and numerical information. Those skills provide the foundation for learning in their specialist studies in the final years of school,' Dr Ainley said.

'Students who have developed competency in these foundation areas will have greater confidence to tackle their studies in Years 11 and 12.'

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The second most important influence on tertiary entrance performance, according to the report, was the particular school a student attended. The report and other research suggest that school culture or environment, teaching practices, student confidence and motivation, organisation and resource use may contribute to differences among schools.

Socioeconomic background, as measured by parental education, wealth and occupational status, was the third most important influence on tertiary entrance performance.

'Students whose parents are professionals, and to a lesser extent managers, exhibit higher ENTER scores. However, taking into account students' levels of literacy and numeracy, the direct influence of socioeconomic background is somewhat weaker,' Dr Ainley said.

Closely following socio-economic background as an influence on ENTER scores was school sector. Students who attended non-government schools outperformed students from government schools, even after taking into account socio-economic background and achievement in literacy and numeracy.

The report also examined a number of other factors that influence ENTER scores including gender, region and ethnicity.

Overall, gender differences in ENTER scores are relatively minor. On average, females achieve higher tertiary entrance scores. Ethnicity also plays a small role in ENTER scores. The average ENTER score varies across ethnic groups. Some groups perform substantially higher than students with Australian-born fathers and some significantly lower. Students whose fathers were born in Asia showed higher ENTER scores than students whose fathers were born in Australia.

The report also found that some ethnic groups perform at higher levels than would be expected given their prior achievement levels and socio-economic backgrounds. For example, the high performance of Asian students is not explained by differences in their socio-economic background or prior achievement.

ACER manages the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth jointly with the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST).

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## **ENTER Scores explained**

The Equivalent National Tertiary Rank (ENTER) is a nationally equivalent measure developed as a selection tool to assist higher education institutions select applicants. All students in Australia who have successfully completed Year 12 study in tertiary entrance subjects receive an ENTER score.

States and territories differ in how they refer to this measure. In New South Wales and the ACT, it is the Universities Admissions Index (UAI). In Victoria, it is called the ENTER. In South Australia, Tasmania and Western Australia, it is called the Tertiary Entrance Rank (TER).

ENTER is a number between 99.95 and zero that reports the rank position relative to all other students. It takes into account the number of students who sit the tertiary entrance subjects in any year and also the number of people of Year 12 school leaving age in the total population. For example, the performance of a student with a TER of 70.00 is equal to or better than 70 per cent of the Year 12 school leaver age population.

ENTER scores for each course and higher education institution vary, typically ranging from the high-90s for medicine and law to the mid-60s for arts and business.

These scores are also important for students who don't go on to higher education after Year 12. Employers may use ENTER scores to screen applicants.

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## Firm based training doubles for young women

Young workers in Australia realise the benefits on-the-job training and education can have on their career.

Participation of young Australian women in formal and informal training programs provided by their employers as part of their work (firm-based training) has more than doubled between 1985 and 1997, according to a recent ACER report.

In 1997, 32 per cent of women aged 19 to 26 participated in external firm-based education and training, compared with 15 per cent in 1985. The incidence of in-house training also increased for young women – from 32 per cent in 1985 to 37 per cent in 1997. For young men there was little change in that period, increasing marginally from 28 per cent to 29 per cent for external training and 29 per cent to 32 per cent for internal training.

The report, *Firm-based Training for Young Australians: Changes from the 1980s to the 1990s* by Michael Long and Stephen Lamb, examined changes in the extent, pattern and outcomes of participation in short episodes of firm-based education and training by young Australians.

The study uses data from the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) project, which is jointly managed by ACER and the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST). It focuses on two national samples of young Australians, the most comprehensive available data to analyse the changes in training experienced by young workers over the period 1985 to 1997.

According to the report, the extent of formal firm-based education and training for young Australians is substantial, but uneven. As part of their work, 46 per cent of employees in the sample participated in formal training in 1994, receiving an average of 55.5 hours over the previous 12 months. However, the distribution of training time was skewed with a small proportion of individuals receiving extensive training and many receiving little training (the median amount of training was 17.2 hours per year).

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Most of the firm-based education and training was provided by the worker's own employer (76 per cent). Young women had a slightly higher incidence of formal training (49 per cent) than young men (44 per cent), but on average received fewer hours (73 hours for males over the previous 12 months, compared with 40 for females). The report also found that workers with 'better' jobs (eg those who are in full-time jobs requiring more education, or in professional or managerial occupations) receive more training.

Training tended to be higher in public administration and community service industry sectors and lower in agriculture and primary industry. Evidence also suggests that those who undertook in-house firm-based training received, on average, higher hourly wages.

Dr John Ainley, Deputy Director of ACER, said the report highlighted the importance of ongoing training for employees to build on their initial skills.

"Training provided in the workplace is an important component of lifelong learning and helps to build a more skilled workforce," Dr Ainley said.

Long, M., Lamb, S. (2002). *Firm-based Training for Young Australians: Changes from the 1980s to the 1990s*, LSAY Research Report No. 23, Melbourne: ACER. The full report is available on the ACER web site (see <http://www.acer.edu.au>) in pdf format. Copies may

be purchased from ACER Press Customer Service telephone (03) 9277 5447, fax (03) 9560 4799, email [sales@acer.edu.au](mailto:sales@acer.edu.au) .

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## Testing overseas students

A new test assesses the preparedness of overseas candidates for academic studies in Australia.

In recent years, Australia has developed an excellent reputation as a destination for international students, particularly those from Asia, who find the quality of education, its relatively low cost (compared to Britain and the US), and safe studying environment very appealing.

In 2001, about 140 000 international students were enrolled in Australian universities making education one of Australia's boom exports and the second largest services export earner after tourism. In 2001, international students comprised about 18 per cent of Australia's university population and spent almost \$1 billion on university tuition alone.

With the influx of thousands of students from a large number of nations, Australian universities have faced difficulties in interpreting the varied credentials and evidence presented in support of student applications. An innovative test launched by ACER in September 2001 is assisting universities to tackle this issue.

The International Student Admissions Test (ISAT) is providing universities with a reliable and efficient way of testing students' potential to succeed in Australian tertiary courses. It complements the existing English-language competency tests.

"While Australian universities have procedures for assessing English language proficiency, until now there has been no commonly accepted method of assessing the preparedness of overseas candidates for academic studies in Australia. ISAT addresses this concern by assessing cross-curricular academic abilities," the Executive Director of ACER, Professor Geoff Masters, said.

ISAT requires students to answer 100 multiple-choice questions in three hours. The questions measure critical reasoning (using material from the humanities/social sciences) and quantitative reasoning (using material from science/mathematics) abilities which are considered important for coping with the intellectual demands of most tertiary courses. The emphasis is on thinking skills rather than curriculum-specific knowledge and English language proficiency.

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IDP Education Australia uses experienced test administrators and a wide network of offices in 65 countries to manage ISAT overseas. Students within Australia are able to apply to sit the test through most tertiary admissions centres. ISAT candidates receive a copy of their results, which also are made available to Australian universities.

"ISAT provides universities with an indication of an applicant's cognitive abilities which should be useful in validating their credentials, assisting with decisions about borderline applicants and guiding placement into particular programs or courses," Professor Masters said.

"ACER has been encouraged by the response from universities in the successful national trials of ISAT. Universities have shown an interest in using the test for entrance into courses in 2002."

Ms Susan Nankervis, ACER's ISAT Project Director, said the trial population was quite varied and drew on international students in Australia and a number who sat the test in their home country. "There was a good gender mix, an excellent range of English language proficiencies and an interesting diversity of nationalities represented in the trial test population, all of which gave ACER the information required to evaluate the validity of ISAT for international student admissions," Ms Nankervis said.

The first test was conducted in November 2001. There will be at least four sittings of ISAT annually. For further information contact Ms Susan Nankervis on (03) 9277 5566 or [.\(JavaScript must be enabled to view this email address\).](#)

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## Professional development 2002

ACER offers a suite of professional development options for teachers, psychologists, parents, human resource professionals, researchers and policy makers.

Options for 2002 include:

- Selection from a generic calendar of professional development activities presented Australia-wide;
- Individual design of sessions for small or large groups;
- Customised series of sessions for schools or regions;
- Interactive workshops;
- Topic specific conferences; and
- Delivery in your workplace or at convenient locations throughout Australia.

ACER invites you to discuss the possibilities of professional development designed specifically to meet your needs. Contact Kerry-Anne Hoad, Manager, Professional Development Unit, telephone (03) 9277 5402; fax (03) 9560 4799; email [.JavaScript must be enabled to view this email address\)](#)

A sample of topics and presenters for 2002:

### EDUCATION

#### ***Bullying – A whole school approach***

Aim: to provide new insights into bullying behaviour and offer easy-to-implement procedures and strategies to handle the complex nature of school bullying.

Presenters: Amelia Suckling and Carla Temple

Assessment Tools for the Primary Years

Aim: to introduce a range of assessment tools with guidance on use and interpretation of data.

Presenters: John King and Barbara Smith

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### ***Numeracy in the Early Years & Numeracy in the Middle Years***

Aim: Practical activities and instructional games which focus on the development of thinking processes and the concepts of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division.

Presenter: George Booker

### ***Literacy 'Sight words made simple'***

Aim: to provide accelerated learning techniques to rapidly improve reading, increase fluency and develop comprehension through the explicit teaching of the magic 100 words.

Presenter: Marcella Reiter

### ***Social skills and behaviour guidance 'Stop, Think, Do'***

Aim: provide strategies to support social skill training in children, behaviour guidance and motivating children's learning.

Presenter: Lindy Petersen

## **PSYCHOLOGY/SOCIAL WELFARE**

### ***Safe Anger Release & Proactive Counselling for Children and Adolescents***

Aim: to provide practical ways for dealing with anger, frustration and acting out behaviour of children and adolescents. Exploring the tools of drawing, bioenergetics, emotional release exercises and relaxation.

Presenters: Mark Pearson and Helen Wilson

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## ***Myers-Briggs Type Indicator courses: Qualifying Programs;***

Step II: MBTI & Careers counselling; MBTI & Team building.

Aim: to identify Type preferences and explore how we prefer to use energy in life and work and how we like to interact with our environment in terms of space, time and deadlines.

Presenters: Peter Geyer and Jo Fleischer

## **HUMAN RESOURCES**

### ***Test Administration Course***

Aim: to cover basic ethics in testing, introduction to psychometric tests, test administration practises, scoring tests, and test administration process, structure and rationale.

Presenter: Marian Power

## **PARENT EDUCATION**

### ***Raising Real People***

Aim: to address some of the difficulties and dilemmas of parenting children and adolescents.

Presenter: Andrew Fuller

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