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Teachers report increased job satisfaction

The job satisfaction of Australia's school teachers has increased over the past three years, and almost nine out of every ten teachers is either satisfied or very satisfied with their job, new research suggests.

Between August and December 2010, 15475 school teachers and 1579 school leaders completed the Staff in Australia's Schools (SiAS) survey about their background and qualifications, their work, their career intentions, and school staffing issues. The findings of the survey, conducted by ACER on behalf of the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), were released on 15 January 2012.

The survey revealed that 88 per cent of primary teachers and 86 per cent of secondary teachers are overall either satisfied or very satisfied with their current job. This represents an improvement since the first SiAS survey, conducted in 2007, of about 3 percentage points for both primary and secondary teachers.

There was little variation in the results when separated according to school sector and location - in all cases over 80 per cent of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with their current job. The aspects of the job that teachers were most satisfied with were their working relationships with their colleagues and with parents/guardians, while the areas of least satisfaction were the value society places on teachers' work and the amount of administrative and clerical work teachers are expected to do.

SiAS project director, ACER Research Director Dr Phillip McKenzie said, "Despite such positive feeling about overall job satisfaction, more than half of all teachers surveyed are unsure how much longer they intend to continue working in schools."

"This suggests that career intentions are somewhat fluid, and difficult to predict with certainty," he added. "However, it is worth noting that only fairly small proportions (7 per cent primary, 10 per cent secondary) indicated that they actually plan to leave teaching permanently before retirement."

The top two reasons for leaving prior to retirement were 'better opportunities outside schools' and 'the workload is too heavy'.

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McKenzie said that SiAS contributes directly to the ongoing development of better information on the teaching workforce. In 2010 SiAS collected information on a wide range of teacher workforce characteristics and attitudes, and comparisons with 2007 enable analysis of trends over time. This will assist governments, teacher employers and teacher education institutions in planning for future needs.

Phillip McKenzie, Glenn Rowley, Paul Weldon & Martin Murphy (2011) *Staff in Australia's Schools 2010: Main Report on the Survey*, Australian Council for Educational Research. The full report is available from <http://www.deewr.gov.au>

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Report on civics and citizenship learning outcomes in Australian schools

A recently released report, produced for the Australian government by ACER, provides interesting insights into young people's understanding and perceptions of civics and citizenship.

The report presents the findings of the National Assessment Program – Civics and Citizenship (NAP-CC), conducted by ACER on behalf of the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) in October 2010. This was the third administration of the national assessment, following the 2004 and 2007 assessment cycles.

A nationally representative sample of more than 7200 Year 6 students and around 6400 Year 10 students completed the triennial test of students' skills, knowledge and understandings of Australia's system of government. The results reveal that:

- Around half (52 per cent for Year 6 and 49 per cent for Year 10) of the participating students met or exceeded the relevant Proficient Standard, a 'challenging but reasonable' expectation of student achievement at that year level.
- There was a slight improvement in Year 10 achievement between 2007 (42 per cent at or above the Proficient Standard) and 2010 (49 per cent), while achievement at Year 6 remained at about the same level (53 per cent in 2007 vs. 52 per cent in 2010).
- On average, girls performed better than boys, both at Year 6 and Year 10.
- At both year levels students from metropolitan schools performed better than those from provincial schools, who in turn outperformed students from remote schools.

In 2010, NAP-CC also included a questionnaire designed to measure students' perceptions of citizenship and their attitudes towards a number of civic-related issues, as well as report on their civic engagement.

Discussing the findings, report co-author ACER Research Director Dr Wolfram Schulz said, "While large majorities of students expressed interest in environmental issues, what is happening in other countries and global issues, only about one third of students at both year levels were found to be interested in Australian politics."

"These results suggest that aspects of political debate in Australia do not reach the attention of young people and also that "politics" may have negative connotations for young people in general," Dr Schulz said.

The questionnaire also revealed the police and law courts were the civic institutions most trusted by students, ahead of federal and state or territory parliament, political parties and the media. The level of trust in each civic institution decreased noticeably between Year 6 and Year 10.

The *National Assessment Program – Civics and Citizenship Years 6 & 10 Report 2010*, published by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) in late 2011, is available to download from <http://www.nap.edu.au/>

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Future academics need encouragement to stay in Australia

The higher education sector must focus on creating roles for early career academics and retaining research graduates or it risks impeding Australia's ability to meet its university attainment targets, according to an ACER research review paper.

In the seventh research briefing for the *Joining the Dots* series, 'Where are the academics of tomorrow? Supply and demand issues for Australian universities', ACER Senior Research Fellow Dr Daniel Edwards explored how the academic workforce is placed to cope with the forecast rise in student numbers that will result if university attainment targets are to be met.

"A viable and engaged academic workforce is vitally important if the expansion of the higher education system is to be a success," said Dr Edwards.

Dr Edwards' research suggests that, in some fields, the supply of academics will not be great enough to meet demand. Dr Edwards said large numbers of research graduates are building careers outside of the Australian higher education sector, reflecting findings from the 2010 National Research Student Survey (NRSS) that show there is a perception among current research students that positions in universities are not widely available.

It is estimated that there are around 19 000 current research students in Australia under the age of 40 with serious career plans to join the academic profession over the coming decade. However, the NRSS revealed that more than 43 per cent of these research students plan to pursue this profession outside Australia. This reduces the estimated supply of academics to Australian universities to about 11 000.

Recent findings from an Australian survey of academics indicate that 48 per cent of the current academic workforce, or over 50 000 academics, intend to retire, move to an overseas university, or leave Australian higher education at some time in the next ten years, indicating there may be growth in the availability of academic positions in the medium term.

"Greater emphasis on highlighting the availability of positions is one of the ways the sector can help to ensure there are enough academics to meet future needs," said Dr Edwards.

Dr Edwards said the good news is the NRSS found research students have a positive impression of the academic career, rating it more attractive than other careers on a wide range of factors including interest and challenge, flexibility, work/life balance and job satisfaction.

"No matter how attractive an occupation may be, if a student believes there are no positions available then the chance they will pursue this line of work is likely to be greatly diminished," said Dr Edwards.

Joining the Dots is a subscription-based resource provided by ACER to those with an interest in Australian Higher Education. Details for the 2012 series can be found at www.acer.edu.au/jtd or by emailing jtd@acer.edu.au

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Mobile phones may help get kids active

Children who know how to use a mobile phone, as opposed to those who don't, are more likely to move about their neighbourhood without adult supervision, ACER research released in December 2011 suggests.

The study, by ACER Research Fellow Ms Catherine Underwood, examined the extent to which knowing how to use a mobile phone is correlated with children's physical activity and ability to move through their neighbourhood without adult supervision, also known as independent mobility.

More than 800 Victorian primary school children aged between 8 and 12 years participated in the research, of which 84 per cent reported they know how to use a mobile phone.

The study revealed that 70 per cent of children who know how to use a mobile phone reported that they are allowed to go outside and play with other children, compared to only 51 per cent of children who do not know how to use a mobile phone.

Children who know how to use a mobile phone reported a greater awareness of skills needed to move independently around their neighbourhood, such as how to read street signs (94 per cent of children who know how to use a mobile phone vs. 74 per cent of those who do not), road safety rules (91 per cent vs. 88 per cent) and how to use public transport (61 per cent vs. 33 per cent).

Children who know how to use a mobile phone also reported a preference for playing outside and participating in outside activities, and were more likely than children who do not know how to use a mobile phone to say they enjoy moving around in their neighbourhood. They were also more likely to own equipment that enabled them to engage in active modes of transport, such as a bicycle, scooter, skateboard or rollerblades.

Ms Underwood said the findings support the idea that mobile phones may be a tool parents use to allow their children greater independent mobility.

"The mobile phone, once a leading contributor to inactive lifestyles, has had a change of heart and may now be getting children mobile in their neighbourhood," said Ms Underwood.

Analysis was based on an aspect of data looking at children's independent mobility and active transport collected in 2010 using VicHealth funded data. Data was collected from 1427 primary school aged children from Prep to year 6 aged 4 to 12 years across 19 Primary Schools in Victoria.

For further information download the [Fact sheet: Children's Independent Mobility: and the Mobile Phone: 8 to 12 year olds](#).

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ACER Update

Scholarship test registrations close soon

In 2012, ACER's Cooperative Scholarship Testing Program (CSTP) test date has been brought forward and will now occur in February, instead of May as was the case in previous years. In response to requests from schools, the 2012 test will take place on Saturday 25 February. The closing date for student registrations is at 11.59pm (AEDST) on Monday 6 February 2012. Further information including a list of participating schools is available from www.acer.edu.au/tests/cstp

Explicit school improvement seminar

On Wednesday 25 January 2012, ACER Chief Executive Professor Geoff Masters will present a one-day seminar in Sydney on *Explicit School Improvement: An evidence-based framework for action*. The seminar will focus on the Teaching and Learning School Improvement Framework (TaLSIF), an evidence-based tool developed by ACER with Education Queensland to address the need for detailed, objective measurement of school practices in areas shown by international research to have a direct impact on teaching and learning outcomes. Professor Masters will be joined by co-presenters Mr Tony McGruther (Manager of Leadership Programs, ACER) and Mr Mark Campling (Assistant Director-General, School Performance, Education Queensland).

First national conference on Adult Language, Literacy and Numeracy Assessment

In response to increasing national and state interest in addressing and improving the Language, Literacy and Numeracy (LLN) skills of Australian workers and vocational education and training (VET) participants, ACER will present the inaugural National Adult English Language, Literacy and Numeracy Assessment Conference in Melbourne on 4 May 2012.

Presentations will cover the main topics and research regarding the LLN skills of the Australian adult population from an industry and training perspective as well as practical issues such as identifying and assessing LLN skills and supporting learners and trainees in improving their LLN skills. Two half-day pre-conference workshops will address the 2011 Australian Core Skills Framework and item writing for adult literacy and numeracy assessments. For further information including a list of speakers please visit www.acer.edu.au/nallnac/

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