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ACER, "ACER eNews 11 November 2005" (2005).
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Jobs: How young people are faring

An annual report of how young people are faring says that each year a substantial proportion of young Australians make a poor transition from school to further study and work. A paper based on the report *How Young People are Faring 2005* was presented by Michael Long at the Monash University-ACER Centre for the Economics of Education and Training (CEET) National Conference in October.

Around 15 per cent of 15 to 19 year-olds are neither in full-time work nor full-time study. These young people were working part-time (7.2 per cent of 15 to 19 year-olds), looking for work (3.8 per cent) or not in the labour force (3.9 per cent). Many of these young Australians want to work or want to work more. In terms of numbers, there are 208 400 young people who are neither in full-time study or full-time work. They are likely to be experiencing difficulty in making a successful transition from secondary education and face a higher level of risk in the labour market over the long term than their counterparts who are fully engaged in education or training.

Completing Year 12 improves the transition for young people. School leavers who completed Year 12 in 2003 were more likely to be either studying (full or part-time) or working full-time in May 2004 than were young people who left school without completing Year 12. About two-fifths of young people who left school after completing Year 10 (45 per cent) or Year 11 (40 per cent) were not studying and either unemployed, in part-time work or not in the labour force. The corresponding percentage in these activities for young people who completed Year 12 (23 per cent) is about half that of other school leavers.

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While the number of full-time jobs has continued to grow for the older population, full-time jobs have not grown to the same extent for young Australians outside full-time study. As part-time work becomes a way of life for more young Australians, it may provide an extended stepping stone to full-time work. Equally, however, it may provide a poor foundation for future skill development or full-time engagement with the labour force. Australia has one of the highest levels of non student part-time employment among OECD countries.

This occurs against a background of an economy that has been expanding for at least a decade. Even though official unemployment has declined among young Australians, this improvement has been relatively greater for older Australians and in relative terms, younger Australians have proportionately higher levels of unemployment.

Governments at all levels have initiated policies and programs designed to improve the transition of young people from school to further study and work. Many of these programs, however, have only recently been introduced and their full effects may not be realised for several years or longer.

[How Young People are Faring 2005](#) was released by the Dusseldorp Skills Forum on 17 November 2005 and is available on the [Dusseldorp Skills Forum](#) website.

Further information is available at [Monash University-ACER Centre for the Economics of Education and Training \(CEET\)](#) website.

Published November 2005

Older workers: Working forever?

The ageing of the Australian population will have an effect on workplaces in coming years, as outlined in a paper by Fran Ferrier at the Monash University-ACER Centre for the Economics of Education and Training (CEET) annual conference in October.

Several of the predicted effects of the ageing of the population, particularly the decline in the number of people in the labour force as more and more workers move toward retirement, are now leading to stronger attention internationally to 'mature' or 'older' workers and the need to keep them in the workforce for as long as possible.

The OECD argues that currently many nations have public policies and workplace practices that discourage older people from continuing in paid employment. Many older Australians withdraw from the labour market well before reaching the official retirement age.

The OECD argues that there is a need for 'a co-ordinated and comprehensive package of measures' that will:

- Facilitate later retirement while removing incentives to early retirement;
- Prevent disability benefits being used as a pathway to early retirement;
- Enhance the effectiveness of age discrimination legislation; and
- Strengthen older workers' employability.

As more people move into older age groups, the number of people leaving the workforce is expected to accelerate. However, two factors are helping to slow the speed of this acceleration: increases in women's participation in paid employment; and rising levels of education among workers.

People with higher levels of education tend to participate in the labour force at higher rates than those with lower levels of education. They also tend to stay in the workforce for longer.

Published November 2005

Recent research has found that training appears to be helpful in maintaining employment. However, increasing training opportunities requires that barriers must be overcome: stereotyped views of older workers held by employers, and the attitudes of some workers themselves towards education and training.

The ability to retire early to enjoy a more relaxed lifestyle, is now and is likely to remain a goal of many Australians. Initiatives to encourage a longer working life will need to address this – and accommodate more flexible forms of workforce participation.

The paper [*Older Workers: Working forever?*](#) was presented by Fran Ferrier, Senior Research Fellow, at the Monash University-ACER Centre for the Economics of Education and Training (CEET) National Conference in October.

Further information is available at [CEET website](#).

Published November 2005

Good data, bad news and good policy making

The New Basics Trial held in Queensland from 2000 to 2004 aimed to improve educational outcomes through practical changes to curriculum, teaching and assessment.

Gabrielle Matters, who became a Principal Research Fellow and began setting up ACER's presence in Queensland in October, presented a paper about the trial at ACER's Research Conference, *Using Data to Support Learning* held in Melbourne in August.

As a part of the New Basics Trial, the **curriculum** was changed by introducing Rich Tasks covering three 3-year spans from Year 1 to Year 9. The Rich Tasks were rich in the sense of having variety, scope and depth; in requiring academic rigour; and in being multidisciplinary.

Assessment was changed by introducing a system of social moderation aimed at achieving state-wide comparability. This required teachers to talk among themselves and compare their opinions about student work, not just within their school but also across schools.

Teaching was changed by 'upping the ante' intellectually, challenging teachers professionally, and connecting what was done in the classroom to the real world.

A research program to assess the viability of the New Basics program covered three key areas:

- Is the New Basics likely to lead to the changes that are wanted?
- Is the New Basics likely to be accepted?
- Is the New Basics feasible on an extended basis?

An external evaluation identified three strengths and three weaknesses in the New Basics in action: Quality of student work, development of an assessment system, and changes in approaches to teaching were the strengths. The weaknesses were performance on standardised tests, lack of congruence with other aspects of the system, and differential impact on year levels.

Published November 2005

Following the research, it was decided the learnings from the New Basics should be transferred to all schools, simply using what is useful. A Queensland Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting (QCAR) Framework of materials and tools will be created by the Queensland Studies Authority in consultation with key stakeholders and implemented across Queensland in 2008.

Download the conference paper [Good data, bad news, and good policy making...](#) by Dr Gabrielle Matters.

Published November 2005

ACER UPDATE

Latest Research Developments now available

The latest edition of ACER's newsletter, Research Developments, is now available online. Print copies will be available shortly. The latest edition contains articles on a review of research into effective teaching methods for students with learning difficulties, effective teacher training and a major assessment on the ICT literacy skills of Australian students and more.

Development of Standards for Foundation Programs for International Students

ACER's Assessment and Reporting research program has been awarded a new project on the Development of Standards for Foundation Programs for International Students. This project is jointly sponsored by the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), the Victorian Government Department of Education and Training (DET) and the Victorian Qualifications Authority (VQA). The purpose of the project is to develop standards to support a draft definition and core criteria for Foundation Programs for international students which have been developed by a national Foundation Studies Working Group of key stakeholders in the international education industry, facilitated by DEST. This work will result in a clear set of national guidelines for Foundation Programs for use by State and Territory government authorities in approving these programs for registration on the Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students (CRICOS). The project will thus help to ensure national consistency in registration for 'standard' Foundation Programs for international students, that is, those offered on-shore in Australia which prepare students for higher education programs, and provide a direct academic pathway to 1st year undergraduate study or its equivalent.

Published November 2005

Sub Sector Monitoring and Evaluation program

The ACER International Institute is currently playing host to a group of 31 senior education officials from the Philippines. ACER is providing a four week "In-Australia" program on Sub Sector Monitoring and Evaluation for the group from 14 November– 9 December. This full program also involved an initial week of activities being delivered in Manila from 4-8 November with the final week of the program to be delivered in Manila in January.

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Australian Council for Educational Research
Private Bag 55, Camberwell, Victoria Australia 3124
Tel: + 61 3 9277 5555
Fax: + 61 3 9277 5500
Web: www.acer.edu.au

