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## Employment experience has strongest influence on labour market outcomes

Experience of working full-time early in the school-to-work transition has the most positive effect on youth labour market outcomes, more so than completion of Year 12 itself or post-secondary qualifications. This is not to understate the significant positive effect of Year 12 completion on entry to employment and to longer-term labour market outcomes. In addition, early experience of unemployment has a 'scarring' effect on subsequent unemployment.

These are among the key findings of a new report released by ACER on 28 October. The report, the latest in the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY), examines the labour market outcomes of a cohort of Australian youth born in 1975. The analysis focuses on their year-to-year labour market activities and movement between activities from 1996 to 2000. During this time the study's participants were aged between 21 and 25, the ages at which young adults tend to be establishing themselves in the labour force.

The report found that the labour market outcomes for the majority of the cohort were largely positive. Between 1996 and 2000, most (on average 74 per cent) were in full-time education or full-time work. More than 60 per cent held post-secondary qualifications by the age of 25. Between 15 and 20 per cent of those looking for work in one year were looking for work the next year. However, higher and increasing proportions (30-50 per cent) were in full-time work the following year.

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The proportion of young people who were engaged in marginal activities for long periods was found to be around 10 per cent of the cohort. Another finding was that much of the year-to-year movement from part-time work and unemployment was into full-time employment.

"One finding that stands out from these analyses is the importance of gaining full-time work quickly and avoiding unemployment when entering the workforce," said ACER chief executive Professor Geoff Masters.

"Once full-time employment was secured, around 80 per cent remained in full-time work the following year. Less than four per cent were unemployed in the subsequent year."

He noted that early experience of unemployment had detrimental effects on the chances of being in full-time work in later years. "Although less than 30 per cent of the cohort were unemployed for two successive years, this experience of unemployment significantly increased time spent unemployed or in marginal activities," he said.

The report suggests that intervention policies may be best directed at assisting young people to secure full-time employment.

**For further information:**

The report, [\*Dynamics of the Australian Youth Labour Market: The 1975 Cohort, 1996-2000\*](#) by Gary Marks, Kylie Hillman and Adrian Beavis, is research report number 34 in the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) research program jointly managed by ACER and the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST).

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## Building teacher quality

It is widely recognised that the quality of teaching is crucial to the learning outcomes of students. According to ACER's Research Director (Learning Processes and Contexts) Dr Ken Rowe, quality teachers and teaching, supported by strategic professional development, is what matters most in students' experiences and outcomes of schooling. What does research tell us about the best ways to build teacher quality? What lessons can Australian educators learn from the experiences of colleagues in other countries?

Some 400 educational researchers, policy makers and practitioners from around Australia and overseas came together in Melbourne in October to tackle these questions and more when ACER hosted its eighth annual conference, Building teacher quality: What does the research tell us? The conference aimed to enhance understanding of the significance of building teacher quality and identify way in which efforts to improve teacher quality can best be informed by research.

Delegates at Research Conference 2003 reviewed and discussed issues including research on improving teacher education, teacher quality and recruitment; evidence of the effects of initial teacher education, induction and teacher professional development on teacher quality; and what research tells us about the integral role of pedagogy in teacher quality.

One of the main areas of interest at the conference was the comparison of developments in building teacher quality in Australia with current practice overseas. Mr Ralph Tabberer, chief executive of England's Teacher Training Agency (TTA) described TTA's role in promoting teacher quality in England and presented a case study of the reform of England's Initial Teacher Training (ITT) program for which the TTA has been responsible since 1994 when it was given its defining powers to fund and allocate places for all initial teacher training in England according to quality. A framework of ITT reform has since been put in place whereby ITT providers are formally accredited, clear quality standards and course requirements are set out in regulations that specify standards that all trainees should achieve.

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Mr Tabberer said that measurable improvements followed the reforms. Inspection procedures showed that in 2001-2002, 93 per cent of newly qualified secondary teachers were judged to have given satisfactory or better lessons, compared with 95 per cent of experienced teachers. In the same year, 95 per cent of newly qualified primary teachers were judged satisfactory or better compared with 97 per cent of experienced teachers, prompting the chief inspector to describe this cohort of new teachers as the best ever.

"On the basis of stronger sanctions and incentives, through the 1990s a better focused and more accountable teaching sector was built," Mr Tabberer concluded. "ITT quality in England has been improved by strengthening the partnership between all sides involved in training, by hard and focused work on everyone's part and, ultimately, by avoiding setting one side against the other."

Evidence of success in teacher certification programs in the United States was provided by keynote speaker Dr Lloyd Bond, Senior Scholar with the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. He told delegates that teacher performance can be assessed reliably and validly and the assessment process can be a powerful form of professional development for teachers.

Dr Bond reflected on his 12 years working closely with the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), the US body responsible for certifying teachers, and presented evidence from a study that showed certified teachers outperformed non-certified teachers against a number of criteria.

The Accomplished Teaching Validation Study, led by Dr Bond, was conducted by a team of researchers based at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro in 2000. The study found that National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) scored higher on all of the 13 dimensions of teaching expertise than did teachers who had sought but not obtained National Board Certification. The dimensions of teaching assessed included attributes such as having an extensive knowledge of subject matter; the ability to adapt and improvise instruction; formulating lessons that are challenging and engaging; and promoting academic achievement by emphasising both personal accomplishment and intellectual engagement.

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Dr Bond's presentation should provide food for thought for the current debate in Australia on the value of teacher certification in this country according to ACER's Research Director (Teaching and Leadership), Dr Lawrence Ingvarson.

"Many Australian educators and policy makers see processes such as teacher certification or performance-based salary increases in this country as being too hard for a number of reasons," said Dr Ingvarson who is an advocate of teacher certification and performance-based salary increases. "Dr Bond's research and the work of the NBPTS in the United States show not only that it could be done but it could have a positive impact on student learning outcomes and be a rewarding experience for the teachers involved."

ACER chief executive Professor Geoff Masters said at the conclusion of the conference that it had been a great success.

"One of the key lessons from research on teacher quality is that the issues are too complex and wide-ranging to be tackled by educators working in isolation. We hope that one of the main outcomes of the conference will be the sharing of knowledge about efforts to build teacher quality, and the research required to support work at the school, state and national levels," Professor Masters said.

"The papers and discussions arising from this conference will make a major contribution to the international literature and debate on building teacher quality."

#### **Further information:**

The published conference proceedings from Research Conference 2003 can be downloaded from [Research Conferences](#) section.

Further information regarding the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards can be found at <http://www.nbpts.org>

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## ACER UPDATE

### **ACER appoints Research Director of early childhood education**

ACER has appointed Professor Alison Elliot to the newly created position of Research Director (Early Childhood Education). Professor Elliott comes to ACER from the University of Canberra where she was Professor of Early Childhood Education and Head of School. Professor Elliott has had a long connection with the Australian Early Childhood Association and has been editor of the Association's publication *Every Child* for the past eight years. Professor Elliott her role with ACER in mid November based in the Sydney office. ACER chief executive Professor Geoff Masters said he was delighted with the appointment, which is in keeping with ACER's objective of expanding its research activities over the next few years.

"Alison Elliott's appointment and the prospect of building our research in the early childhood area are exciting developments for ACER," he said.

### **Academic Talent Program (WA)**

ACER has been awarded the contract to run the Academic Talent Program for the Department of Education and Training in Western Australia for the next three years. The test is designed to assist in the selection of students from primary school into a range of specialist secondary schools.

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