

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## *School system designed for the past won't prepare young Australians for the future*

To prepare for the future young Australians need an education that is holistic, flexible and encompasses a commitment to both work and life a new review of research concludes.

But, according to Australian Education Review 55, released today by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), there is emerging consensus that a school system designed to meet the needs of Australia in the past cannot prepare today's youth adequately for future challenges.

The review by Johanna Wyn of the University of Melbourne was prompted by papers delivered at last year's ACER Research Conference held in Brisbane on the theme of *Touching the Future: Building skills for life and work*. The review draws on contemporary research to explore the goals of Australian education and how schools should prepare young people for work and life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

"Secondary schools that were built all over Australia in the 1950s still stand as a reminder of the thinking that informed educational design at that time," Wyn writes. "Although some have had a lick of paint, and others have had new wings and administrative blocks added, their basic design reflects the past."

Wyn argues 'Fordist' ideas about the relationship between education and society, where the main role of schools was to prepare young people for the workforce, are also outdated. Predictable pathways from school to work are increasingly non-existent and less relevant to many young people.

"We are in a new era in which social, economic and environmental change needs to be taken into account in determining what young people need to know. These changes have brought new challenges to individuals and to society that require new ways of thinking and working."

Wyn criticises current education systems for entrenching inequalities, writing "The focus on individual choice within educational and labour market places the onus on young people to draw on their own and their family's resources to reach their goals, further exacerbating already existing inequalities in communities."

The review stresses the need for gaps in school performance and attendance by Australia's Indigenous students and those from low socioeconomic backgrounds and rural communities to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

ACER's chief executive Professor Geoff Masters said that to face the challenges of life beyond school young Australians need to develop proficiency in ICT literacy, civics and citizenship and a range of employability skills.

Johanna Wyn is Professor in Education in the Melbourne Graduate School of Education and Director of the University of Melbourne's Youth Research Centre.

Australian Education Review number 55, *Touching the Future: Building skills for life and work*, by Johanna Wyn, is available for download from the ACER website at <http://www.acer.edu.au/acer>. Print copies can be purchased from ACER Press. Contact customer service on 1800 338 402 or via email on [sales@acer.edu.au](mailto:sales@acer.edu.au)

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