

MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release Friday 8 August 2008

Career preferences don't match workforce needs, says vocational expert

The interests and preferences of young people are not satisfied either by the curriculum offered to them or the work opportunities available in modern Australia, says vocational education expert Dr James Athanasou.

Interest is as important to student outcomes as ability, and more important than the quality of teaching, he says. He will present his views at the ACER research conference on Monday.

Analysis of students' career interests shows preferences for occupations involving business, contact with people and creative activities.

Despite these interests, secondary school students are most likely to enrol in mathematics, science, and to a lesser extent business and creative courses.

Further, enrolments do not match employment trends, with most Australians employed in business and practical occupations and the least numbers in creative and scientific occupations.

While only 12 per cent of students were interested in science, 18 per cent studied it, despite only 6 per cent of available jobs being in the scientific sector.

Nearly 50 per cent of workers are employed in the business and practical categories of commerce and industry, but only 23 per cent of students are enrolled in these areas.

Sixteen per cent of young people have an interest in creative activities and 11 per cent of students take creative subjects, but less than 2 per cent of graduates will find employment in creative field.

"Clearly there is a mismatch between the interests of people, the courses offered in educational institutions, and the types of occupations in which people are employed," says Dr Athanasou.

"Some would argue that education for education's sake should be quarantined from the function of preparing people for the world of work, but research shows that interest is a major factor in educational achievement, surpassing even the effect of the quality of teaching, and that interest is also a key factor in occupational achievement and job satisfaction."

Dr James Athanasou is an Associate Professor of Education at the University of Technology, Sydney and editor of the *Australian Journal of Career Development*, published by ACER Press.

The ACER Research Conference 2008, on the theme *Touching the Future: Building skills for life and work*, takes place in Brisbane from 10 to 12 August.

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