

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## *Secondary school reform to lower youth unemployment*

The education system pumps far too many poorly qualified and inadequately skilled young people onto a labour market that has little need for them, and only reform to the model of secondary education can address the problem, says education expert Professor Richard Sweet.

Professor Sweet, of Sweet Group and the University of Melbourne, will present his views in a keynote address at the ACER annual research conference on Monday.

Professor Sweet contends that a low level of Year 12 completion results in too high a rate of teenage unemployment despite a strong and youth-friendly labour market.

The education system must shift to a universal structure of separate senior high schools to address this problem. Australia is one of the few OECD countries that does not divide lower and upper secondary education.

The Australian model has failed to convince many disengaged 15- to 18-year-old students to complete Year 12. These students need a more adult learning environment, not one based upon the discipline demands of 12-year-olds, according to Professor Sweet.

Separate senior schools will allow for larger grade cohorts and thus a wider curriculum, a greater range of more interesting subjects to choose from, and a more adult learning environment. Teachers in such schools will be better able to provide adult teaching styles and discipline policies, and support services such as remediation, counselling and welfare for those who struggle the hardest.

“We must create institutions that can foster a joy in learning among the full range of young people after the age of compulsory schooling, not just among those who find academic achievement easy. The new model must embrace a genuine education revolution in which all young people move, at the end of compulsory schooling, to an institution designed for their needs and able to offer them a choice of subjects and a way of learning that suits all of their aspirations and expectations,” says Professor Sweet.

Professor Richard Sweet heads the international education and training policy consultancy Sweet Group and is a Professorial Fellow in the Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning at the University of Melbourne.

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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