

MEDIA RELEASE

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Early school leavers take up education, training and employment

Only four per cent of 17 year olds in a recent Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) study had not completed Year 12, participated in an alternative vocational program or found full time employment.

The majority of those who did not complete Year 12 were fully engaged in employment, education or training (80 per cent of males and 58 per cent of females), according to the study released today.

Reports often focus only on Year 12 completion rates. This study followed those who left school before completing Year 12 and found that many went on to study in different settings such as TAFE colleges and apprenticeships.

"When TAFE courses and apprenticeships are considered alongside Year 12 completion rates, we have more young Australians completing Year 12 or a vocational equivalent than is sometimes thought," ACER's chief executive Professor Geoff Masters said.

Earlier this year the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) set a goal to lift the Year 12 or equivalent attainment rate to 90% by 2020. The report's findings indicate TAFE courses and apprenticeships can make an important contribution to achieving that goal.

The study tracked 8,691 young people from 2003 when they were aged 15, until 2005. Those most likely to have left school early were low academic achievers, Indigenous young people, those from families where parents worked in blue-collar occupations or were not university-educated, those not living with both parents, those from non-metropolitan locations, those from government schools, males and those born in Australia.

"Since the 1980s there have been dramatic rises in the proportions of young people completing Year 12, and changes to the diversity of programs schools offer," Professor Masters said. "A pleasing result during that time is that differences in early school leaving relating to gender and socioeconomic background have declined."

Many young people did not have a realistic plan for achieving their career goals. Twenty percent of those nominating professional careers and one third of those planning trade occupations were intending to gain qualifications below the level typically required for their intended careers.

"It is important that we assist young people in gathering information about career opportunities and about the education and training pathways that are necessary to achieve career goals," Professor Masters said.

Further information and additional findings are available in the report, *School Non-completers: Profiles and Initial Destinations* by David D. Curtis and Julie McMillan. The study is research report number 54 in the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY), a program funded by the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) with support from state and territory governments.

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