

MEDIA RELEASE

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New study challenges crisis accounts of youth labour market

“Crisis” accounts of the youth labour market are not supported by a new report released today by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER). The report also disputes claims that young people who are not fully engaged in full-time work or study are “at risk” of an unsuccessful school-to-work transition.

An analysis of the labour market outcomes of 5500 young Australians who did not go to university has found generally positive employment outcomes that improved with time. The group was first surveyed in Year 9 in 1995 and tracked through to 2002 when their average age was 21 and they had been out of school for between four and six years. The results are reported separately for males and females as their post-school experiences differ in a number of ways.

In the first year after leaving school, 61 per cent of young men and 45 per cent of young women were working full-time. A little over half of young male and a third of female full-time workers were also studying part time. Twelve per cent of women and 6 per cent of men were working part time while 27 per cent of women and 20 per cent of men were studying full-time. About 9 per cent of both men and women were unemployed with a further 2 per cent not studying or in the labour force.

By the fourth year after leaving school about 77 per cent of males and 65 per cent of females were in full-time work. The type of work also changed over time: higher proportions moved into professional and skilled jobs, earnings increased, and job satisfaction improved. Most of those who had started in part-time jobs moved into full-time employment by the fourth year.

“Such findings show that the youth labour market is highly dynamic and today’s youth are a diverse and very mobile group,” ACER’s chief executive, Professor Geoff Masters said. “Misleading impressions of their pathway from school to work can be obtained from data that focus on a single year at a time.

“A young person engaged in part-time work or study in one year does not necessarily remain in that position over a long period of time. Tracking their progress for several years enables us to better understand the transition from school-to work.”

He noted that this group has benefited from a strong economy and decreasing unemployment rates. Their employment outcomes may not be as positive in times of economic downturn and high unemployment.

The report concluded that obtaining a job soon after leaving school is the best pathway to ongoing full time work for school leavers. Apprenticeships and traineeships are especially effective ways of getting a good start after leaving school.

Further information and additional findings are available in the report, *The transition to full-time work of young people who do not go to university* by Gary N Marks. The study is research report number 49 in the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY), a program conducted jointly by ACER and the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST).

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