

MEDIA RELEASE

For release Thursday 21 August 2003

Year 12 subject selection broadens

A new study of Year 12 subject enrolments released today by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) has identified a broadening of subject selections over the past decade.

The widening of subject selection is due in part to an increase in the number of Year 12 students undertaking vocationally oriented subjects rather than the key learning areas of English, mathematics, society and environment and the sciences.

“Over the period from 1990 to 2001 we have seen a growth in student enrolments in computer studies, technical studies and the arts and a shift away from subjects such as economics and accounting and towards areas such as business studies,” said ACER chief executive Professor Geoff Masters. “At the same time there has been a decline in the number of students enrolled in the humanities social sciences, biological sciences and physical sciences.”

The report found that in the early 1990s the four largest key learning areas of English, mathematics, society and environment and the sciences accounted for 76 per cent of all Year 12 enrolments. By 2001 this had fallen to 71 per cent.

A decline in the number of students taking two subjects from traditional areas of specialisation such as two mathematics subjects, the combination of physics and chemistry or two subjects from the humanities and social sciences field was also noted.

Differences associated with gender, earlier achievement and social background are evident in the patterns of subject participation. For example males are more likely than females to be enrolled in advanced mathematics, physics, chemistry, technical studies and computer studies. Females are more likely than males to be enrolled in arts and home sciences.

Students with higher levels of earlier achievement, as well as those with aspirations to higher education, were more likely than other students to be enrolled in advanced mathematics, chemistry and physics. Students with lower earlier achievement levels were more likely to be enrolled in technical studies, computer studies and home sciences. Students with an Asian background were more likely than any other cultural group to enrol in advanced mathematics, chemistry and physics.

The report also documents the differences in Year 12 participation rates. Those more likely to participate in Year 12 are females, students from higher socio-economic backgrounds, students from non-English speaking backgrounds and those who had a higher level of earlier school achievement.

The report, *Patterns of participation in Year 12* by Sue Fullarton, Maurice Walker, John Ainley and Kylie Hillman, is research report number 33 in the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) research program jointly managed by ACER and the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST).

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