

MEDIA RELEASE

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Not all Year 12 courses are equal

Inappropriate course selection in Year 12 can leave some students unable to participate in further education and in a vulnerable position in the labour force a new report has found.

A study of the patterns of course choice in Year 12 and the consequences of these choices, released today by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), shows that subject choice has a major influence on the educational and career options open to them after finishing school.

Although most Year 12 students make a successful transition to tertiary study or work, some parts of the Year 12 curriculum act as better pathways to post secondary education and training than others, reinforcing the importance of access to quality career guidance in school.

Further study and employment outcomes were clearly best for those students who had included some advanced mathematics and physical sciences subjects in their Year 12 studies and worst for those undertaking clerical and services vocational subjects.

ACER's chief executive Professor Geoff Masters said the report offers senior secondary students a reminder to consider carefully the subject choices they make and the possible outcomes of these choices.

"It is clear from this study that the decisions students make in their senior years of school do make a difference to their chances of successfully entering further study or employment. Schools have a responsibility to ensure that students are aware of the potential ramifications of their choices."

The courses that were the best pathways to higher education, with more than half of their participants entering university, were advanced mathematics-physical sciences, a mixed group of subjects including advanced mathematics-physical sciences, and social sciences and humanities courses.

Around half of students who did not go on to further education and training after Year 12 entered full time employment. The other half were employed part-time, unemployed or not in the labour force. Most moved into low-level positions primarily in the areas of retail, accommodation, cafes and restaurants and manufacturing.

"Over recent years the range of Year 12 options available to students has broadened significantly," Professor Masters said. "This research raises the question as to whether some courses of study are sufficiently meeting the needs of students who take them. Some Year 12 courses do not appear to open up viable pathways to tertiary study or employment."

He said clear careers advice and guidance is vital at this stage of young people's lives, particularly for those who do not have appropriate role models outside of school to provide guidance and advice.

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Data for the study were drawn from two cohorts in the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY). The students were typically in Year 12 in 1998 and 2001 respectively.

Further findings are available in the report, *Pathways from school to further education or work: Examining the consequences of year 12 course choices*, by Sue Thomson. The study is research report number 42 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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LSAY background information is available on the ACER website at www.acer.edu.au