

MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release Thursday 30 June 2005

Student interests drive course change and attrition

University students who change courses or withdraw from study without gaining a qualification are more likely to be driven by personal interests and career objectives than academic difficulties or financial pressures, according to new research.

A new report, *Course change and attrition from higher education*, released today by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), examined the pathways of almost 7000 young Australians who were in Year 9 in 1995 and commenced higher education in 1999 or 2000. The report analyses their education, training and labour market activities until late in 2001 when they were around 20 years of age.

The study found that the majority of commencing university students (74 per cent) persisted with their initial course, while 12 per cent had changed courses and 14 per cent had stopped their studies before completing a qualification. The report adds to other research on course change and attrition in higher education by including extensive data on students' backgrounds as well as looking at the higher education sector as whole and not just individual institutions.

According to ACER's chief executive Professor Geoff Masters, the study's findings indicate that course change and attrition can be a positive outcome for some students.

"The findings of this report suggest that some course change and attrition may be regarded as part of the settling in period in the transition from school to higher education as students discover where their interests lie," Professor Masters said. "It should not be assumed necessarily that course non-completion is synonymous with failure or wastage of talent."

Students whose initial course was not their first preference were more likely to undergo a course change along with students who described their initial course as turning out to be not what they wanted.

The most common reasons cited by those who withdrew from study were also related to interests, career, or wanting to get a job.

Very few students indicated that academic difficulties were the main reason for changing or discontinuing their most recent course.

The study, *Course change and attrition from higher education*, by Julie McMillan, is research report number 39 in the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) conducted jointly by ACER and the Australian Department of Education Science and Training (DEST).

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