

Outcomes of consultations on LSAY research priorities for 2008–10

Nhi Nguyen
Alison Anlezark
NCVER

The views and opinions expressed in this document are those of the authors
and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government
or state and territory governments.

Publisher's note

Summary information relating to this research is available as a flyer. It can be accessed from the LSAY website <<http://www.lsayr.edu.au/publications/2131.html>>.

© Commonwealth of Australia, 2009

This work has been produced by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) on behalf of the Australian Government and state and territory governments with funding provided through the Australian Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. Apart from any use permitted under the *Copyright Act 1968*, no part of this publication may be reproduced by any process without written permission of the Commonwealth. Requests and inquiries concerning reproduction and rights should be addressed to the Commonwealth Copyright Administration, Attorney-General's Department, Robert Garran Offices, National Circuit, Barton ACT 2600 or posted at <http://www.ag.gov.au/cca>.

ISBN 978 1 921413 07 0 web edition

TD/TNC 95.26

Published by NCVER
ABN 87 007 967 311

Level 11, 33 King William Street, Adelaide, SA 5000
PO Box 8288 Station Arcade, Adelaide SA 5000, Australia

ph +61 8 8230 8400 fax +61 8 8212 3436
email ncver@ncver.edu.au
<<http://www.ncver.edu.au>>
<<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2131>>

About the research

Outcomes of consultations on LSAY research priorities for 2008–10

Nhi Nguyen and Alison Anlezark, NCVER

This paper summarises the consultations undertaken by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) in September and October 2008 to determine the priorities for the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) research program to 2010.

The findings in this paper are grouped into three research priority areas; these have since been agreed with the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). The three agreed research priority areas are:

- ✧ Improve the education outcomes of young people—by understanding the factors that impact on participation and completion in education and training, especially for those who are disadvantaged.
- ✧ Provide young people with the skills, qualifications and capabilities needed for the contemporary labour market—by investigating whether the skills from, and pathways through, education and training are well matched with labour market demands.
- ✧ Ensure that young people lead full and meaningful lives—by gaining a better insight into the wellbeing and social activities of young people.

Tom Karmel
Managing Director, NCVER

Contents

Introduction	5
Research priorities	6
1. Improve the education outcomes of young people	6
2. Provide young people with the skills, qualifications and capabilities needed for the contemporary labour market	8
3. Ensure that young people lead full and meaningful lives	10
Future directions for LSAY	12

Introduction

This report summarises the outcomes of the National Centre for Vocational Education Research's (NCVER) 2008 consultations to identify research priorities for the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) analytical program. These priorities will determine the basis of projects undertaken by NCVER and its research partner, the Social Policy Evaluation Analysis Research Centre (SPEAR) for the next two years. The priorities will also provide guidance for researchers using the LSAY data via the Research and Innovation Expansion Fund (RIEF).

In July 2008, a paper to stimulate discussion on LSAY research priorities was developed, with face-to-face consultations taking place during September 2008 in Adelaide, Brisbane, Canberra, Sydney and Melbourne. The following associated activities took place:

- Key stakeholders were sent the discussion paper in September 2008 and invited to comment either by written submission or by attending one of the five LSAY research consultations held later in the month.
- The discussion paper was placed on the NCVER website during September, and written submissions were sought until 3 October 2008.
- Internal comments were sought from the Department of Education, Employment, and Workplace Relations (DEEWR).

The face-to-face meetings were attended by 80 stakeholders, and written submissions were received from over a dozen organisations and individuals. Stakeholders included representatives from state training authorities, not-for-profit organisations, technical and further education (TAFE) institutes, school peak bodies, academics, research centres, unions, industry skills councils, career advisors, and the Office for Youth.

Stakeholders had mixed prior knowledge of LSAY. Some had previous knowledge of the LSAY research program; others had used the data for their own research. For some, it was their first introduction to LSAY.

The consultations commenced with a brief summary of the LSAY program, an overview of the data, followed by a discussion on current youth policies that past and future LSAY research has the potential to inform. These consultations provided an opportunity for open discussion about past and future LSAY research and its relevance to policy-makers. Throughout the consultations, the views of stakeholders on future LSAY research priorities, suggestions for LSAY research topics, and relevant policy questions were noted.

This report summarises information gathered during these consultations, grouped into key research priority areas. This report does not attempt to report on every individual comment, but rather seeks to convey the common themes for LSAY research priority areas. In some cases, suggested research may not be possible using existing LSAY data, but could be considered if accepted as a priority and the survey instrument were varied accordingly.

In November 2008, the Department of Education, Employment, and Workplace Relations endorsed the three research priorities outlined in this report.

Research priorities

The LSAY instrument is designed to assist policy-makers and researchers to better understand youth transitions. The consultation process revealed support for research that contributes to the current policy agenda to improve the education, skills and the workforce development of young people and therefore assist them to participate and be productive in both the economy and society. This backdrop provided the first LSAY research priority area, which lies at the core of LSAY past and future research.

1. Improve the education outcomes of young people

Improve the education outcomes of young people by understanding the factors that impact on participation and completion in education and training, especially for those who are disadvantaged.

Individual characteristics

There are particular groups of young people who are more disadvantaged in education and training than others. Research needs to look at how these disadvantaged young people fare in education and training and how well they make their transitions from school, and identify factors to help them to make successful transitions.

Topics of interest suggested during the consultation included:

- ✧ exploring whether young men and women with similar levels of skill and education make different transitions from school to work
- ✧ investigating students from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds, and identifying motivators and barriers to staying on at school, and going on to post-school study
- ✧ exploring youth mobility, sense of place, and attachment to where they live, an issue perhaps related to socioeconomic status
- ✧ investigating why Indigenous youth have low school completion rates, and identifying the factors that successful Indigenous children share
- ✧ describing youth transitions for students with a disability
- ✧ looking more closely at multiple and cumulative disadvantage
- ✧ investigating unmet demand for vocational education and training (VET) and university courses, by field of study and geographic region
- ✧ identifying labour market outcomes and job satisfaction for students who miss out on their preferred courses.

Environmental factors

The impact of social inclusion and community connectedness on youth transitions, and whether getting a job depends significantly on local connections were highlighted as areas of interest.

There was also strong interest in how young people respond to labour market conditions, and how this affects their education and later labour market outcomes. This topic is covered in the second LSAY research priority area.

Institutional factors

Strong support was shown for research that led to a better understanding of the impact of locational disadvantage and mobility on young people's education outcomes. The LSAY data could be used to explore variations in educational outcomes across Australia and to identify how mobility affects educational outcomes.

LSAY is a national data collection and it can be used to investigate whether the varying Year 12 options across Australia are providing different education and labour market outcomes. Although LSAY cannot evaluate specific programs, attributes of certain programs could be identified. Interest was expressed in the possibility of looking at the differences in outcomes between undertaking a standard Year 12 curriculum or school curriculum programs and alternatives such as the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL).

Related to this is understanding why students participate in VET in Schools programs. Are they selected as an alternative option to a Year 12 certificate or as a pathway to further post-school VET?

By comparing outcomes across the jurisdictions, it is possible to use the LSAY data to analyse the effect of school leaving age on improving successful transitions of young people.

Literacy and numeracy

Improving literacy and numeracy is a priority area for government. There is interest in further exploring the relationship between literacy and numeracy and later education and employment outcomes. Successful transition for those with lower levels of school numeracy and literacy could be identified.

LSAY also has the potential to explore the relationships between PISA results, which are integrated with later cohorts of the LSAY data, and Year 12 completion and subject choice.

Measures of disadvantage

A key area of discussion during the consultations related to the importance of identifying 'at risk' youth. Concerns were raised over whether the current measure of 'at risk'¹ is adequate, and whether definitions of risk were gender-specific. Identifying factors that motivate disadvantaged youth to remain at school could provide insight into how we might improve their participation in education and training. LSAY, being longitudinal, also provides an opportunity to understand how young people move in and out of the 'at risk' category.

LSAY can also provide a deeper understanding of young people who are 'at risk'; for example, young people 'at risk' could be parents, carers, those engaged in child rearing, those taking a 'gap year', or those unable to work because of disability or poor labour market conditions.

The impact of part-time work

The increasing trend for young people to combine part-time work with study (both school and post-school study) warrants investigation into how this affects school, post-school and later

¹ 'At risk' youth can be defined in a number of ways, including early school leavers, but more generally as young people not earning or learning, and more specifically as young people aged 15 to 24 years who are not in full-time education or training or full-time employment.

labour market outcomes. How do young people balance work and study? What are the characteristics of those who combine work and study?

There is interest in Indigenous youth and the impact that part-time employment has on their school and post-school outcomes.

Financial concerns

Financial stress and the affordability of education and training were revealed as areas of interest. Research could explore how well young people cope with the costs of education and training, how this affects their choice of education and training, and whether this impacts on school and post-school study. The interrelationships between part-time work, study and income support could also be explored.

2. Provide young people with the skills, qualifications and capabilities needed for the contemporary labour market

The second research priority area focuses on how well the skills and qualification of young people match the needs of the labour market.

Provide young people with the skills, qualifications and capabilities needed for the contemporary labour market by investigating whether the skills from, and pathways through, education and training are well matched with labour market demands.

The strength of the labour market

A changing economic climate attracted support for an investigation of the effects of labour market conditions on the acquisition of skills, and how this affects the decisions young people make about participating in education and training. Research could measure how responsive young people are to economic conditions by determining whether individuals remain in education and training in a weak economy, or defer training to enter the labour market in a stronger one. Student aspirations could also be explored. Such research would involve multiple cohort comparisons to evaluate educational choices in different economic climates.

A related area of interest is the way in which qualifications mediate young people's entry into the labour market, and how they assist their career progression.

Subject choice

There was interest in the curriculum choices young people make and the impact of careers advice on school and post-school subject choices. Research could examine whether patterns of subject choice are discernable at Year 12, how they differ by gender, socioeconomic status, and student background. Changes in subject choice over time were also mentioned.

Research could explore motivations for occupational choices and whether school and post-school subject choices impact on later career paths. Research could focus on whether young people follow a pathway which is influenced by subjects taken at school or by their anticipated prospects in the labour market.

Career advice and decision making

Related to subject choice and occupational destinations is the quality and quantity of career advice that young people receive. Some aspects of cultural capital—those that describe the

knowledge, experiences and connections that lead to successful transitions—could be explored using LSAY data.

There was interest in investigating the correlation between the levels of achievement at school and post-school education choices—do high achievers in school consider VET as an alternative to university study?

Returns on investment

There was strong support for research that measures the value of qualifications, the outcomes of different levels of qualifications and the types of qualifications that lead to better employment outcomes. It would also be interesting to analyse this by different groups of young people and to explore what types of training do and do not meet labour market outcomes.

LSAY can be used to understand why young people do not complete qualifications and why education and training is suspended. Research can also look at the changes over time in VET and higher education entry and completion.

There was some interest in comparing the outcomes of students who study the newly introduced generalist degrees offered in some universities with those of the more traditional degrees.

Career change and mobility

As noted in the discussion paper, young people are highly mobile. LSAY could be used to understand when young people are most likely to change jobs and their motivations for doing so, and identify occupations with greater mobility. Underlying characteristics could be explored to highlight the characteristics of those most likely to be mobile and the outcomes for those with high levels of job mobility.

Successful transitions

The definition of a ‘successful’ transition is still a topic of discussion. It would be worth exploring what makes young people successful and whether they continue to be satisfied with a successful transition. For example, an engineering graduate working as a full-time waiter is counted as a successful transition, whereas a textile designer, working only part-time in their chosen field would be seen as largely unsuccessful.

One idea of a successful outcome is achieving independent living status, and research could look at the factors that contribute to achieving this outcome.

A further related topic is an investigation of young people who take longer to reach a successful transition. This could be carried out with young people who re-engage with the education system four or five years after early school leaving.

Blurring of sector boundaries

Transitions between education sectors are on the increase, and there is sustained interest in the articulation between higher education and vocational education and training. LSAY could explore the progression from one qualification to another and/or changes from one course type to another.

Mobility within education sectors also attracted interest. For example, LSAY could be used to understand motivators for movements between private and public school or VET institutions, when it occurs and why.

Gap years

LSAY can be used to measure the impact of taking a gap year on young people's transitions into post-school education. Does taking a gap year affect intentions to return to the preferred study option and what are the study and work outcomes of those who take a gap year? Research could explore the patterns of deferral rates and measure whether the incidence of young people taking a gap year has increased over time, particularly across different jurisdictions.

There was some concern that there is a general assumption that taking a gap year is a choice; therefore, it is important to explore the extent to which deferring is actually a consequence of the barriers that prevent young people from accepting their preferred education and training places.

Occupational destinations

There was support for occupational destination research; that is, exploring the pathways into occupational groupings or industries and identifying whether there is skills wastage in skills-shortage areas. Careers advisors could benefit from understanding the types of individuals who pursue a specific career and their motivations and pathways into discrete occupations or industries. The results of research in this area have the potential to assist policy-makers to target more young people for specific skills-shortage areas. Particular industries of interest are the science, technology, engineering and maths careers (STEM), as well as careers in occupations with highly casualised workforces, such as early childhood development, hospitality and retail.

Apprenticeships

There was interest in the uptake of full-time and part-time apprenticeships and the influence of labour market conditions on young people's decision to undertake an apprenticeship. Reasons for attrition from apprenticeships and traineeships could be explored with the LSAY data, as could differences over time, and across different industries.

3. Ensure that young people lead full and meaningful lives

The consultations also raised several interesting points about measuring successful outcomes for young people beyond the more orthodox measures of education and labour market outcomes. During the consultations, there was interest in the importance of young people's feelings of self-worth and the extent to which they feel they have control of their career pathways.

Support young people to lead full and meaningful lives by gaining a better insight into the wellbeing and social activities of young people.

A related area of interest is how young people form their aspirations for work and study. What affects young people's aspirations and who is more or less likely to have high or low personal aspirations, and at what point is it critical to build these aspirations?

The role of parents in young people's lives was also raised. Research could examine how parents act as role models for their children and how they affect their aspirations. LSAY could also be used to explore the impact of household income and parental working patterns on successful youth transitions.

The emotional and physical health of young people was also discussed, as well as the impact of the health of other family members, and how this could have a significant influence on a young person's transition. A related topic is how young people see their lives beyond work, and the role of employment in their emotional and physical wellbeing.

In addition to the health of young people being a causal factor in their successful transition, it can also be an outcome. LSAY research could explore the benefits beyond employment that young people realise from their education. Related to this is an understanding of young people's spare-time activities and the role these play in their transition; for example, participation in volunteering at school and whether this continues after they have left school. The role of volunteering in gaining employment could also be explored.

Future directions for LSAY

During the LSAY research consultations, there were several topics raised that were beyond the scope of the LSAY data. Many stakeholders involved in the consultations were still learning about the scope of the LSAY instrument, with suggestions made to improve the depth of information collected in LSAY. Included below are suggestions for improvements to the LSAY survey instrument. However, these need to be carefully considered by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations in terms of costs and benefits, in the context of gathering additional information relevant to better understand youth transitions.

- ✧ Extend the survey beyond age 25 years to more effectively capture lengthening youth transitions.
- ✧ Consider additional samples of disadvantaged youth, such as:
 - students with a disability
 - students with learning difficulties
 - students with mental health issues
 - newly arrived migrant and refugees.
- ✧ Consider additional questions on:
 - access to early school learning
 - the impact of alcohol, truancy and disobedient behaviour on youth transitions
 - skills utilisation: are young people using their qualifications in their current occupations?
 - measures of self-management, motivation and resilience
 - discrimination of young people in school and in the workplace.
- ✧ Add parent interviews: to gain more background information on the family dynamics, context, and any learning difficulties encountered by the young person prior to joining LSAY.
- ✧ Link LSAY data to other extant data, such as the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Children (LSAC), or administrative data sets such as collections held by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), or the Australian Taxation Office (ATO).