

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

# Success despite the odds? Outcomes for low-performing students in Australia

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<b>Project no.</b>	<b>NY08104</b>
<b>Theme:</b>	Students and individuals – Careers and pathways – Pathways after compulsory education Students and individuals – Learner groups – Young people
<b>Project type:</b>	Research – national managed research program
<b>Project approach:</b>	<b>Quantitative</b>
<b>Time frame:</b>	<b>February 2009 – October 2009</b>
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### **LONGITUDINAL SURVEYS OF AUSTRALIAN YOUTH (LSAY) RESEARCH INNOVATION AND EXPANSION FUND ANALYSIS GRANTS PROGRAM:**

This project has been funded under the Research Innovation and Expansion Fund (RIEF) Analysis Grants Program. The RIEF has been established to provide researchers with the opportunity to use data from the LSAY and to widen the community of researchers with experience in this data. The Analysis Grants Program is one element of the RIEF and complements the broader LSAY Analytical Program ([www.lsay.edu.au](http://www.lsay.edu.au)) being conducted by NCVER on behalf of the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

#### **PROJECT PURPOSE:**

The aim of this project is two-fold:

- to trace the pathways followed through senior secondary school and into further education, training and the labour force by a group of students who performed poorly on the 2003 PISA tests; and
- to investigate what differentiates those students who go on to have successful outcomes (despite their earlier low achievement) from those who do not fare as well.

#### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS:**

1. What pathways do low-performing students follow through secondary school and into the labour force and further education and study?
2. What differentiates low-performing students who have positive and successful outcomes from those who have less successful outcomes?

## **METHODOLOGY:**

There are two main stages to the project:

❖ *Data preparation, variable construction, and literature review*

A review of literature will be conducted (relating to the issue of outcomes for low-performing students) from national and international perspectives. This stage will also be used to identify students to be included in the low performing group. Performance on the 2003 PISA tests will be the determinant. Students who score below proficiency level 2 in mathematics and science, the two domains for which proficiency levels were defined in the 2003 PISA data will be considered low achievers and selected for further analysis of their pathways and outcomes. The appropriate variables to be used in the statistical analysis will also be determined during this stage. Individual factors that may be investigated include gender, family structure, attitudes towards school, aspirations and social capital. In addition, school level factors, such as sector, size, location, school climate and socioeconomic level (aggregated) will be included as potential influences of student outcomes. The outcome variable will be constructed using information about the participants' activities over the course of the year (interview to interview) and their reports of happiness with different aspects of their lives.

The data set to be used in this project is the 2003 LSAY Year 9 cohort.

❖ *Statistical analysis and model building*

This stage will be used to answer the research questions looking at the pathways followed by senior secondary students, and what factors differentiate low performing students with successful outcomes from those with poorer outcomes.

The initial pathways of the sample will be examined each year using frequencies and cross tabulations, weighted appropriately. The potential clustering of low performing students in particular schools, and the effect this would have on the identification of variables that influence outcomes, will be investigated through multilevel multivariate logistic regression. Should the clustering effect be substantial, the relationships between the various individual and school factors and outcomes will be modelled using appropriate multilevel multivariate procedures. If there is no evidence of a clustering effect, then standard multivariate logistic regression will be used.

## **THE ORGANISATION:**

ACER is an independent, national educational research organisation established in 1930. With offices in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Perth and overseas locations, ACER is able to provide comprehensive research and development services to the education community. ACER undertakes quantitative and qualitative data collections, analyses and reviews, and is one of the main sources of data and commentary on Australian education and training.

ACER research covers all education sectors and levels from the early years to higher education and adult learning. The research program is organised around six areas: Assessment and Reporting (e.g. National Assessment Program –Literacy and Numeracy Analyses 2008); National and International Surveys (e.g. Programme for International Student Assessment 2000-2009); Policy Analysis and Program Evaluation (e.g. The Smith Family's Learning for Life Program 2008- 09); Systemwide Testing (e.g. Teaching and Learning International Survey 2007- 09); Teaching, Learning and Leadership (e.g. Standards for School Leadership 2006); and Transitions and Post-School Education and Training (e.g. Australian Quality Training Framework Quality Indicators 2007-08).

ACER has extensive experience in working collaboratively with Australian and international education and training organisations. Almost all of ACER's research is conducted under contract and the organisation and staff are fully aware of the processes and requirements of delivering high-quality and timely commissioned research.