About the research

Bridging the gap: who takes a gap year and why?
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Taking a break between completing high school and entering university is common overseas, and is becoming more popular in Australia. There are many reasons why young people take a gap year. It may be to travel, to take a break, to study, or to work. Our definition of a ‘gapper’ is a young person who commenced university one to two years after completing Year 12.

While the concept of a gap year is related to the deferral of a university offer, it is different. Some gappers have deferred, others decide to enrol during their gap year, not beforehand. Similarly, some who defer a university offer subsequently do not take up a place and are thus not defined as gappers.

This report was prepared for the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations in 2009 prior to the Australian Government’s announcement of proposed changes to Youth Allowance as an initiative in the 2009—10 Budget and the subsequent reforms based on recommendations from the Review of student income support reforms (Dow 2011).

The research uses data from three cohorts of the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) to throw light on the incidence of gap-taking, the characteristics of those taking a gap year, the activities undertaken in the gap years, and subsequent study and employment outcomes. The report also looks at whether there is any evidence that young people were taking a gap year in order to qualify for Youth Allowance payments.

Key messages

- The incidence of gap-taking has increased and it is estimated that around 20% of Australian students who complete high school will take a gap year.
- Gap-takers tend to be weaker academically, with lower-than-average tertiary entrance rank (TER) scores, lower than average Year 9 mathematics achievement, and less favourable attitudes to school. In addition to academic factors, young people from English speaking backgrounds and from regional locations are more likely to take a gap year. Students who do not receive Youth Allowance payments while at school (and thus who were from higher socioeconomic status families) are also more likely to take a gap year.
- The most common activities of Australian gap students are work (40%) and study or training (33%), with only 3% reporting travel as their main activity.
- It appears that relatively few took a gap year principally to qualify for Youth Allowance: four out of 69 who deferred a university place gave ‘needing to qualify for Youth Allowance’ as a reason for their deferral.
- The university completion rates of ‘gappers’ are a little lower than ‘non-gappers’.

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