

About the research



Year 12 completion and youth transitions

Chris Ryan, Australian National University

On average, young people who complete Year 12 tend to have more successful transitions from education to work than those who do not. Hence we have seen numerous governments introduce policies that promote Year 12 completion. However, in recent years there has been a realisation that it does not make much sense to promote Year 12 retention for its own sake. No longer are targets expressed in terms of the numbers completing Year 12; now the targets are in terms of Year 12 or its equivalent.

While this policy trend makes good sense, is it going to have the desired outcomes? The aim of Ryan's study is to answer this question by looking at data from the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY). This is not a straightforward task. The fact that some students benefit from doing Year 12 does not prove that all students would benefit from undertaking Year 12. In addition there is the problem of sample attrition, with the less successful individuals more inclined to drop out of the survey.

Ryan employs a range of econometric techniques to account for these difficulties, focusing on those who do not complete Year 12 and continue on to further full-time tertiary education study. He defines a set of education pathways according to whether the individual is an early school leaver or not and whether the individual undertakes further education and training (including apprenticeships and traineeships). He also rates success through a number of outcomes; these include a number of labour market and study variables over the transition years.

Key messages

- ✧ For males, Year 12 completion provides a better transition relative to other pathways, the exception being an apprenticeship. However, the superiority of an apprenticeship is conditional on obtaining one. Obtaining the type of certificate II or III available to young people in these data was not as effective on average as completing Year 12.
- ✧ For females, completing Year 12 clearly provides the best outcomes, followed by the completion of a traineeship, and the completion of an apprenticeship (female apprentices tend to be either hairdressers or cooks). Of the other pathways, completing a certificate III is the best and completing a certificate II the worst.
- ✧ Sample attrition does not materially affect the analysis.

On the whole Ryan's study supports the push toward Year 12 completion, even for those not following a path into full-time tertiary study. This suggests that we need to devote further effort to devising and building on new models of schooling that engage young people, especially those more attuned to applied than to academic learning.

Tom Karmel
Managing Director, NCVER