

About the research



Which paths work for which young people?

Tom Karmel and Shu-Hui Liu, NCVER

In this paper the researchers ask how completing Year 12 and undertaking vocational education and training (VET) and university studies assist young people to make a successful transition from school. As part of their research they analyse whether those who are less academically benefit from completing Year 12 and post-school education and training options to the same extent as the more academically inclined. Unlike other studies addressing the issue of successful youth transition, this research looks at the education path chosen (or not), rather than an individual's return from the completion of a particular path (qualification); not all those who embark on a path complete it. The researchers are interested in finding out how the route an individual chooses affects the later employment, wages, job status, financial wellbeing and happiness of young people. They do this by analysing data from the 1995 cohort of the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY).

The analysis suggests that, on average, completing Year 12 is no longer sufficient; rather, young people today need to have Year 12 plus further study to get them on a path to success. For males an apprenticeship after Year 12 is an attractive route, as is university study; for females the best choice is university, even for those with lower levels of academic orientation.

The researchers are not suggesting that everyone should be forced to complete Year 12 and to go on to further study. While the best paths involve Year 12 and certain types of post-school study, it is also the case that paths that include Year 12 do not necessarily lead to superior outcomes, relative to those involving leaving school before Year 12. In addition, Karmel and Liu find that the choice of path is not always of consequence. For males, paths only have salience for satisfaction with life, the occupational status of full-time workers and the pay of full-time workers. For the other variables they investigate—engagement with full-time work or study, full-time employment, financial wellbeing, satisfaction with work—the paths do not really matter. That is, the transition from school to adulthood can work well—in relation to these outcome measures—for young men following any of the paths. For females, educational paths matter for attaining full-time engagement and pay for full-time workers and occupational status for full-time workers, but do not matter for financial wellbeing, satisfaction with life and job status for part-time workers.

Finally, Karmel and Liu note that the analysis relates to people who did Year 12 in 1998, during a buoyant economic period, which, they point out, is also an important factor in contributing to good transitions for young people.

Tom Karmel
Managing Director, NCVER