

About the research



Lost talent? The occupational ambitions and attainments of young Australians

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Given ongoing interest in increasing productivity and participation in the workforce, understanding when talent is lost is a useful exercise. The term 'lost talent' describes the underutilisation or wastage of human potential. Focusing on young people, Sikora and Saha define lost talent as occurring when students in the top 50% of academic achievement lower their educational or occupational expectations or fail to achieve their educational or occupational plans.

Using data spanning a ten-year period from the 1998 cohort of the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY98), the authors examine academic achievement in Year 9, educational and occupational expectations while at school, and educational and occupational attainment by age 25 years to determine the extent to which talent loss is occurring. The general relationships between occupational expectations and attainment are also examined to see whether ambitious career plans lead to higher-status employment.

Key messages

- ✧ The proportion of high-achieving individuals who represent talent loss is low but not negligible, with approximately 15% lowering their educational and occupational expectations. Factors associated with decreasing expectations included low socioeconomic status, being male, having low personal assessment of academic ability and low satisfaction with school.
- ✧ Having ambitious occupational plans is important, with a strong relationship found between holding these plans and having a professional or managerial job by the age of 25 years. Not having a career plan can be detrimental to later occupational attainment—more so for young women.
- ✧ Students' occupational expectations are significantly less gender-segregated than the labour market they eventually enter.

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