



LONGITUDINAL SURVEYS OF AUSTRALIAN YOUTH RESEARCH SYNTHESIS

Are we there yet? Making the successful transition to adulthood

NCVER



INTRODUCTION

There was a time when leaving school marked the beginning of adulthood. Even though this transition has now lengthened, the traditional markers of a successful transition remain the same: getting a good job, becoming a responsible citizen, establishing a household and having a family.

These markers are seen when young people have:

- gained sufficient education, including literacy and numeracy skills, to give them the ability to complete Year 12 and to keep on learning at the post-school level, as well as at work and from life
- well-informed career plans
- gained high-quality employment, as seen through their level of earnings, job status and security, job satisfaction, and training and promotional opportunities
- good mental and physical health and stable social relationships.

GETTING ON TRACK

Being either in full-time education or work, or a combination of both – in other words, being fully engaged in society – is a good indicator that a young person is on the right track. Some may take a different, less direct route towards achieving this but it is not necessarily a bad thing; they too may be involved in meaningful activities such as travel, or caring for children or others, or doing volunteer work.

Who might get off track?

But there is a minority who struggles to make a successful transition. They often leave school early and, when they do, find it difficult getting a job. This can increase the chances of further periods of unemployment and be the beginning of a vicious cycle.

This group of young people is sometimes referred to as being 'at risk', a term we should use cautiously, given that the period of youth transition is by its very nature a time of flux when many young people are trying to decide the direction in which they wish to head. Nevertheless, policy-makers and educators need to be aware of the types of things that can hinder a successful transition. These include: having poor literacy and numeracy; living outside a metropolitan area, where there is limited access to further education and to jobs; coming from a low socioeconomic background; and having parents with little education or who are long-term unemployed.

WHAT HELPS YOUNG PEOPLE ACHIEVE A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION?

Being from a less advantaged background does not have to determine a young person's destiny. Various interventions can help young people overcome obstacles.

School

A good experience at school is important, both for its educational benefits but also because it means the student feels part of a community. For example, getting involved in extra-curricular activities, including sport, has a positive impact on education participation and aspirations.

Good student–teacher relationships are central, particularly for those with low educational motivation or little support from home. Teachers can also help students make subject choices that are relevant to post-school plans for work and study. Well-informed and appropriate careers advice can also motivate low academic achievers to stay at school. And having a wider choice of subjects, both vocational and academic, can encourage students to remain at school for longer.

Financial support

For those living in poverty, it is likely to take more than a positive school environment to get them on the right track. Income support to complete school and go onto post-compulsory education is an important ingredient in making the transition from child to adult a success.

Part-time work

Working part-time while at school can provide young people with valuable work experience and skills, such as team work and time management, which will help them in their future jobs. But too much part-time work can have a negative impact on school performance; finding the right balance between the two can be difficult.

FURTHER READING

Anlezark, A 2011, *At risk youth: a transitory state?*, LSAY briefing paper 24, NCVER, Adelaide.

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Karmel, T & Liu, S 2011, *Which paths work for which groups of young people?*, LSAY research report 57, NCVER, Adelaide.

Liu, S & Nguyen N 2011, *Successful youth transitions*, LSAY briefing paper 25, NCVER, Adelaide.

Semo, R 2011, *Social capital and young people*, LSAY briefing paper 26, NCVER, Adelaide.

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