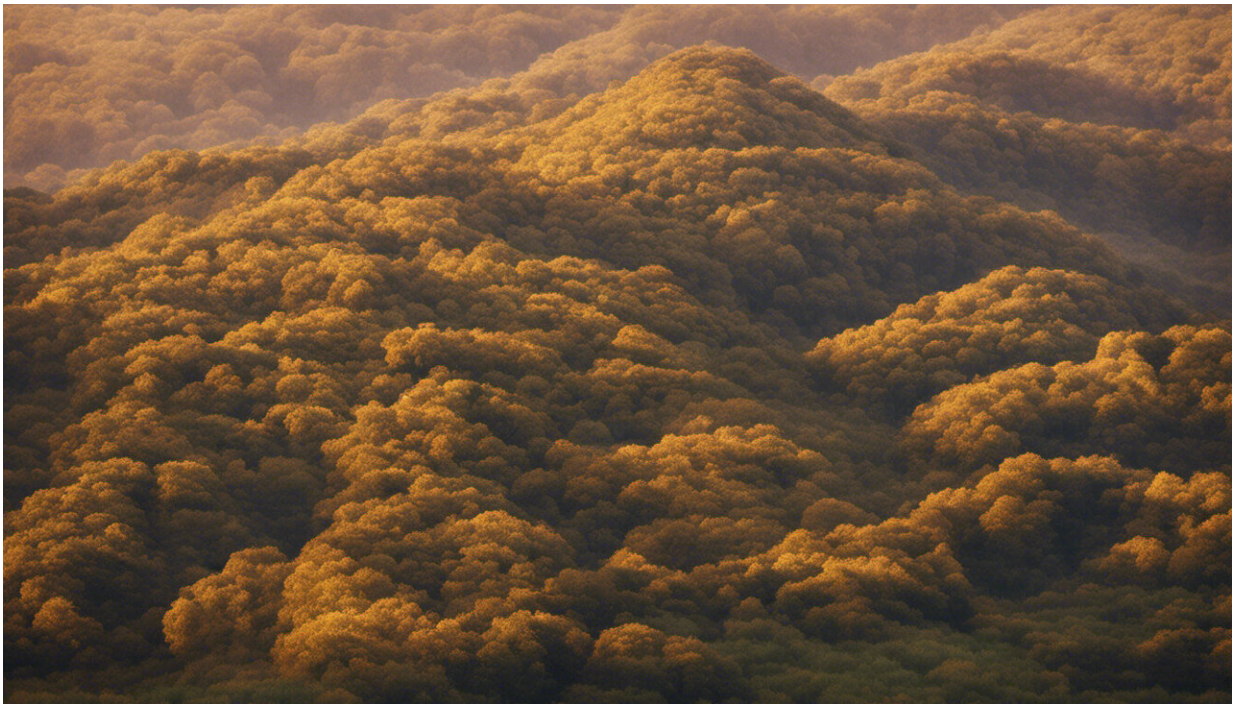


# A three-decade 'moving picture' of young Australians' study, work, and life

August 14 2020, by Somayeh Parvazian, Ronnie Semo

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

The Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth ([LSAY](#)) unpack the lives of young Australians as they leave school, enter further study or the workforce and make the transition into adulthood.

The latest findings are now available for the group of young people who

completed their first questionnaire back in 2009 at age 15. This group's [11th and final survey](#) shows young people are completing university at higher rates than ever before, while participation in apprenticeships and traineeships is taking a dive.

The information collected from these groups of students, or "cohorts," is used to better understand what helps or hinders this transition. This includes things like the effect of schools on year 12 completion, whether government benefits like [Youth Allowance](#) help students complete their studies, and the factors that help a young person find full-time work sooner.

Each cohort starts with about 14,000 students in the first survey, or "wave." From the age of 15 to 25, they complete a 20-minute survey once a year to share what's been happening in their lives. LSAY asks about their experiences at [school](#), their post-school study and work, as well as their health and home life.

Six cohorts have taken part so far. The recent release of findings from the fifth cohort's final survey is a milestone, with LSAY [data now available across three decades](#). This means we can study generational changes in transition patterns.

To capture the many changing events or factors that affect young peoples' transition, the survey has added questions about caring responsibilities, volunteering activities, participation in the gig economy, their personality traits and whether they have access to social support.

## **Data dating back to the '70s**

LSAY is one of Australia's biggest and longest-running panel surveys. More than 60,000 young people have been surveyed since 1995. It's recognized as one of eight [core longitudinal data assets in Australia](#).

The surveys grew out of the Youth in Transition ([YIT](#)) studies in the 1970s. The decade's [oil price shocks](#) caused unemployment to soar, with young people hit the hardest. This created a need to better understand their school-to-work transition in the face of global technological and economic change.

Then came the Australian Longitudinal Surveys ([ALS](#)) and Australian Youth Surveys ([AYS](#)) in the 1980s. One of the more prominent pieces of research using these data found the aptitude of new teachers fell substantially as teacher pay declined compared to other salaries.

These three [longitudinal studies](#) were combined to create the LSAY program.

## Researchers mine LSAY for insights

More than [300 published research papers](#) have used LSAY data. The report [25 years of LSAY: Research from the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth](#) showcases some of the highlights.

LSAY research has shown working just a few hours a week while at school [improves prospects of getting a full-time job](#). But working long hours has a slightly negative effect on school completion. The research also found females are better at balancing school and work than their male peers.

Research has also shown that students participating in school-based [vocational education](#) and training (VET) had [higher rates of school completion](#), full-time employment and incomes in their first year after school than non-VET students with similar characteristics. Ex-VET students were also more likely to be in a job they liked as a career. These benefits were associated with school-based VET programs with a workplace learning component.

The Productivity Commission used LSAY data to [investigate the demand-driven university system](#). Many disadvantaged students successfully attended university as a result of the expansion of the system. However, those with lower literacy and numeracy were more likely to drop out. The study recognized schools and universities need to do more to prepare and support students, and that university might not always be the best option.

LSAY has been an important source of evidence for policy. National reviews and inquiries informed by LSAY data include the [COAG Reform Council's reporting on youth transitions](#) (2009), the [Bradley Review of Higher Education](#) (2008) and the [House of Representatives inquiry into combining school and work](#) (2008-2009).

The recent Education Council [Review of Senior Secondary Pathways](#), released in July, draws heavily on LSAY to establish how students can choose the best pathway for their transition from school.

LSAY has a high degree of comparability with international youth surveys. These include the Transition from Education to Employment ([TREE](#)) study in Switzerland, the Youth in Transition Survey ([YITS](#)) in Canada, the Education Longitudinal Study ([ELS](#)) and National Longitudinal Survey of Youth ([NLSY](#)) in the United States, and [Next Steps](#) in the UK.

Most of these have a starting sample of about 9,000 individuals. Next Steps has 16,000. LSAY's starting sample of 14,000 young Australians makes it one of the largest surveys of its kind in the world.

## **Tracking lives through the GFC and COVID-19**

These datasets enable us to transform a snapshot of a person's life into a moving picture. Compared with cross-sectional studies, these

longitudinal datasets provide a much clearer picture by accounting for personalities, life events and pathways.

Combining a longitudinal study with cohort studies sheds more light on this picture by controlling for inter-generational differences, or crises such as wars, financial downturns or natural disasters.

For example, using data from four LSAY cohorts, [one study](#) found the well-being of those whose transitions occurred during the global financial crisis ([GFC](#)) was much worse on several measures, including standard of living, home life, career prospects, social life and independence.

The extraordinary challenges Australian youth face as a result of the coronavirus pandemic will be documented when the sixth LSAY cohort, now aged 20, complete their sixth survey in 2020 and further surveys in the years thereafter.

By providing a valuable resource to explore the longer-term effects of this crisis, LSAY continues to stand the test of time.

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