

RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Staying on at School

Professor Margaret Vickers and Dr Katrina Barker from the School of Education, Professor Robert Perry and Professor Sue Dockett from Charles Sturt University and Mr Michael Hyam from the NSW Department of Education and Training are researching why some students leave secondary school early. This research is funded through an Australian Research Council Linkage Grant.

'The NSW Government has set a new education retention target: that 90 percent of young people should be completing Year 12 or its vocational equivalent by 2016', says Professor Vickers. 'However, in some regions of the state the completion rate is as low as 56 per cent. Our aim in this study is to track a number of students in three NSW Department of Education and Training target areas, Hunter, Riverina and South Western Sydney. We will explore the challenges faced by the students and what programs are in place to engage them and help them move towards completing secondary school or its equivalent.'

This study will involve three aspects, comprising both quantitative and qualitative components. Surveys will be administered over a three year period to a sample of 2000 students (200-250 from each school) to assess: the critical turning points in a young person's decision to stay in school; school practices that increase engagement with school; and the combination of other factors (background, school-level and individual) that influence a young person's engagement with school. A smaller sample of young people identified from the survey as 'disengaged students' will take part in face-to-face and telephone interviews over the three years of the study. This will provide a rich source of stories about young people's pathways and experiences. Case studies of the participating schools will aim to identify practices that are considered to be effective in increasing student engagement.



Recently the NSW State government announced that the school leaving age would be raised to 17 years, making this research both essential and well-timed. The research seeks to generate information that will improve the capability of education systems to create environments more conducive to learning, leading to increased retention rates across the state of NSW.

Project Title: Staying on at school: strategies for increasing high school completion rates in low-retention regions of NSW

Funding has been set at: \$401,000

Contact Details: mhv@uws.edu.au
<http://www.uws.edu.au/education>

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