

From the Managing Editor

Welcome to the first issue of the *Australian Journal of Labour Economics* for 2021. As always, this issue contains articles of interest to academics, practitioners and anyone interested in how labour markets work in Australia and our region. I think readers will find the papers particularly interesting, challenging some of the common policy narratives.

The first paper, by Siddharth Shirodkar and Boyd Hunter of the Australian National University, examines the hypothesis that a discriminatory environment faced by Indigenous business owners affects the success of these businesses. This is important since business ownership provides Indigenous Australians with an opportunity to seek economic independence and greater self-determination. Using an interesting dataset and analysis the authors conclude from their results that the implicit biases of non-Indigenous Australians drives lower levels of Indigenous business ownership. The authors have some interesting (and somewhat controversial) views on what this means for much of the previous research in this area.

The paper by Yonatan Dinku of the Australian National University examines the issue of economic inactive Indigenous youth – defined as those not in employment, education or training (NEET). Given that much of policy is based on the premise that such inactivity has detrimental consequences there is limited empirical evidence on the factors which put young people at risk of economic inactivity. This paper is an important contribution to providing this empirical evidence. A number of individual, household, and local factors are found to explain underlying NEET status.

Gerard Lind and Rebecca Colquhoun provide detailed estimates of gender segregation in the Australian labour market using ABS Labour Force Survey and Census data. Among the main results are findings with important policy implications. Perhaps the most important is that over the last three decades, gender segregation in Australia has not significantly changed across either industries or occupations. Gender segregation across industries is, in general, more resistant to gender integration than across occupations and detailed classifications are more highly segregated than more highly aggregated classifications. Additionally, gender segregation increases as individuals get older and the further they work from urbanised areas. Women continue to have more constrained labour supply choices than men, hindering labour market efficiency and flexibility.

The final paper by Mike Dockery, John Phillimore and Sherry Bawa, of Curtin University, adopts a novel approach to generating a continuous measure of Science, Technology and Mathematics (STEM) intensity. This is employed to model changes in demand for STEM skills, and in other fields, based on changing occupational composition of employment in Australia between the 2006 and 2016 Censuses, and on projected changes to 2024. The results are very interesting and controversial, contradicting some commonly held views on STEM education. Contrary to popular narratives around STEM and the future of work, they find that the changing nature of work is actually reducing the demand for STEM skills relative to skills in other fields

of education. The results also suggest that technical and trade jobs account for almost the same level of demand for STEM skills as professional occupations, reflecting the importance of including the VET sector in any STEM agenda. Importantly, the results also suggest that policies to promote 'women in STEM' may be misguided. The authors conclude that, if anything, women are benefitting in terms of the demand for their skills by the fact that they are under-represented in STEM and over-represented in key services such as Health and Education. The results in this paper caution against an uncritical acceptance of the need for a higher proportion of people to specialise in STEM fields.

Thanks go to all the authors, editors and referees for contributing to an excellent issue of the journal. Particular thanks are due to Sandie Rawnsley, our Editorial Assistant, for her excellent work in making this issue possible.

Phil Lewis
Managing Editor