

Participation in and Progress through new Apprenticeships

LSAY Research Report 44

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

New Apprenticeships provide a pathway from school to adult working life for a significant proportion of each cohort of young people and thus make a potentially important contribution to the formation of skills for individuals and for the community as a whole. New Apprenticeships are based on a formal combination of study and work that links learning in the workplace with learning in an educational institution. They incorporate both traditional apprenticeships and traineeships. This report focuses on two broad research questions:

- What are the characteristics of young people who commence a New Apprenticeship overall, as well as of those in traditional apprenticeships or traineeships separately and those in different fields of training?
- What are the points of entry to and patterns of progress through New Apprenticeships?

Data

The report uses longitudinal data from the Y95 cohort of the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY), a nationally representative sample of young people from Year 9 in 1995, to investigate patterns of participation in and progress through New Apprenticeships. The Y95 cohort has been followed for sufficient time to allow analysis of their persistence in and completion of these qualifications.

Participation

One in every five members of the cohort that was in Year 9 in 1995 (and thus would have been in Year 12 in 1998) participated in a New Apprenticeship by the end of 2003. In terms of personal background, participation in a New Apprenticeship was higher among males than females, those of an English-speaking background than other students, those from non-metropolitan than metropolitan backgrounds, those whose father worked in a skilled trade than others, those with above average trade-related interests, and those in the lowest three quarters of family socioeconomic status compared to the highest quarter. Of this cohort 11.5 per cent of the cohort was serving a traditional apprenticeship and 9.5 per cent were undertaking a traineeship.

Traditional apprenticeships

Males were three times as likely as females to participate in traditional apprenticeships (even after allowing for differences in other factors such as interests). Participation was also higher among young people

- of an English-speaking background;
- whose father was a tradesman;
- with lower achievement in reading and mathematics in Year 9;
- with greater interest in trade-related activities;
- who left school before Year 12;
- who studied a VET subject in Year 12 compared with doing Year 12 without VET; and
- who came from a school with a strong level of enrolments in technology subjects.

Traineeships

Participation in traineeships was more evenly distributed across the cohort than was the case for traditional apprenticeships. However, females had a higher likelihood than males of participating in a traineeship, students with lower levels of achievement in reading in Year 9 were more likely to participate in a traineeship, and students from non-metropolitan locations were more likely to

participate in traineeships. Undertaking Year 12 with a VET subject included resulted in an increased likelihood of traineeship participation over completing Year 12 without a VET subject.

Progress through New Apprenticeships

Most New Apprentices began in the same year as they completed school or in the following year. More than three-quarters of apprentices began their training within a year of finishing at school. For trainees there was sometimes a gap between school and training.

By 2003, 74 per cent of traditional apprentices had completed, 16 per cent had discontinued, and 10 per cent were continuing. These completion rates are higher than those estimated by NCVER, possibly because they refer to those who commenced apprenticeships after leaving school in their late teens and possibly because they refer those who commenced in the mid 1990s, as opposed to those who completed in the early to mid 2000s. In addition, the analysis of longitudinal data may estimate higher completion rates than administrative data because those who do not complete an apprenticeship are more likely to have discontinued in the survey and because longitudinal data can capture information about transfers within apprenticeships and courses of training. There was no difference in completion between those who had completed Year 12 and those who had not completed Year 12. Completion data for trainees are more difficult to analyse because self-reported completions may not be accurate.

There were differences among fields of training in the percentages that discontinued their training. Higher percentages discontinued in hairdressing and food and hospitality than in other fields. However, none of the other personal and educational background characteristics that were investigated were associated with discontinuation.

Reasons given for not continuing a New Apprenticeship most frequently focussed on personal issues such as dislike of the type of work, getting along with supervisors or others at work, being offered a better job or feeling that the pay was too low. The difficulty of study, future job prospects or the nature of the on or off the job training were not key reasons for discontinuing a New Apprenticeship.

Conclusion

Several conclusions from this report have relevance to considerations of the ways in which New Apprenticeships contribute to the skilled labour force. It suggests that expanding entry numbers may be as important for expanding output from the system as improved completion rates. There are probably limits to improving completion rates (even allowing for the uncertainties of estimation those rates) since non-completion is more related to the workplace circumstances and changed interests than it is to entry characteristics. As Year 12 completers form the majority of each cohort and participation amongst early school leavers is already relatively high, there appears to be more scope for expansion through encouraging participation among those who complete Year 12 than among those who leave school before Year 12. However, encouraging participation among early leavers in New Apprenticeships has been argued to have benefits for equity in education and training. Participation among those who complete Year 12 will be enhanced through the experiences and advice provided in the earlier years of school that shape interests and by curriculum provisions in the senior years through technology studies and vocational education and training.