

**Non-apprenticeship VET Courses:
Participation, Persistence and Subsequent Pathways
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report examines recent school leavers who commenced non-apprenticeship VET courses in Australia during the late 1990s. The focus is on the early post-school years, up to age 20. The report has two broad aims:

- to describe the educational, training and labour market pathways of non-apprenticeship VET course entrants; and
- to identify factors associated with persistence in non-apprenticeship VET courses.

The report uses data from the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) to address each of these aims. The findings are based upon a sample of young people who had been in Year 9 in 1995 and who commenced a non-apprenticeship VET course during the period between leaving school and December 2000. Their education, training and labour market activities were tracked until late in 2001 when they were approximately 20 years of age.

Educational, training and labour market pathways

First non-apprenticeship VET course

Among the 1995 Year 9 LSAY cohort, 23 per cent of females and 17 per cent of males had commenced a non-apprenticeship VET course by 2000 (at approximately age 19).

By late in 2001 (at approximately age 20), 60 per cent of the non-apprenticeship VET entrants had completed their first course, 14 per cent were still enrolled in their first course, and just under one-quarter had discontinued their first course. These completion rates differ from other published rates, such as those outlined in the introduction, because they followed cohort members through their non-apprenticeship VET courses, unlike completion rates based on administrative data, which do not track individuals across institutions.

Males were more likely than females to be still studying in their first course and less likely than females to have completed their first course by age 20. While males and females displayed similar rates of course discontinuation, females tended to stop earlier than males.

Subsequent pathways (up to age 20)

Among those who left their first non-apprenticeship VET course through completion or discontinuation, 24 per cent commenced a second non-apprenticeship VET course, 11 per cent commenced a university course, and 9 per cent commenced a New Apprenticeship by age 20.

Subsequent labour market activities were also examined. Seventy-nine per cent of those who had completed a diploma and 74 per cent of those who had completed a certificate or discontinued a non-apprenticeship VET course were engaged in full-time activities such as employment, education and training at age 20. In contrast, young people who had not participated in tertiary education and training by age 19 reported lower levels of participation in full-time activities at age 20 (68%).

Gender differences were evident between the pathways of persons with no experience of tertiary education and those of persons who had undertaken non-apprenticeship VET. Among females, those with no experience of tertiary education and training were most likely to be outside work and study (24%), followed by those who had discontinued VET (16%), completed a certificate (11%), or completed a diploma (4%). Among males, the relationship was weaker: those with no tertiary experience and those who had completed a certificate displayed similar levels of being outside work and study (18% and 16%, respectively), followed by those who had completed a diploma (10%) and those who had discontinued a course (7%).

Factors associated with course persistence

For the purposes of this report, course persistence was defined as completing a course or still being enrolled by age 20. The findings show that:

- *Low socioeconomic status (SES) students* were *not* disadvantaged in terms of course progress. Rather, students with parents in manual occupations were more likely to persist in their courses than those with parents in para-professional, clerical or sales occupations, and had similar levels of course persistence as those with parents in professional and managerial occupations. Parental education and receipt of Youth Allowance were unrelated to course progress after controlling for a range of other background, educational and labour market characteristics.
- *Other background characteristics*: Gender, language background and region were unrelated to course persistence as defined in this report.

In contrast, the findings show that a number of educational and labour market characteristics were associated with course persistence and that students' interests and preferences were also important. In particular:

- *Numeracy*: Numeracy—measured at school in Year 9—was negatively associated with course persistence, other things being equal.
- *Course level*: Entrants to Certificate I/II courses and Certificate III/IV courses were more likely to persist than entrants to Diploma and higher-level courses.
- *Paid work*: Students who worked between 11 and 20 hours per week or more than 30 hours per week were less likely than students not in paid work to persist in their course. In contrast, students working relatively few hours per week were no less likely than students who were not in paid work to persist.
- *Attitudinal factors*: Higher self-perceptions of academic ability were associated with higher levels of course persistence, as were previous aspirations to undertake VET studies and gaining entry into the course of first preference.
- *Reasons for discontinuing*: The reasons given by discontinuers for leaving their first course also emphasise the importance of preferences and interests: wanting to get a job, apprenticeship or traineeship; the course turning out to be not what the students wanted; and losing interest were common reasons for withdrawal or deferral.

Implications

The extent to which course persistence differs between various socio-demographic groups has important equity implications. The current report suggests that among non-apprenticeship VET course entrants, low SES students are not disadvantaged in relation to course progress and that gender, language background, and region are unrelated to course persistence. Any new policy initiatives targeting these equity groups should focus on entry to tertiary education or on branching points earlier in young people's educational pathways.

The high proportion of course discontinuers indicating that their first course turned out to be not what they wanted, or that they wanted to get a job, apprenticeship or traineeship suggests a need for students to have better access to course and career guidance prior to entry to tertiary study.

Finally, there is some evidence that VET participation—relative to not undertaking tertiary education and training—is beneficial in terms of being engaged on a full-time basis in education, training or labour market activities at age 20. It will be necessary, however, to examine the pathways of young people over a longer period of time in order to provide a more accurate assessment of the outcomes of participation in a non-apprenticeship VET course.