

Participation and Achievement in VET of Non-completers of School

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report examines the vocational education and training (VET) activities and experiences of non-completers of Year 12 in the initial post-school years. It investigates differences between those who participate in VET after leaving school and those who do not. It also reviews VET achievement examining results in the VET courses undertaken by non-completers.

The report provides information on the characteristics and success rates of non-completers who participated in VET. The report does not attempt to identify factors which influence the progression from Year 9 to post-school destinations (for example, leaving school early and participation in VET). Rather, this study concentrates on describing the characteristics and achievement levels of those non-completers who participated in VET according to their specific study programs.

In the present report, the term 'non-completer' is used to refer to all those who did not complete Year 12, not just those who left school prior to the post-compulsory years. It includes the young people who did not continue at secondary school beyond Year 10 and Year 11 as well as those who left during Year 12 without obtaining a Year 12 certificate.

The group of school non-completers is not homogeneous, as students leave school early for a variety of reasons. The VET sector plays an important role in providing further education and training for the diverse groups of non-completers - those who are re-entering education and training, those undertaking apprenticeships or traineeships, or those continuing their studies in an environment different to school. Focusing on the VET choices and achievements of non-completers will assist a better understanding of the processes of transition to work and the role played by VET in this process.

Data and Method

The analyses were based on data from the Y95 cohort of the *Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth* (LSAY). This is a national sample of young people who were first surveyed in Year 9 of secondary school in 1995; at that time the majority of sample members were aged 14 years. The cohort has been surveyed annually since 1995. The LSAY surveys provide detailed information on school experiences, educational attainment, and post-school participation in education, training and work. To obtain more detailed information on VET experiences, the information was supplemented with data collected for the Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard (AVETMISS). The AVETMISS data contain information collected from publicly funded VET programs delivered by training organisations across Australia. The data apply to programs delivered by adult and community education, State TAFE systems and private providers of vocational education. This is the first report in the LSAY series using this information to examine VET participation and achievement.

The information collected from the annual Y95 follow-up survey has been matched with data from the 1996, 1997 and 1998 AVETMISS collections to develop a detailed profile of the vocational education and training experiences of non-completers. LSAY provides information on broad measures of participation in VET, including qualification and field of study. The AVETMISS data contain more detailed information on courses, module enrolments and module achievement. Together the two data sets provide extensive information on the VET experiences of non-completers from the Y95 cohort.

Two main sets of analyses were undertaken. The first set examined the course enrolments of non-

completers including enrolments by stream of study, field of study and qualifications. The second set examined achievement for non-completers by examining success in modules or subjects. The analyses explored the rates of withdrawal and failure from modules in which non-completers enrol, as well as achievement for those who completed. Course and module enrolments covered the period from 1996 to 1998.

The sample of non-completers comprised 2067 respondents, which represented about 21 per cent of the surviving members of the Y95 cohort in 1998.

Main Findings

The results show that approximately 37 per cent of non-completers had undertaken some sort of VET study in their initial post-school years. Given a rate of school non-completion of 21 per cent for this cohort in 1998, this implies that only 13 per cent of school students had not completed Year 12 or continued in some form of further study. Participation in VET varied by background. There were clear differences according to gender, ethnicity and locality. Of note were:

- higher participation rates for males than females (42 per cent compared to 30 per cent);
- higher participation for non-completers from Catholic schools (44 per cent compared to 36 per cent from government schools and 31 per cent from independent schools);
- lower participation rates for non-completers from lower socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds (35 per cent for the lowest quartile of SES compared to 43 per cent for the highest quartile); and
- lower participation rates for non-completers living in areas of high unemployment.

Participation also varied by type of VET course:

- over 40 per cent of all non-completers who enrolled in further study entered trade-related courses (preparatory or full trade courses);
- a quarter enrolled in non-trade skills courses;
- male non-completers (57 per cent) were more likely to enrol in a trade-related course, while females (82 per cent) were more likely to enrol in courses that teach other skills; and
- males who leave school after commencing Year 11 were less likely to enrol in a trade-related course compared with males who leave school earlier (51 per cent compared to 64 per cent).

Not all non-completers are successful in their vocational education and training studies. In looking at achievement measured in terms of module outcomes:

- almost 60 per cent of modules undertaken by non-completers in the sample resulted in a successful outcome, while 29 per cent of modules were not successfully completed. Non-completers withdrew from a further 11 per cent of modules;
- failure rates varied depending on the type of qualification, with the highest failure rates in the advanced courses - diploma-level courses; and
- pass rates were highest in trade-related and similar level courses.

Module outcomes also varied across different categories of non-completers:

- failure rates were lowest in modules undertaken more often by students who performed well at school compared to those who did not perform well at school (14 per cent for those in the highest quartile of school achievement compared to 17 per cent for those in the lowest quartile);
- failure rates were lowest in modules undertaken more often by high SES rather than low SES non-completers (13 per cent compared to 19 per cent);
- successful completion rates were 63 per cent for high SES non-completers compared with 59 per cent for low SES non-completers _ the differences in success rates are small, in the light of the differences in school success rates of the two groups; and
- failure rates were lower in modules undertaken by non-completers from English-speaking rather than non-English-speaking backgrounds (16 per cent compared to 22 per cent).

The results of this analysis suggest that non-completers study a range of courses within the VET sector. It is important that VET remains flexible and continues to provide diversity in the range of courses available to this group of teenagers. The data used in this report covered the period up to 1998, and by that time it was not possible to assess if all courses studied by non-completers lead on to secure employment outcomes; nor was it possible to test whether some courses provide superior employment outcomes. These longer-term effects will form part of the LSAY program over the next few years as the Y95 cohort ages.