

Participation in Vocational Education and Training to age 24

Introduction

Participation in education and training after leaving secondary school has long been recognised as an important pathway for young people in Australia. Recent changes to secondary education have seen many schools offering vocational education, including arrangements for young people to combine school study with apprenticeships and traineeships.

Post-school study offers opportunities to concentrate in specific fields, extending interests that may have developed while at school and developing skills in new fields of interest. This includes university study (or 'higher education') and programs of vocational education and training (VET). VET comprises apprenticeships and traineeships (amalgamated under the title 'Australian Apprenticeships') and non-apprenticeship courses offered at publicly funded TAFE institutions and private VET providers.

University study holds a distinct place in Australian society, as it provides a pathway into professional occupations. University graduates are consistently shown to have superior outcomes, in terms of

employment and earnings. Does VET study provide an equivalent pathway for young people interested in non-academic careers? Are there similar benefits for those who participate in VET programs?

The data for this *Briefing* are from the 1995 cohort of the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY). The findings reported here are from three recent LSAY research reports, which are listed at the end of this *Briefing*. The cohort comprises young people who were in Year 9 at school in 1995. Data in this *Briefing* have been collected annually to 2005. This *Briefing* concentrates on those who undertook an apprenticeship or traineeship after leaving school, or enrolled for non-apprenticeship study at a TAFE institution or a private VET provider.

The majority of the 1995 Year 9 LSAY cohort completed Year 12 in 1998, and 1999 was their first year of post-school study. Around 21 per cent had participated in an apprenticeship or traineeship by the end of 2001, with most entering by the end of the first year after leaving school (Ainley & Corrigan, 2005). Around 24 per cent of cohort members engaged in non-apprenticeship VET study, again with most entering by the end of

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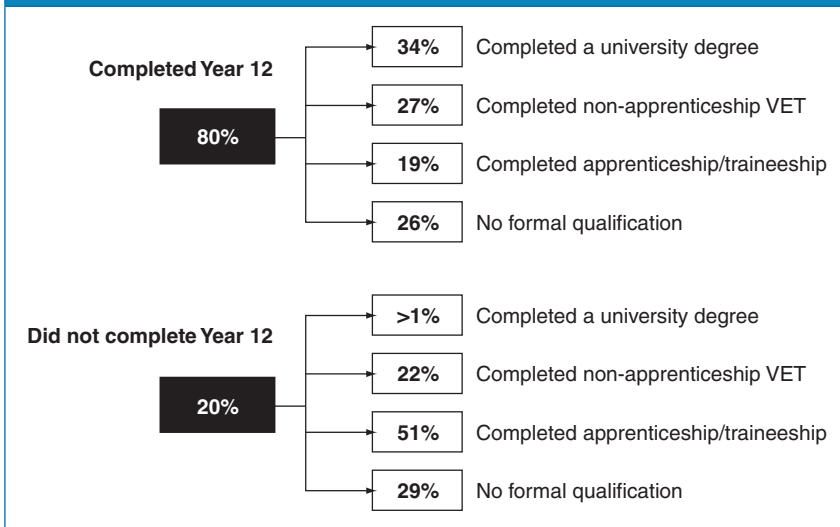
Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training. The aims of the series are to bring summaries of findings from LSAY research to a wider audience and to examine particular topics in brief. Related references, are listed at the end of the paper.

Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth BRIEFING

HIGHLIGHTS

- More than 40 per cent of young people undertake VET study in the first years after leaving school
- Young people who complete VET study have better employment outcomes than those who do no post-school study
- VET study is especially helpful for young people who were low achievers at school or who leave school before completing Year 12
- Completion of a VET qualification results in better outcomes compared to non-completion

Figure 1 Completions of formal post-school training for young men from the LSAY 1995 Year 9 cohort, to 2005



the first year after leaving school (McMillan, Rothman & Wernert, 2005). By the end of 2001, 42 per cent of the cohort had engaged in some form of VET study, including some (more than 3 per cent) who had done both an apprenticeship/traineeship and non-apprenticeship VET study (Curtis, 2008).

The importance of the VET pathway

Among the LSAY Year 9 1995 cohort, the post-school VET option—particularly the use of apprenticeships—has been most valuable for young men who did not complete Year 12 at school. Just over one-half of young men who left school before the end of Year 12 had completed an apprenticeship or traineeship by the end of 2005. This is reflected in the post-school education and training pathways of the cohort through to 2005, as shown in Figure 1. Some cohort members had completed more than one form of post-school study up to 2005, but by the end of that year, 74 per cent of male Year 12 completers and 71 per cent of male non-completers had obtained a formal post-school qualification.

Among young women, a greater proportion of Year 12 completers had completed a university degree and more had completed a non-apprenticeship VET course, while a lower proportion had completed an apprenticeship or traineeship.

Overall, by 2005, 80 per cent of female Year 12 completers had completed a formal post-school qualification, but only 59 per cent of female non-completers had done so (see Figure 2).

By the end of 2005, three-quarters of the 1995 Year 9 LSAY cohort had obtained a formal post-school qualification: 73 per cent of young men and 77 per cent of young women. A greater proportion of young women than young men had attained a university degree, while young men tended to complete VET study, as shown in Table 1. The VET option was more commonly used by young men, especially among those who did not complete Year 12 at school.

Who participates in VET study after leaving school?

Up to the end of 2001, 45 per cent of young men and 39 per cent of young women in the 1995 Year 9 LSAY cohort had participated in VET study. Apprentices were more likely to be male, be from a low-to-medium socioeconomic group, have a parent in a technical or trade occupation, have attended a government school, be a relatively lower achiever in reading and mathematics while at school, and have studied VET subjects while at school (Ainley & Corrigan, 2005; Curtis, 2008).

Among this cohort, traineeships were more common among Indigenous young people, who had a take-up rate of 2.5 times the rate of non-Indigenous young people. Trainees were more likely to be female, and were less likely to have university-educated parents working in professional occupations, be relatively high achievers in reading and mathematics while at school, and have attended a non-government, non-Catholic school (Ainley & Corrigan, 2005).

Participation in non-apprenticeship VET study was generally evenly distributed across members of the cohort, but there were some differences by course level (McMillan et al, 2005).

Figure 2 Completions of formal post-school training for young women from the LSAY 1995 Year 9 cohort, to 2005

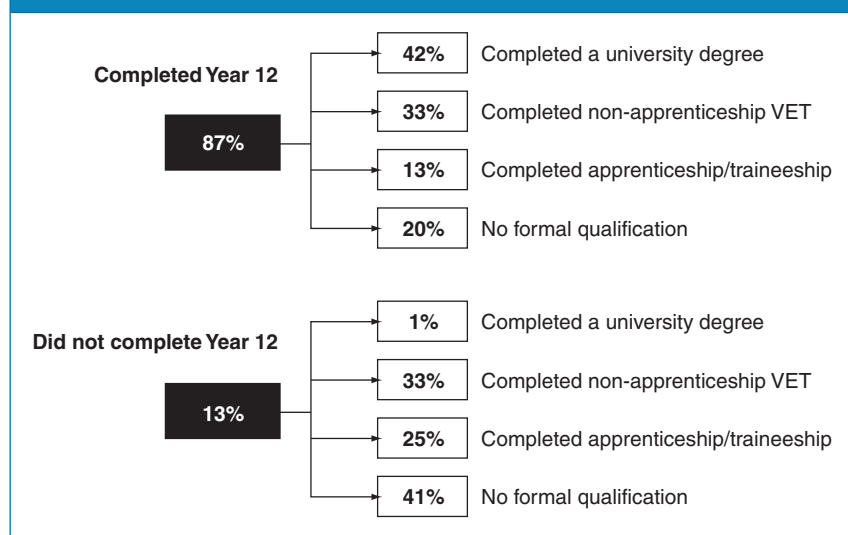


Table 1 Highest level of attainment by members of the 1995 Year 9 LSAY cohort to 2005, by gender

	Males	Females	Persons
Level of attainment	%	%	%
Below Year 12 and no post-school qualification	6	5	5
Completed Year 12 and no post-school qualification	21	17	19
VET study (apprenticeship or non-apprenticeship VET)	46	41	43
Higher education	27	37	32
Total	100	100	100

Note: VET study includes all certificate levels (1–4 and level not specified), diplomas and associate degrees.

Source: Rothman (2006)

Across all VET study, participants were more likely to be male, Indigenous, an early school leaver and from a rural or remote area; have a lower socioeconomic background, a lower level of achievement in reading and mathematics and an English-speaking background; and have attended a government school and have undertaken some VET study while at school (Curtis, 2008).

What do young people study in VET programs?

Table 2 shows the fields of education studied by members of the 1995 Year 9 LSAY cohort when first entering post-school study. Overall,

Management and Commerce courses were most common, particularly among apprentices and trainees, and those in non-apprenticeship VET courses. The level and depth of study in these locations differed, however, with trainees concentrating on retail sales, non-apprenticeship VET students on accounting and bookkeeping, and university students on economics and management. Food, Hospitality and Personal Services courses are not available at universities, and a number of fields are not available as VET study.

Within these fields of education, the levels studied by young people in the cohort who entered post-school non-apprenticeship VET study differed by whether they completed Year 12. Year 12 non-completers were

most commonly enrolled in study at AQF level 2, with 41 per cent at certificate levels 1 and 2. Year 12 completers most commonly enrolled at diploma level, with another group at certificate levels 3 and 4 (see Table 3).

VET study and Year 12 equivalence

One goal of Australian education is that all young people ‘complete Year 12 or its vocational equivalent’ (MCEETYA, 1999). It has been accepted in many circles that AQF certificate level 2 is the vocational equivalent of Year 12 completion (eg Long, 2005), but some argue that these levels do not hold across all

Table 2 Field of education in initial post-school study among the 1995 Year 9 LSAY cohort, by form of study

	Apprenticeship or Traineeship	Non-apprenticeship VET study
Field of education	%	%
Agriculture, Environmental and Related Studies	6	4
Architecture and Building	16	5
Creative Arts	–	8
Education	–	–
Engineering and Related Technologies	18	7
Food, Hospitality and Personal Services	17	17
Health (excluding Medicine, Dentistry, Veterinary Science)	4	3
Information Technology	7	7
Management and Commerce	27	27
Medicine, Dentistry, Veterinary Science, Law	–	–
Natural and Physical Sciences	–	–
Society and Culture (excluding Law)	–	14
Total	100	100

Source: Ainley & Corrigan (2005); McMillan, Rothman & Wernert (2005).

Table 3 Level of first non-apprenticeship VET course commenced by the 1995 Year 9 LSAY cohort, by Year 12 completion status

	Year 12 non-completers	Year 12 completers
Course level	%	%
AQF Certificate I	17	5
AQF Certificate II	24	7
AQF Certificate III	21	17
AQF Certificate IV	8	14
AQF Certificate level unknown	17	6
Diploma	12	42
Advanced diploma/associate degree	1	9
Total	100	100

Source: McMillan, Rothman & Wernert (2005).

fields of VET study, and that level 3 should be considered the equivalent (eg Karmel, 2004). Table 3 shows that those who did not complete Year 12 were concentrated at level 3 and below (including those who did not know the level of the certificate they would receive), while those who did complete Year 12 generally enrolled in courses at level 3 and higher.

Among members of the 1995 Year 9 LSAY cohort, the ‘non-completion’ rate dropped to 7 per cent for both males and females, rather than the 20 per cent for males and 13 per cent for females reported above when AQF level 2 is considered as the Year 12 equivalent (Curtis & McMillan, 2008). Regardless of which AQF level is considered equivalent to Year 12 completion, more than one-half of school non-completers who enter non-apprenticeship VET courses complete their study with an equivalent-level certificate.

What do young people do after VET study?

Curtis (2008) examined the outcomes of VET study for this cohort up to 2004 (around age 23). With a sample limited to those who did not undertake university study-allowing easier comparison with prior achievement and more time after study-he found that 77 per cent of those who had undertaken some

form of post-school VET study were working full-time in 2004, compared to 70 per cent of those who had not done any study. This difference held for young men and young women, and for all types of VET study-apprenticeship, traineeship and non-apprenticeship VET programs. He also noted that young women with no post-school qualifications were ‘particularly disadvantaged’, a finding similar to that reported by Lamb and Rumberger (1999), who examined data on earlier cohorts of Australian youth.

Curtis (2008) also examined the amount of unemployment experienced in 2004 by VET completers, and compared this to the amount of unemployment experienced by those who did no post-school study. Both young men and young women who had completed an apprenticeship had experienced the lowest levels of unemployment. Overall, there was little difference between those who did some study and those who did no study; however, those who did not participate in post-school study had spent more time in the labour force, which of itself has some benefit (see Marks, 2006). Curtis also found that in 2004, former apprentices-especially young men-were earning substantially more per week than others in the sample, even though hours of work per week were similar across all groups and for both men and women.

Does VET study benefit school non-completers?

In 2005, when around 24 years of age, three-quarters of the 1995 Year 9 LSAY cohort were working in full-time jobs. Employment status in that year varied according to the highest level of post-school study completed and whether the young person had completed Year 12 at school, as shown in Table 4. Among those with no formal post-school qualification, 71 per cent of Year 12 completers were working full-time, as were 61 per cent of non-completers; however, among those who did not complete Year 12, 26 per cent were not working, most of whom were women outside the labour force and looking after children. Among cohort members who had completed non-apprenticeship VET study, 70 per cent of Year 12 non-completers and 72 per cent of Year 12 completers were working full-time, with more Year 12 completers than non-completers working part-time. Only 6 per cent of those who completed an apprenticeship or traineeship were not working in 2005, with 83 per cent working full-time. Similar outcomes were reported for the cohort in 2004 (Curtis, 2008).

The patterns in income and hours worked found by Curtis (2008) for the cohort in 2004 held for the cohort in 2005. Young men who

Table 4 Highest level of attainment by members of the 1995 Year 9 LSAY cohort to 2005, by gender

	Completed Year 12	Full-time	Part-time	Not working	Total	Number in sample
Level of attainment		%	%	%	%	
No post-school qualification	No	61	13	26	100	232
	Yes	71	18	11	100	809
Non-apprenticeship course	No	70	14	16	100	189
	Yes	72	19	9	100	811
Apprenticeship/traineeship	No	80	14	6	100	286
	Yes	85	8	6	100	559
Higher education	No	–	–	–	–	4
	Yes	78	15	7	100	1344
Year 12 non-completers		71	14	15	100	710
Year 12 completers		76	16	8	100	3523
Total		75	15	9	100	4233

Note: Based on main job only. 30 hours or more per week is considered full-time employment. Those not working may be unemployed, studying or otherwise out of the labour force. Columns and rows may not sum to totals because of rounding.

had trained as apprentices had higher weekly earnings than those who undertook non-apprenticeship VET study or no post-school study, and lower earnings than those who had completed a university degree, but there was very little difference in the number of hours worked.

Among young women, former apprentices and trainees were also earning more than those who had undertaken non-apprenticeship VET study or did no post-school study, and were earning less than university degree holders; again, there was no difference in the hours worked. Non-apprenticeship VET study also offered monetary benefits for young women, compared to no post-school study. Additionally, 12 per cent of young men who had done VET study were self-employed, compared to 6 per cent of non-VET completers.

Post-school study in 2005

In 2005, 16 per cent of cohort members were engaged in post-school study, most of whom had already completed a qualification by then. Among those who had completed a non-apprenticeship VET course, 18 per cent were studying, with 6 per cent doing another non-apprenticeship VET course and 10 per cent studying at university.

Former apprentices were less likely to be studying in 2005: only 12 per cent were doing so, with about one-half of them studying a TAFE course. By comparison, 22 per cent of those who had completed Year 12 but no post-school study were engaged in study in 2005, with the majority studying at university.

Benefits of VET participation and completion

Much of the LSAY work has already demonstrated the benefits of an apprenticeship, particularly for young men, and even more so for young men who do not complete Year 12 at school. An important question is whether a non-apprenticeship VET course offers any benefits to a young person. In 2001, when these young people were around age 20, McMillan et al (2005) found that those who had participated in a non-apprenticeship VET course had benefited from such attendance, regardless of whether they completed the course. Curtis (2008) extended that analysis to 2004 (age 23) with the same cohort, finding that VET course completers in general were in a better position than non-completers in terms of full-time employment.

Overall, those who completed apprenticeships were in the best position in terms of employment and earnings. By 2005, there is additional information that apprenticeship completers were also more likely to be operating their own businesses.

One insight into the question of the benefits of VET study is offered by comparing the employment outcomes of those who did no post-school study with those who completed VET study. The first two pairs of rows in Table 4 allow comparisons for those who did not complete Year 12 at school and those who did. Among Year 12 non-completers, 61 per cent of those who did no post-school study were working full-time in 2005, compared to 70 per cent of Year 12 non-completers who undertook non-apprenticeship VET study. For those who left school before the end of Year 12, undertaking VET study was beneficial in terms of employment, and more so for young men.

Those who completed Year 12 also benefited from VET study, although the benefits were less substantial. For young men who completed Year 12 there was little net benefit in post-school non-apprenticeship VET study compared to direct entry into the labour market, but young women who completed Year 12 did benefit slightly from such study. This was

particularly an issue among those who completed lower certificate non-apprenticeship VET courses. As Marks (2006) has argued, this may be because early experience in the labour market has many benefits in term of later full-time employment.

Overall, the greatest benefit from post-school study was found for young men who had undertaken an apprenticeship, with 92 per cent of Year 12 completers and 88 per cent of non-completers working full-time in 2005.

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The Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth

The Longitudinal Surveys of The Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) is a research program jointly managed by ACER and the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST). Funding for LSAY is also provided by the Australian Education Systems Officials Committee (AESOC) through the National Fund for Educational Research.

The program includes more than 20 years of data on young Australians

as they move through school and into tertiary education, the labour market and adult life. LSAY commenced in its present form in 1995 with a national sample of Year 9 students. Another sample of Year 9 students was drawn in 1998, and a further sample of 15 year olds was drawn in 2003. Data are first collected in schools, then by mail and telephone interviews.

Advice and guidance are provided by a Steering Committee, with representatives from DEST,

other Australian Government departments, AESOC, the Chief Executive Officers of State and Territory training authorities, non-government schools, academics and ACER.

The data collected through LSAY are deposited with the Australian Social Science Data Archive for access by other analysts.

Further information on the LSAY program is available from ACER's Website: www.acer.edu.au



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