

Why are commencements different from *Total VET students and courses*?

Comparing qualification commencements in 2021, we can see differences between the two publications:

- VET qualifications completion rates 2025 reported 1,525,695 commencements.
- Total VET students and courses 2025 reported 1,637,325 (qualification) commencements.

There are several reasons as to why these numbers may be different, including the application of program supersession, unit of measurement, student identification, and methodology differences. They generally result in fewer commencements in VET qualification completion rates than total VET students and courses. However, methodological differences can lead to scenarios where the commencement count in VET qualification completion rates is greater.

Table 1 Summary of differences between publications

	VET qualification completion rates	Total VET students and courses (program enrolments)
Purpose	Understand outcomes	Monitor system activity
Measuring	Student receiving a qualification (regardless of version or from who).	Students participating in a qualification at an organisation.
Student identification	Unique student identifier is used to group records. Any records without a unique student identifier may be linked to one based on secondary identifiers.	Unique student identifier is used to group records. Any records without a unique student identifier are unique.
Supersession	Yes — groups all versions of a program together into a 'cluster'. Multiple commencements in a cluster are generally treated as one.	No — different versions of the same program are considered different activity.

Supersession

Using Diploma of Leadership and Management as an example, it is possible to highlight the impacts on the two publications. In 2020, students were likely enrolled in one of two versions, either BSB51918 or its replacement BSB50420.

In *total VET students and courses*, supersession is not considered when counting program enrolments (commencing or continuing programs) nor as part of the commencement indicator. Instead, a student enrolled in both versions, is counted as two program enrolments.

Whereas, *VET qualification completion rates*, incorporates supersession to ensure a student who transfers from one version of a qualification to another is only ever considered one commencement and one conclusion (either successful or unsuccessful).

Table 2 Example of commencements and conclusions by publication

Publication	Program	Commencement	Conclusion
Total VET students and courses	BSB51918	1	1
	BSB50420	1	1
VET qualification completion rates	BSB51918	1	1
	BSB50420		

Unit of measurement

Total VET students and courses reflects activity occurring during the year. That includes students changing providers or programs. In effect, a student undertaking the same version of a program (e.g., BSB51918) can still be counted as more than one commencement if the training provider changes.

Again, this is where *VET qualification completion rates* differs. Although who did the training and/or assessment is important, ultimately the goal is to understand whether a student has the skills to undertake an occupation.

Student identification

VET qualification completion rates is a longitudinal analysis from commencement to conclusion of a student studying a qualification. This increases the likelihood of students moving in and out of NCVER's reporting or being reported with new information, such as a unique student identifier. The longitudinal construct attempts to associate student records without a unique student identifier to those with one, increasing the linkage rates across years and accuracy of the information.

Total VET students and courses is an annual snapshot of vocational education and training activity, as such it is less consequential that a student was reported without a unique student identifier one year and with one in the following: in effect, what is counted is the same.

Methodological differences

VET qualification completion rates includes the concept of a recommencement. Where a student goes a period (a year or more) without training in the qualification, the next time it is seen is a new commencement. Alternatively, should a student commence a qualification after successfully completing it, this is also considered a new commencement.

However, *Total VET students and courses* does not factor this in. Even if the student has a break, in reporting, the activity is not considered a new commencement - the commencing program status remains "continuing".