Work–life issues and participation in education and training



CENTRE FOR WORK + LIFE,
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The views and opinions expressed in this document are those of the author/project team and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government, state and territory governments or NCVER

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About the research

Work–life issues and participation in education and training

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The factors that influence the participation of low-skilled and low-paid workers in vocational education and training (VET) are the focus of a major research project, *Low-paid workers and VET: Increasing VET participation amongst lower-paid workers over the life cycle*, being undertaken by the Centre for Work + Life at the University of South Australia.

Using data from the 2009 Australian Work and Life Index (AWALI), this report examines how work–life pressures influence the capacity and motivation of individuals to engage in education and training. The Australian Work and Life Index is an annual national survey of nearly 3000 employed persons and is representative of the Australian working population.

Future reports from the project will bring together the quantitative data in this report with the material from the qualitative components of the study, including interviews with low-paid workers in the aged care, food processing and retail industries.

Key findings

- Undertaking some form of training outside the workplace does result in a significantly higher work–life conflict for employees in low-paid occupations.
- Women in higher-paid occupations were particularly likely to experience a work–life penalty for their participation in education and training, relative to their male counterparts.
- Men in low-paid occupations are those most likely to be disengaged from current and future participation in education and training.
- Only a minority of employees anticipate undertaking a university-level qualification, with the majority expecting to do a VET course or other type of qualification.
- The most common reasons cited for not participating in education or training remain time and cost, despite most employees indicating that their employer would provide some support and that the outcomes would have employment benefits.

Tom Karmel
Managing Director, NCVER

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Executive summary

This report applies a work–life lens to examine patterns of participation in education and training, and perceptions of future participation.

Using data from the 2009 Australian Work and Life Index (AWALI), this report examines how work–life pressures intersect with occupational status and income to influence workers' capacity and motivation to engage in education and training. Previous Australian Work and Life Index surveys have established that work–life pressures are likely to be stronger for women, those working longer hours, those in the peak years of family formation/responsibility and work/career (25 to 44 years) and those with parenting responsibilities.

The Australian Work and Life Index is an annual national survey. In 2009 the survey included 2748 employed persons, that is, representative of the Australian working population. Data are collected by telephone interviews in March–April of each year.

For the purposes of this report higher-paid occupations were defined as the first three levels of ANZSCO (Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations): managers, professionals and technicians and trades workers. Low-paid occupations comprised levels four to eight of the ANZSCO occupational classifications: community and personal services workers, clerical and administrative workers, sales workers, machinery operators and drivers, and labourers.

Comparing low-paid and higher-paid workers

While rates of participation in education or training were very similar for those in low-paid compared with higher-paid occupations, there was a significant difference in the work–life consequences of participation. For low-paid workers, participation in education or training was associated with significantly higher work–life conflict compared with their non-participant counterparts.

Of particular interest in the current study were the perceptions and expectations of those who were not engaged in education or training and who did not expect to do so in the next 12 months. Compared with workers in higher-paid occupations, low-paid workers were less confident of employer support for any future education or training and more likely to report their own lack of interest. Those in higher-paid occupations were more likely to report time constraints to their future participation, which is not surprising, given the culture of long hours that accompanies many managerial and professional roles, and the more frequent occurrence of part-time work in lower-paid occupations. Cost concerns were also more prevalent for those in higher-paid compared with low-paid occupations.

Comparing men and women

Gender is a central factor that influences how workers experience the fit between their work and other life commitments. Women are often more likely to experience time pressure and work–life conflict, particularly if they are working full-time (Pocock, Skinner & Ichii 2009). In Australia,

women are also more likely to use part-time work as a work–life balance strategy, which often means employment in low-paid occupations, where the majority of part-time opportunities are available (Pocock, Skinner & Ichii 2009).

One of the goals of this study was to examine how these gender differences in navigating the work–life relationship was manifested in working men's and women's experiences and perceptions of education and training.

Women were more likely to be engaged in education or training at the time of the survey, and they were also more likely to experience higher levels of work–life conflict as a result of their participation. On the other hand, for men work–life conflict was not affected by participation in education or training.

The prospect of a work–life penalty for participation in education or training was also obvious to women who were not currently studying. Of those respondents who were not currently studying and did not expect to participate in education or training in the next 12 months, women were more likely to report that participation in education or training would create work–life fit problems and that they would not have time to study. In contrast, men were more likely to be confident of employer support, but also to report a lack of interest in future education or training.

Gender and occupational status are very broad social categories through which to examine individuals' perceptions and experience of education and training, especially through a work–life lens. A central aim in this report was to examine how working in low- or higher-paid occupations was experienced differently for men and women, with regard to their perceptions and experiences of education and training.

Two groups particularly stood out in terms of the interactive effects of gender and occupational status: *women in higher-paid occupations* and *men in low-paid occupations*.

There was evidence from the survey that women in higher-paid occupations were particularly likely to experience a work–life penalty for their participation in education or training compared with their male counterparts. It was also these higher-paid women who were most likely to report that work–life fit barriers and time constraints created difficulties for their future participation in education and training.

There was also evidence that men in low-paid occupations were most likely to be disengaged from current and future participation in education and training. In general, women were more likely to be studying at the time of the survey, and this was the case in low-paid and higher-paid occupations. However, low-paid men working full-time reported the lowest rate of current participation (12.1%). Low-paid men who were not currently studying were also most likely to report that they were unlikely to engage in future education or training (nearly 40%).

Within this group of low-paid men nearly one-third had strong expectations of future participation in education or training. Indeed, looking at low-paid workers overall, low-paid men were more likely to expect future participation compared with low-paid women (a gender difference not observed for those employed in higher-paid occupations). This suggests that there are two distinct groups of low-paid men: those confident of their future participation in education or training and those who are disengaged and uninterested. An interesting question is how these low-paid men who were confident of their future engagement in education or training differ from their disengaged counterparts.

Implications for policy and practice

It is clear from the findings of this report that there are common concerns and barriers to participation in education or training that apply across the board (that is, time and cost). The emphasis on these issues as barriers or support to participation varies according to gender and

occupational status, and there are also some barriers to participation (for example, lack of motivation/interest) that are characteristic of a particular group (men in low-paid occupations).

A lack of time to engage in education or training was a universal concern for men and women, and across occupational groups. Time constraints were particularly a concern for women and especially those in higher-paid occupations, who are more likely to be working full-time (and long hours). One approach to addressing time constraints is to offer study leave or 'education sabbaticals', a strategy that has been utilised in some European countries (Edwards et al. 2008). For example, workers in Spain can adjust their working hours to accommodate study, and Finnish workers can take unpaid leave for up to two years to pursue a course of education (Institute for Women's Policy Research 2008).

The work–life research literature suggests that workers' capacity to modify their work hours and scheduling to fit their needs significantly reduces work–life conflict (Pocock, Skinner & Ichii 2009). In Australia, it is women, and mothers in particular, who are most likely to request such flexibility and to have their requests granted (Pocock, Skinner & Ichii 2009). Indeed, working reduced or flexible hours to meet child care responsibilities is the most common, and most socially acceptable, reason for reducing work hours or taking an extended period of leave (Pocock, Skinner & Ichii 2009).

Developing policies, practices and workplace cultures that support flexible work practices to meet study needs is likely to support and encourage all workers' participation in education and training, and women in particular. Indeed, in this study, time supports were most often discussed by participants in terms of having more time off work to study.

Many employers already provide such opportunities, albeit mostly for managerial and professional staff. The greater challenge is to encourage and support employers of workers in low-paid occupations to follow suit. Schemes in which government and employers share the direct and indirect costs of low-paid workers' participation in education or training could be one such strategy. There is also work for employers to do in developing a workplace culture that supports employees' engagement in further education or training, especially those workers in low-paid occupations. As this report highlights, it is these low-paid workers, and men in particular, who are most likely to be disengaged from participation in education or training.

Concerns about the cost of participation in education or training were common for men and women, and across occupations. Cost concerns were particularly prevalent for women and those in low-paid occupations. Indeed, around 40% of low-paid women who were studying at the time of the survey cited the costs of education and training as their main concern about future study.

In their review of strategies to address cost barriers to participation in education or training, Edwards et al. (2008) described a range of schemes used in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries to share the costs of education or training between stakeholders. These include accounts provided by governments or industries and schemes in which a financial investment by workers is added to by governments or employers. However, as Edwards et al. (2008) observe, many low-paid workers are not in a position to provide this initial financial outlay. Another strategy is the use of learning accounts provided by the employer or government that can be spent on training options. One best-practice example described by Edwards et al. (2008) is that of Skandia, a Swedish finance company. The company matches employee contributions to a learning account, the funds of which can be used for full-time study at full wages.

The Australian Work and Life Index analysis is only one part of a larger project *Low-paid workers and VET: Increasing VET participation amongst lower paid workers over the life cycle,* with reports which will subsequently incorporate qualitative analysis of the many issues suggested by the data.

Introduction

Background to the project

This report is part of a larger multi-method project, *Low-paid workers and VET: Increasing VET participation amongst lower paid workers over the life cycle,* focused on identifying the barriers and supports to participation in vocational education and training (VET) for workers from low-paid occupations and those with lower levels of income, in the context of changing work–life configurations. The purpose of the project is to inform policy and practice to support and encourage the VET participation of the low-paid workforce with positive outcomes for their lives.

The current report builds on and extends findings from two pieces of research that have already been conducted for this project. The working paper *Investigating the low-paid workforce: Employment characteristics, training and work–life balance* (Skinner & King 2008) describes the employment, social demographic and work–life characteristics of low-paid workers, based on analyses of the National Centre for Vocational Education and Research (NCVER) Student Outcomes Survey, the Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey and the Australian Bureau of Statistics Adult Literacy and Life Skills (ALLS) Survey. The occasional paper *Low-paid workers, changing patterns of work and life, and participation in vocational education and training: A discussion starter* (Pocock 2009) raises key issues related to low-paid workers and their participation in VET and draws on existing literature and key findings from the working paper.

Pocock highlights the unique employment and social circumstances of workers in low-paid occupations—an estimated 14% of the Australian working population. Low-paid workers are often in low-quality jobs, characterised by insecurity, a lack of career paths and training, unsocial hours, high levels of repetition and low-level skill use. These workers are also more likely to experience 'churning' between a succession of low-paid jobs, often punctuated by periods of unemployment, and may be less confident and more cautious of change, compared with those in more advantaged jobs or life circumstances. A lack of time and money characterise the life experiences of many low-paid workers (Pocock 2009).

Skinner and King (2008) observed that low-paid workers are a significant VET client population, especially women in these occupations. They found that VET participation has significant benefits for low-paid workers as they were more likely to transition to higher-skilled employment after training compared with workers from higher-paid occupations. They also found that low-paid workers were employed in workplaces less supportive of work–life and work–study balance, characterised by a lack of access to telework, employee-centred flexible work arrangements and part-time-work options.

Both Pocock (2009) and Skinner and King (2008) provide evidence that low-paid workers are more at risk of work–life pressures and unsupportive employment arrangements and conditions likely to inhibit their capacity to engage in education or training. This report builds on and extends this previous work through an in-depth examination of the extent to which work–life pressures influence participation in education and training, and whether low-paid workers are more at risk of work–life barriers to participation. Participation in education or training is examined from two perspectives: actual rates of participation in education or training and perceptions of future participation.

This report uses data from the 2009 Australian Work and Life Index, which, as described below, is an annual national survey of employed Australians' work arrangements and their views and experiences of their employment and their work–life relationship.

The Australian Work and Life Index (AWALI)

The Australian Work and Life Index (AWALI) is a national survey of employed Australians conducted by the Centre for Work + Life at the University of South Australia. It has been conducted annually since 2007 using computer-assisted telephone interviews (CATI). The index surveys different people each year: it is not a longitudinal survey of the same people.

The concepts, methods, literature and measures underpinning the Australian Work and Life Index are set out in Williams, Pocock and Skinner (2007). Key findings from AWALI 2009 are described in the report *Work, life and workplace flexibility: The Australian Work and Life Index 2009* (Pocock, Skinner & Ichii 2009).

Sampling methodology

The AWALI 2009 sample is a national random stratified sample of 2748 Australian workers (2348 employees, 344 self-employed) conducted over four weekends in March and April 2009. Of those successfully contacted by phone, 50.6% participated in the 2009 survey.

The survey data are collected by a private polling company. Respondents were selected by means of a stratified random sample process, which included a quota set for each capital city and non-capital city area, and within these areas a quota set for statistical divisions or subdivisions. The sample is also weighted by age, highest level of schooling completed and gender. Household telephone numbers were selected using random digit dialling, and there was random selection of an individual in each household by means of a 'last birthday' screening question.

Measurement of work–life interaction

Work–life interaction is measured in the Australian Work and Life Index by the five-item work–life index. The index assesses two dimensions of work–life interaction: the impact of work on respondents' capacity to satisfactorily engage in the activities and responsibilities of other spheres of life and the time available to spend on activities outside work. In sum, the index measures perceptions of work–life interaction focusing on:

- 'general interference' (that is, the frequency that work interferes with responsibilities or activities outside work)
- 'time strain' (that is, the frequency that work restricts time with family or friends)
- work-to-community interaction, measuring the frequency that work affects workers' ability to develop or maintain connections and friendships in their local community
- satisfaction with overall work–life 'balance'
- frequency of feeling rushed or pressed for time.

These five measures of work–life interaction are summed and averaged to arrive at an overall work–life index that is scaled from 0 (best work–life interaction) to 100 (worst work–life interaction).

Overview of the AWALI 2009 sample

As shown in table 1, the AWALI 2009 sample consists of slightly more men (54.8%) than women (45.2%), which is consistent with proportions of men (54.4%) and women (45.6%) employed in the Australian labour market at the time of the survey (ABS 2009). Proportions of respondents in low-

paid (48.7%), compared with higher-paid occupations (51.3%), are also consistent with the employed Australian population (48.6% in low-paid occupations; 51.4% in higher-paid occupations) (ABS 2009).

Table 1 Overview of the AWALI sample 2009

	All		Men		Women	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
All	2748	100.0	1505	54.8	1243	45.2
Occupation						
Low-paid	1338	48.7	625	41.5	713	57.4
Higher-paid occupation	1410	51.3	880	58.5	530	42.6
Income						
< $30 000	684	27.7	257	19.0	427	38.2
$30 0000–$59 999	900	36.4	480	35.4	420	37.6
$60 000–$89 9999	551	22.3	353	26.0	198	17.7
$90 000+	338	13.7	266	19.6	72	6.4
Participation in education/training						
Current participant	639	23.3	304	20.2	335	27.0
Not current participant	2109	76.7	1201	79.8	908	73.0
Work hours						
Full-time	1823	67.2	1203	81.0	620	50.5
Part-time	889	32.8	282	19.0	607	49.5
Employment type						
Employee	2348	87.2	1234	83.7	1114	91.5
Permanent/ongoing	1734	73.9	960	77.8	774	69.5
Fixed term	198	8.4	98	7.9	100	9.0
Casual	416	17.7	176	14.3	240	21.5
Self-employed	344	12.8	241	16.3	103	8.5
Highest level education						
University	885	32.3	424	28.3	461	37.3
VET	1037	37.9	621	41.4	416	33.7
Year 11 or 12	448	16.4	231	15.4	217	17.5
Year 10 or below	366	13.4	223	14.9	143	11.6
Age						
18–24 years	435	15.8	229	15.2	206	16.6
25–44 years	1282	46.7	714	47.5	568	45.7
45+ years	1030	37.5	561	37.3	469	37.7
Parental status						
Resident child 17 years or younger	1232	44.8	661	43.9	571	46.0
4 years or younger	425	15.5	257	17.1	168	13.5
5–17 years	806	29.4	403	26.8	403	32.4
No resident children	1515	55.2	844	56.1	671	54.0

Notes: Low-paid occupations are categorised as the lowest five categories of the ANZSCO classifications and higher-paid occupations are categorised as the highest three levels of the ANZSCO classifications (see next page). Self-employed persons not included in the analysis as the sample size was too small for reliable estimates for this group. Weighted sample size ('000): All N = 9947; Men N = 5447; Women N = 4499.

Who comprises the low-paid workforce?

Identifying low-paid workers by occupation and income

In this report low-paid occupations were defined as occupations in the lowest five categories of the ANZSCO (Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations) classifications (levels 4 to 8) (ABS 2005). Table 2 shows the classification of low- and higher-paid occupations in this report.

Table 2 Low-paid and higher-paid occupations as defined by ANZSCO classifications

Low-paid occupation	Higher-paid occupation
Community and personal services workers	Managers
Clerical and administrative workers	Professionals
Sales workers	Technicians and trades workers
Machinery operators and drivers	
Labourers	

Of course there are higher-paid workers within these occupational groups and low-paid workers in higher-paid occupations. However, the nominated low-paid occupations are, by and large, the occupations in which most low-paid workers are found. Throughout this report the term 'higher-paid occupations' is used to refer to all the non-low-paid occupations, namely managers, professional and technicians and trade workers.

Since occupational status and income are not precisely correlated, personal income is also used to identify low-paid workers. In this report the lower income group was defined as those earning less than $30 000 per year, the middle income group was defined as those earning between $30 000 and $59 999, and the higher income group as those earning $60 000 or more.

Socio-demographic characteristics of low-paid workers

Workers in low-paid occupations have a unique set of socio-demographic characteristics that contribute to their vulnerability to work–life strains in general and increase the likelihood that they will experience work–life barriers that impede participation in education and training. It should be noted that the following analysis of Australian Work and Life Index data excludes self-employed persons.

Women employees were more likely to work in low-paid occupations (58.8%) compared with men 44.8%). This is an important observation from a work–life perspective as it is well established that women, and especially mothers and women working full-time, are more likely to experience high levels of work–life conflict compared with men (Pocock, Skinner & Ichii 2009).

Parenting responsibilities increase the likelihood of work–life strains and conflict. Overall, employees with parenting responsibilities were fairly evenly distributed between low-paid and higher-paid occupations: 51.1% of employees with parenting responsibilities were employed in low-paid occupations. However, this pattern differed for men and women.

Around 60% of men with parenting responsibilities were employed in higher-paid occupations; 42.2% of fathers were employed in low-paid occupations. The opposite pattern is evident for women; 60% of mothers were employed in low-paid occupations. From a work–life perspective, this indicates that those women who are most likely to experience high work–life conflict or strains are also over-represented in low-paid occupations.

Younger workers were more likely to be employed in low-paid occupations. Seventy per cent (71.3%) of employees aged 18 to 24 years were employed in low-paid occupations, compared with 43.3% of those aged 25 to 44 years, and 52.7% of those aged 45 years and older. This most likely reflects the large proportion of younger persons in university and VET courses who commonly work in low-paid jobs in the retail sales, community services and hospitality industries.

Low-paid workers also have a distinctive employment profile. Of those employees who work part-time, 71.0% were in low-paid occupations, and this was the case for men and women. Casual workers were also over-represented in low-paid occupations: 78.4% of casual workers were in low-paid occupations, compared with around 45% of those permanent/ongoing or fixed-term contract employees.

Participation in education and training

Summary

Around one-quarter of respondents were participating in education or training at the time of the survey. Participation was more likely for women, part-time workers, younger workers aged 18 to 24 years, and those with lower incomes (< $30 000). There was little difference in rates of participation in education or training between those in low-paid and higher-paid occupations, although women in low-paid occupations were more likely to be current participants compared with women in higher-paid occupations. Those least likely to be current participants were men working full-time in low-paid occupations and women in higher-paid occupations without parenting responsibilities.

The majority of employees in education or training were enrolled in a university or VET course. Employees in low-paid occupations were more likely to be enrolled in a university degree, whereas those in higher-paid occupations were more likely to be in VET or workplace training. This most likely reflects the high proportion of young people attending university and earning income from sales, services or hospitality jobs. The most common reasons for engaging in education or training were to try for a different career, better job or promotion, to develop skills for a current job or to satisfy a job requirement.

There was evidence of a work–life penalty (higher work–life conflict) for participation in education and training and it was more likely to be experienced by employees in low-paid occupations. Women were also more likely to experience a work–life penalty associated with participation in education or training.

Table 3 Overview of findings on participation in education and training

Measure	Men vs women	Low vs higher-paid occupations	Lower vs higher income
Who is more likely to be participating in education or training?	Women more likely to be participating compared with men	No significant difference	Lower income workers (< $30 000) more likely to be participating compared with those on higher incomes
Training provider and type of enrolment	University study more likely for women than men	University study more likely for those in low-paid than higher-paid occupations	Estimates not reliable
Reason for participation	Advancing job/career prospects most common reason for participation		
Effect of participation on work–life conflict	Participation was associated with higher work–life conflict for women, but not men	Participation was associated with higher work–life conflict for those in low-paid occupations, but not for those in higher-paid occupations.	Participation was associated with higher work–life conflict for those with a lower income (<$30 000), but not those on higher incomes

Current participation in education or training

Who is participating in education or training?

This section applies a work–life lens to examine patterns of participation in education and training. The focus is on four factors that play a key role in work–life interaction: gender, work hours, age and parenting responsibilities. It is well established that work–life pressures are likely to be stronger for women, those working longer hours, those in the peak years of family formation/responsibility and work/career (25 to 44 years) and those with parenting responsibilities. The analyses below examine how these work–life pressures intersect with occupational status and income in their association with participation in education or training.

Overall, nearly one-quarter (24.3%) of employees were participating in education and training at the time of the survey (table 4). Participation in education or training was more likely for those in the lowest income group (< $30 000) (43.3%), part-time workers (36.0%), casual employees (43.0%), those with Year 11 or 12 as their highest level of education (42.4%) and younger persons (57.3%). Women were more likely to be participating in education or training (27.7%) compared with men (21.2%), and this was the case in low-paid and higher-paid occupations. Men were more likely to be participating in education or training compared with women in the lowest income category (< $30 000) and amongst part-time workers.

This is consistent with Skinner and King's (2008) analysis of the NCVER Student Outcomes Survey, in which they observed that two-thirds of graduates were employed in low-paid occupations in the six months prior to training, and women VET graduates were much more likely to be employed in low-paid occupations (80.1% of all women graduates) than men (55.0%).

In the current study there was little difference in rates of participation in education or training between those in low-paid or higher-paid occupations, or those with parenting responsibilities, compared with those without parenting responsibilities. However, those in the lowest income group ($< 30 000) were most likely to participate in education or training (43.3%), which most likely reflects the high proportion of younger people (including those studying and working) in this lower income group.

There were differences in the pattern of education and training participation when low-paid and higher-paid occupations were considered separately, and within lower, middle and higher income groups (refer tables S1 and S2 in support document).

Looking at participation in education and training by work hours, it was in low-paid occupations where the largest difference occurred in participation rates between part-time (38.1%) and full-time workers (15.5%), and this was particularly evident for low-paid men; 12.1% of low-paid men working full-time were participating in education and training, compared with 44.1% of their part-time counterparts. Low-paid men working full-time also had a lower rate of education and training participation, compared with full-time men in higher-paid occupations (20.2%), whereas low-paid men working part-time were more likely to be in education or training, compared with part-time men in higher-paid occupations (31.2%). These findings suggest that men in low-paid occupations working full-time may be particularly disadvantaged in regard to opportunities, supports or barriers to participate in education or training. (refer tables S1 and S2 in the support document).

Table 4 Participation in education and training by employment characteristics and selected socio-demographics, AWALI 2009 (% in education or training)

	All		Men		Women	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
All	570	24.3	262	21.2	308	27.7
Occupation						
Low-paid	306	25.3	118	21.3	188	28.7
Higher-paid occupation	264	23.2	144	21.2	120	26.2
Income						
< $30 000	253	43.3	100	48.6	153	40.4
$30 0000–$59 999	138	17.6	59	14.9	79	17.6
$60 000–$89 9999	82	17.1	40	13.6	42	22.6
$90 000+	56	19.6	41	18.1	15	25.2
Work hours						
Full-time	300	18.9	172	17.1	127	22.1
Part-time	269	36.0	89	40.6	179	34.0
Employment type						
Permanent/ongoing employee	331	19.1	164	17.1	167	21.6
Fixed-term employee	60	30.5	31	31.9	29	29.0
Casual employee	179	43.0	67	37.9	112	46.7
Highest level education						
University	196	25.1	77	21.7	119	25.1
VET	176	20.4	89	18.2	87	23.4
Year 11 or 12	168	42.4	81	40.0	87	44.9
Year 10 or below	25	8.4	13	7.4	12	10.1
Age						
18–24 years	235	57.3	113	53.2	123	61.7
25–44 years	224	20.0	107	17.9	117	22.5
45+ years	111	13.6	42	10.0	68	17.4
Parental status						
Resident child 17 years or younger	263	24.8	108	19.7	155	30.2
No resident children	308	23.9	154	22.5	154	25.5

Notes: Weighted ('000) sample size (N): All N = 2065; Men N = 949; Women N = 1116.

Rates of participation in education or training also differed between those with and without parenting responsibilities, and there were also gender differences within these patterns. The clearest and most consistent picture emerged for women in higher-paid occupations; 29.7% of mothers in higher-paid occupations were in education or training, compared with 23.3% of their counterparts without parenting responsibilities. Parenting responsibilities demonstrated little association with participation in education or training for men in higher-paid occupations or for men or women in lower-paid occupations. With respect to personal income, parenting responsibilities increased the likelihood of participation in education or training for those on lower incomes (<$30 000) and decreased the likelihood of participation for those on higher incomes ($60 000+). From a life course perspective this finding is not surprising, as levels of personal income are likely to increase with age, which in turn is likely to decrease the likelihood of having children under the age of 18 years.

Training provider and type of enrolment

The majority of employees participating in training were doing so at university, a VET provider or at their workplace (table 5). University education was more common for women (44.0%), younger people (62.1%), and those in low-paid occupations (48.0%). VET or workplace training was more common for men, employees aged 25 years and older, those with children and those employed in higher-paid occupations (47.0%). Data on occupational and income groups are provided in tables S3 and S4 in the support document.

Table 5 Provider of education and training by employee gender, age and parental status, AWALI 2009

Education and training provider	All	Men	Women	18–24 years	25–44 years	45 years & older	Child	No child
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
University	39.1	33.2*	44.0	62.1*	27.6*	14.4*	38.4*	39.7*
VET and workplace	39.6	43.9*	35.9*	31.1*	42.2	52.3*	41.8*	37.8*
Private provider	14.2*	16.4*	12.3*	5.1*	20.0*	20.7*	12.5*	15.6*
Other	7.2	6.5	7.8	**	10.2	12.6	7.2	6.8

Notes: *Estimate not reliable as RSE > 25% and should be used with caution. **Estimate not provided as cell size < 5 persons. VET and workplace training grouped together due to small sample sizes. Weighted ('000) sample size and unweighted sample size (in parentheses): All N = 2064 (519); Men N =948 (232); Women N =1116 (287); 18–24 years N = 851 (164); 25–44 years N = 813 (197); 45 years and older N = 402 (158); Child N = 951 (236); No child N = 1113 (283).

Consistent with the findings on education and training provider, table 6 shows that 39.4% of employees in education or training were enrolled in a bachelor degree or higher qualification, a qualification more common for women (45.5%), younger people (59.8%) and those in low-paid occupations (47.9%; 29.5% of those in higher-paid occupations).

Women were more likely to be enrolled in university-level qualifications across income groups, and also within higher-paid occupations. This gender difference was not observed in low-paid occupations.

Enrolment in lower-level qualifications was more common for older employees: 40.4% of employees aged 45 years or older who were participating in education or training were enrolled in certificate level I or II or another type of qualification. Employees in higher-paid occupations were also more likely to be enrolled in certificate level I or II or another type of qualification (30.0%), compared with those in low-paid occupations (16.1%). This pattern can also be observed in a comparison of lower and higher income groups (refer tables S5 and S6 in the support document).

Table 6 Type of enrolment by gender, age and parental status, AWALI 2009

Qualification	All	Men	Women	18–24 years	25–44 years	45 years & older	Child	No child
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Bachelor degree or higher	39.4	32.4	45.5	59.8	28.8*	16.6*	39.3	39.5
Diploma/associate degree	13.2*	11.2*	14.9*	9.3*	15.2*	17.7	11.8*	14.4*
Certificate III or IV	24.8	31.7	19.0*	23.1*	26.5*	25.3	26.6*	23.3*
Certificate I, II or other	22.5	24.7*	20.6*	7.8*	29.6*	40.4	22.2*	22.7

Notes: *Estimate not reliable as RSE > 25% and should be used with caution. Weighted ('000) sample size and unweighted sample size (in parentheses): All N = 2038 (510); Men N =941 (229); Women N =1097 (281); 18–24 years N = 852 (164); 25–44 years N = 798 (194); 45 years and older N = 386 (152); Child N = 951 (232); No child N = 1113 (278).

Reason for participating in education or training

The most common reasons for engaging in education or training were to try for a different career, better job or promotion, to develop skills for a current job or to satisfy a job requirement (table 7). Advancing job or career prospects was the most common reason identified by men (29.0%) and women (33.8%), younger people (41.1%), and those with parenting responsibilities (34.1%) or without parenting responsibilities (29.4%). The most common reason for participation in education or training given by employees in the mid-age group (25 to 44 years) was to develop skills for their current job (32.8%), whereas the most common reason for older workers (45 years or older) to engage in education or training was to meet a job requirement (29.8%).

Table 7 Employees' reason for participation in education or training by gender, age and parental status, AWALI 2009

Reason for participation in education or training	All	Men	Women	18–24 years	25–44 years	45 years & older	Child	No child
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Develop existing/start new business	5.0	7.7	2.7*	4.8*	5.7*	3.9*	5.9*	4.2*
Career, job, promotion	31.6	29.0	33.8	41.1	28.9	16.9	34.1*	29.4
Job requirement	21.0	21.4	20.5	17.6	20.1	29.8	18.6*	22.9
Develop skills for current job	20.8	19.2	22.2	8.5	32.8	22.5	22.3*	19.5
Improve general skills, education or confidence	14.4	15.0	13.9	14.6	9.3	24.2	13.1*	15.5
To get into another course of study	4.6	4.5*	4.8*	10.1	**	**	4.4*	4.8*
Other reason	2.7*	3.3*	2.1*	3.3*	**	**	1.6	3.6*

Notes: *Estimate not reliable as RSE > 25% and should be used with caution. **Estimate not provided as cell size < 5 persons. Weighted ('000) sample size and unweighted sample size (in parentheses): All N = 2064 (518); Men N =948 (232); Women N =1111 (286); 18–24 years N = 849 (163); 25–44 years N = 812 (197); 45 years and older N = 401 (158); Child N = 947 (235); No child N = 1115 (283).

Considering low-paid and higher-paid occupations separately, in low-paid occupations education and training was most often undertaken to enhance career, job or promotion prospects (40.1%), whereas those in higher-paid occupations were more likely to participate to develop their skills for a current job (28.1%), meet a job requirement (24.7%), or to gain a better career, job or promotion (21.7%). These patterns are also evident when lower and higher income groups were compared (refer tables S7 and S8 in the support document).

Participation in education and training and work–life interaction

This section examines the relationship between participation in education or training and work–life interaction, specifically whether participation had a negative, neutral or positive association with work–life conflict and whether this relationship differed by gender, occupational status and income. The aim was to investigate whether there was a work–life penalty for participation in education or training, and if so, whether this 'penalty' was more evident for those in low-paid occupations.

Work–life interaction was measured using the five-item work–life index scale which forms part of the Australian Work and Life Index (Pocock, Skinner & Ichii 2009). The work–life index provides a global assessment of the extent to which work interferes with activities outside work and creates time strain. The index is a five-item measure addressing 'general interference' (frequency that work interferes with responsibilities or activities outside work), 'time strain' (frequency that work restricts time with family or friends), work-to-community interaction (frequency that work affects workers' ability to develop or maintain connections and friendships in their local community), satisfaction with overall work–life 'balance' and frequency of feeling rushed or pressed for time.

We averaged and standardised these five measures of work–life interaction so that the minimum score on the index was 0 (indicating the best possible work–life interaction) and the maximum score was 100 (the worst possible work–life interaction).

The average work–life index score for Australian employees in 2009 was 43.3 (42.9 for men and 43.8 for women) (Pocock, Skinner & Ichii 2009). Scores above these averages can be considered as higher than average work–life conflict, whereas lower scores indicate less work–life conflict than the Australian average.

Table 8 shows scores on the work–life index for employees who were participating in education or training at the time of the survey compared with those who were not. Unadjusted scores are the raw (original) index scores. As work hours have a significant impact on work–life index scores, and work hours differ between men and women and by occupational status, scores adjusted for these differences in work hours are also provided. (A more detailed explanation of adjusted scores is provided in the support document, p.11.)

For employees overall, those participating in education or training had worse work–life interaction (that is, a higher index score) compared with those who were not participating. This effect was only apparent with the index scores adjusted for differences in work hours.

This work–life penalty (that is, worse work–life interaction) associated with participation in education or training was also observed for employees in low-paid occupations and for those in the lowest income bracket (<$30 000) (refer table S9 in the support document). In contrast, for those in higher-paid occupations work–life interaction did not differ according to participation in education or training. A more detailed explanation of these findings is provided in the support document (p.11).

In sum, there is evidence of a work–life penalty for participation in education and training, and this is most likely to be experienced by employees in low-paid occupations.

Women participating in education or training consistently had higher work–life conflict (that is, higher index scores), compared with male participants. This gender difference was statistically significant for the sample as a whole and for those in higher-paid occupations.

Table 8 Work–life index scores by gender and occupational status, AWALI 2009

Work–life index	All		Low-paid occupation		Higher-paid occupation	
	Participating	Not participating	Participating	Not participating	Participating	Not participating
			All			
Unadjusted	44.2	43.0	43.0	38.9	45.5	47.1
Adjusted	46.6	42.6	48.6	40.0	44.6	45.2
			Men			
Unadjusted	42.7	43.0	41.9	37.6	42.9	47.0
Adjusted	42.9	39.3	46.2	36.0	39.7	42.7
			Women			
Unadjusted	45.7	43.1	43.7	40.1	48.9	47.3
Adjusted	50.2	45.8	51.0	44.0	49.5	47.6

Notes: Adjusted scores represent an estimate of index scores if all groups worked the same hours. Higher scores indicate worse work–life interaction. Weighted ('000) sample size and unweighted sample size (in parentheses): All N = 8381 (2276); Low-paid occupation N =4281 (1123); Higher-paid occupation N =4100 (1153).

Future participation in education or training

This section considers employees who were not participating in education or training at the time of the survey. Their self-reported likelihood of future participation in education or training, the form they expect it to take and their reasons for future participation are described.

Summary

Nearly one-third of employees who were not in education or training at the time of the survey reported they were quite or very likely to participate in the next 12 months.

In low-paid occupations, men were more likely to expect future participation in education or training compared with women, and this gender difference was particularly evident in a comparison of mothers and fathers. This pattern was not evident in higher-paid occupations.

Overall, part-time employees were less likely to expect future education and training participation. However, this pattern was reversed for women in higher-paid occupations, suggesting that part-time work may support education and training participation for women in higher-paid occupations. This pattern was not observed for low-paid women working part-time; indeed this group was least likely to expect future participation in education and training.

The majority of employees anticipated that any future education or training they would undertake would either be for a VET qualification or another type of qualification. University education was more likely to be identified as a future qualification by those in higher-paid occupations compared with low-paid occupations.

Employment-related reasons were the most commonly cited motivations for future participation in education or training for employees in low-paid and higher-paid occupations, and these mostly related to obtaining a better job, promotion or different career, developing extra skills for their current job or to meet a job requirement.

Table 9 Overview of findings on future participation in education and training

Measure	Men vs women	Low vs higher-paid occupations	Lower vs higher income
Who is likely to participate in education or training in the next 12 months?	No difference	Those in low-paid occupations less likely to expect future participation	No difference
Level of anticipated education or training	Women more likely to expect to undertake a university qualification	Those in higher-paid occupations most likely to expect to undertake a university qualification. Low-paid workers more likely to expect to undertake a VET qualification	Those on higher incomes more likely to expect to undertake a university qualification. Those on a lower income more likely to expect to study for a VET qualification
Reason for participation	Employment-related reasons most common reason for participation (e.g. gain skills for current job, meet a job requirement, improve career or promotion opportunities)		

Who is likely to participate in education or training in the next 12 months?

As table 10 shows, nearly one-third (29.1%) of employees who were not in education or training at the time of the survey reported they were quite or very likely to participate in the next 12 months. With a few exceptions, this proportion differed little by gender or employment characteristics. Expectations that future participation in education or training was quite or very likely were less common for those: in low-paid occupations (26.4% quite/very likely); working part-time (26.4%);

with lower levels of education (20.5% of those with Year 10 or lower qualifications); or aged 45 years or older (23.0%).

These patterns differ within low-paid and higher-paid occupational groups. Overall, men in low-paid occupations were slightly more likely to report a strong likelihood of future education or training participation (28.7%) compared with women (24.3%). This gender difference was particularly evident for low-paid employees with parenting responsibilities: 35.6% of low-paid fathers reported they were quite or very likely to undertake education or training in the next 12 months compared with 21.7% of low-paid mothers. For those in higher-paid occupations on the other hand there was very little difference in the perceived likelihood of future education or training participation between men and women overall, or between mothers and fathers (refer tables S10 and S11 in the support document).

Table 10 Likelihood of participation in education or training in the next 12 months by employment characteristics and selected socio-demographics, AWALI 2009

	Not at all likely	Somewhat likely	Quite/very likely	Total
	%	%	%	%
All	51.3	19.6	29.1	100.0
Men	50.3	19.1	30.6	100.0
Women	52.6	20.2	27.3	100.0
Occupation				
Low-paid	54.4	19.2	26.4	100.0
Higher-paid occupation	48.1	20.1	31.8	100.0
Income				
< $30 000	52.9	18.7	28.4	100.0
$30 0000–$59 999	51.4	20.5	28.0	100.0
$60 000–$89 9999	49.2	18.5	32.4	100.0
$90 000+	50.6	17.5	31.9	100.0
Work hours				
Full-time	50.0	19.8	30.2	100.0
Part-time	55.4	18.2	26.4	100.0
Employment type				
Permanent/ongoing	50.7	20.1	29.2	100.0
Fixed term	51.1	22.6	26.3	100.0
Casual	54.9	14.9	30.2	100.0
Highest level education				
University	46.5	20.1	33.5	100.0
VET	49.7	20.6	29.8	100.0
Year 11 or 12	53.0	20.3	26.7	100.0
Year 10 or below	64.3	15.2	20.5	100.0
Age				
18–24 years	30.1	20.5	49.3	100.0
25–44 years	48.3	21.8	29.9	100.0
45+ years	60.4	16.6	23.0	100.0
Parental status				
Resident child 17 years or younger	48.1	21.4	30.5	100.0
No resident children	53.9	18.2	27.9	100.0

Notes: Weighted ('000) sample size and unweighted sample size (in parentheses): Not at all likely = 3276 (950); somewhat likely N =1252 (334); quite/very likely N = 1857 (493).

It was previously observed that strong expectations of future participation in education or training were less likely to be reported by part-time compared with full-time employees. This pattern was also observed for women in low-paid occupations and men in higher-paid occupations, whereas for

men in low-paid occupations there was very little difference between part-time and full-time employees. However, for women in higher-paid occupations part-time women were more likely to have a strong expectation of future participation in education or training (34.3%), compared with their full-time counterparts (29.9%), and also compared with part-time men (26.3%) in these occupations. In contrast, in low-paid occupations part-time women had lower expectations of future education and training participation (60.0% not likely), compared with part-time men (51.6% not likely) in these occupations (refer tables S10 and S11 in the support document).

These findings suggest that part-time work for women in higher-paid occupations supports or enables access to education or training, possibly by reducing work-related time restrictions. This was not the case for women in low-paid occupations working part-time. However, these descriptive findings should be interpreted with caution, as multivariate analyses did not find that work hours (as a continuous variable or as a part-time/full-time categorical variable) predicted the perceived likelihood of future participation in education or training for employees overall or any particular group. This analysis is reported in a later section.

Similar patterns were evident from a comparison of income groups. The strongest gender difference occurred in the lowest income group (< $30 000), in which men were more likely to have strong expectations of future participation in education or training (35.9% quite/very likely), compared with women (24.8% quite/very likely). There was little difference in part-time and full-time workers' expectations of future training in the lowest two income groups. However, in the higher income group ($60 000+), full-time workers were much more likely to report that future participation in education or training was quite or very likely (33.4%), compared with their part-time counterparts (14.6%). Higher income earners with children were also more likely to expect future participation (36.2% quite or very likely), compared with those without children (28.3%). However, there was little difference in expectations by parental status in the other income groups (refer table S12 in the support document).

Level of future education or training

The majority of employees anticipated that any future education or training they may undertake would either be for a VET qualification (30.8%) or another type of qualification (not VET or higher education) (51.8%). Only a minority of employees anticipated undertaking a university-level qualification in the next 12 months (17.4%), and this expectation was most common for younger people (30.6%). A university qualification was identified as the most likely future qualification for women (20.9%), compared with men (14.6%), and for those with children (20.1%), compared with those without parenting responsibilities (14.9%).

Similarly, within low-paid and higher-paid occupations, over 70% of employees in each of these occupational groups expected their future education or training would be VET or another type of qualification. University education was more likely to be identified as a future qualification by those in higher-paid occupations (21.7%), compared with low-paid occupations (12.6%), and in both groups women were more likely to identify university as their future level of qualification. Those with higher personal incomes ($60 000+) were also more likely to identify university as their future level of qualification, compared with lower-income groups (refer tables S13 and S14 in the support document).

Table 11 Anticipated future level of qualification reported by employees by gender, age and parental status, AWALI 2009

Qualification	All	Men	Women	18–24 years	25–44 years	45 years & older	Child	No child
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
University	17.4	14.6	20.9	30.6	17.8	10.7	20.1	14.9
VET	30.8	32.5	28.6	44.3	31.3	23.9	30.4	31.2
Other	51.8	52.9	50.5	25.1	50.9	65.5	49.5	53.9

Notes: 'Other' refers to any type of qualifications that was not identified by respondents as a university or VET qualification. Weighted ('000) sample size and unweighted sample size (in parentheses): All N = 3071 (816); Men N = 1712 (449); Women N = 1359 (367); 18–24 years N = 444 (78); 25–44 years N = 1647 (390); 45 years and older N = 979 (348); Child N = 1468 (365); No child N = 1601 (451).

Reason for future education or training

The majority of employees anticipated they would undertake education or training for employment-related reasons (82.1%), and this was the case for men and women, across age groups and for those with or without parenting responsibilities (table 12). Just over one-third of employees who identified an employment-related reason said they wanted to gain skills for their current job (36.2% overall; 36.5% of men; 35.8% of women). Around one-quarter of these employees anticipated future participation as a job requirement (22.6% overall; 23.2% of men; 21.9% of women), and 26.8% of men and 32.8% of women identified reasons related to their career, improving their current job or obtaining a promotion.

Table 12 Employees' reason for future education or training by gender, age and parental status, AWALI 2009

Reason for participation in education or training	All	Men	Women	18–24 years	25–44 years	45 years & older	Child	No child
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Employment-related	82.1	84.6	78.9	76.3	84.4	80.8	83.6	80.7
Further study, personal or other	17.9	15.4*	21.1*	23.7*	15.6*	19.2	16.4*	19.3*

Notes: *Estimate not reliable as RSE > 25% and should be used with caution. Weighted ('000) sample size and unweighted sample size (in parentheses): All N = 3104 (826); Men N = 1731 (454); Women N = 1373 (372); 18–24 years N = 444 (78); 25–44 years N = 1658 (392); 45 years and older N = 1004 (356); Child N = 1488 (370); No child N = 1617 (456).

The majority of employees in low-paid (80.7%) and higher-paid occupations (83.4%) also identified employment-related reasons for future participation in education or training. Similarly, over 80% of employees across all income brackets identified employment-related reasons (refer tables S15 and S16 in the support document). Of those who identified employment-related reasons, employees in low-paid occupations were most likely to cite reasons related to obtaining a better job, promotion or different career (36.8%), developing extra skills for their current job (29.9%) or job requirements (23.3%). Those in higher-paid occupations were most likely to anticipate future participation to gain extra skills for their job (41.2%), try for a promotion, different career or job (23.3%) or meet a job requirement (22.1%).

Women in low-paid occupations (24.6%) were most likely to anticipate future participation for further study, personal or other reasons, and men in low-paid occupations (14.1%) were least likely to cite these reasons.

Perceptions of education and training

This section describes employees' perceptions of the barriers and supports that may influence decisions to engage in education or training in the future. Hence the analysis in this section excludes those employees (almost a quarter) who were participating in education or training at the time of the survey. Further, in the Australian Work and Life Index survey these questions were only presented to workers who reported that they were not likely to undertake education or training in the future, or who were not sure of their future participation in education or training. Survey respondents indicated the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a statement describing a particular support or barrier. The support document (tables S17 and S18) contains detailed findings by occupational and income groups.

Summary

Overall, around 60% of employees expected that their employer would provide support for education and training, and that education or training would have employment benefits.

Those in low-paid occupations were less confident of employer support, compared with those in higher-paid occupations. On the other hand, low-paid workers were more likely to agree that education and training provides rewards and benefits, compared with those in higher-paid occupations.

The majority of employees agreed that work–life issues impaired their capacity to participate in education or training: a little over half of respondents agreed that education or training would not fit in with their family or life commitments and 70% of employees agreed that time constraints prevented their participation in education or training.

There was little difference between those in low-paid compared with higher-paid occupations in perceptions of work–life fit problems. Women in higher-paid occupations and those on higher incomes were most likely to report this barrier. Those in higher-paid occupations were also more likely to report time constraints and this was particularly the case for women in higher-paid occupations: around 80% of these women agreed they did not have time to engage in education or training. Similarly, those on the highest incomes ($60 000+) were most likely to report time constraints.

Around half of employees anticipated financial problems from participation in education and training, with only small differences between men and women and across occupational and income groups.

Nearly half of employees also reported a lack of interest in education or training. This was more common for those in low-paid occupations, and particularly low-paid men, of whom nearly 60% reported a lack of interest.

A smaller proportion of respondents, around 14%, reported that transport difficulties prevented their participation, and this was consistent across gender, occupational and income groups.

Table 13 Overview of findings on perceptions of education and training

Measure	Men vs women	Low vs higher-paid occupations	Lower vs higher income
Employer support for education or training	Men more confident of employer support than women	Those in higher-paid occupations more confident of employer support	Those on higher incomes (> $30 000) more confident of employer support
Employment and job-related benefits	No gender difference	Those in low-paid occupations more likely to perceive benefits	Those on lower incomes (< $30 000) most likely to perceive benefits
Work–life fit barriers to participation in education or training	Women more likely to perceive work–life fit barriers	No difference	Those on higher incomes ($60 000+) more likely to perceive work–life barriers
Time constraints	Women more likely to perceive time constraints	Those in higher-paid occupations more likely to perceive time constraints	Those on higher incomes more likely to perceive time constraints
Financial barriers	No gender difference	No difference	Those on middle-level incomes ($30 000–$59 999) most likely to perceive financial barriers
Lack of interest	Men more likely to report a lack of interest	Those in low-paid occupations more likely to report a lack of interest	Those on lower incomes (< $30 000) more likely to report a lack of interest

Perceived employer support and employment benefits

Employer support for education or training

As table 14 shows, 61.8% of employees agreed that their employer would provide some support such as paying course costs or allowing time to undertake education and training. Men were more confident of employer support (65.6%) than women (57.5%). Other groups less confident of employer support were younger people aged 18 to 24 years and those without children.

Those in low-paid occupations were less confident of employer support (59.3% agreed), compared with those in higher-paid occupations (64.7% agreed). Similarly, only half of those in the lowest income group (< $30 000) expected their employer would provide some tangible support for their training. Within both occupational groups women were less confident of support compared with men.

Employment and job-related benefits

Around 60% (58.3%) of employees agreed that education or training would provide opportunities for promotion, more interesting work or a pay rise. Younger people aged 18 to 24 years were particularly likely to perceive such benefits (85.2%). There was little gender difference in perceptions of the benefits or rewards of training.

Employees in low-paid occupations were more likely to agree that training would provide rewards and benefits (61.0%), compared with those in higher-paid occupations (55.1%), and this was the case for men and women. A similar pattern was evident for those with lower and higher personal incomes: those with the highest incomes ($60 000+) were least likely to agree that training brings reward and benefits (55.1%), compared with those on lower (58.5%) and middle-level incomes (62.0%). This may reflect a ceiling effect, where those with higher incomes are already working at high-level jobs with less room for promotion and advancement via additional training. On the other hand, men in the lowest income category were least likely to agree that education and training results in rewards and benefits (40.5%).

Table 14 Perceptions of education and training by employees *not* currently undertaking education or training by gender, age and parental status, AWALI 2009 (% agree)

	All	Men	Women	18–24 years	25–44 years	45 years & older	Child	No child
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Employer provides support	61.8	65.6	57.5	55.4	63.7	60.7	65.9	58.8
Training provides rewards (e.g. promotion, interesting work)	58.3	58.2	58.4	85.2	60.5	52.5	60.2	56.9
Education and training not fit in with family & other life commitments	54.9	53.3	56.6	43.4	61.4	49.5	67.5	45.4
Don't have enough time to do education or training	67.8	63.6	72.7	66.2	77.6	57.9	79.8	58.9
Education and training create financial problems	51.9	50.4	53.5	52.6	60.4	43.2	57.4	47.9
Not interested in education or training	47.9	49.8	45.7	45.9	38.5	57.6	39.2	54.3
Difficulties arranging transport	14.2*	13.2*	15.4*	19.8*	13.6*	14.3*	15.1*	13.6*

Notes: *Estimate not reliable as RSE > 25% and should be used with caution. Weighted ('000) sample size and unweighted sample size (in parentheses): All N = 3127 (906); Men N = 1677 (499); Women N = 1450 (407); 18–24 years N = 188 (35); 25–44 years N = 1487 (365); 45 years and older N = 1452 (506); Child N = 1320 (348); No child N = 1807 (558).

Perceived barriers to education and training

Work–life fit barriers

A little over half of respondents (54.9%) agreed that education and training would not fit in with their family and other life commitments. This perception was more common for women (56.6%), those aged 25 to 44 when family responsibilities are often at their peak (61.4%) and those with parenting responsibilities (67.5%).

There was very little difference in the expectation of work–life fit problems between those in low-paid occupations (54.6%) and higher-paid occupations (55.1%). Women in higher-paid occupations were most likely to expect that education and training would not fit with their work and other life commitments (61.2%; 53.7% of women in low-paid occupations). Considering personal income, it was those with the higher incomes ($60 000+) who were more likely to perceive work–life fit barriers (59.4%), compared with those with lower incomes (< $30 000) (47.6%). Nearly 70% (68.0%) of women in the highest income group agreed that participation in education or training would cause work–life fit problems, compared with only 45.5% of women in the lowest income group. This probably reflects the longer hours worked by employees in these higher-paid occupation and income groups (Pocock, Skinner & Ichii 2009).

Time constraints

Nearly 70% (67.8%) of respondents agreed that they did not have enough time to undertake education or training. As with work–life fit barriers, this perception was more common for women (72.7%), those aged 25 to 44 years (77.6%) and those with parenting responsibilities (79.8%).

Employees in higher-paid occupations were more likely to perceive time constraints to participation (72.4%), compared with those in low-paid occupations (63.8%). In both occupational groups women were more likely to perceive time constraints compared with men, and this was particularly the case for women in higher-paid occupations, of whom just over 80% (81.2%) perceived time constraints. Consistent with this pattern, employees with higher personal incomes were more likely to perceive time constraints (73.2%), compared with those in the lower (58.7%) or middle (68.1%)

income groups. Over 80% (84.4%) of women in the highest income group perceived time constraints, compared with 64.5% of women in the lowest income group.

Financial barriers

Around half (51.9%) of respondents anticipated financial problems arising from participating in education or training, and this expectation was more common for those aged 25 to 44 years (60.4%) or those with parenting responsibilities (57.4%). Overall, there was little difference between men's (50.4%) and women's (53.5%) expectations of financial difficulties.

There was very little difference in the expectation of financial problems between those in low-paid (50.1%) and higher-paid occupations (53.9%). Overall, women in higher-paid occupations were most likely to expect financial problems (55.9%), and men in low-paid occupations were least likely (47.8%). Considering personal income, it was those in the middle income group ($30 000 to $59 999) who were most likely to expect financial problems (55.7%,), compared with around 50% of those in the lowest and higher-income groups.

Lack of interest

Nearly half (47.9%) of respondents reported a lack of interest in education or training, a perception more common for those aged 45 years and older (57.6%), those without parenting responsibilities (54.3%) and for men (49.8%), compared with women (45.7%).

Employees in low-paid occupations were more likely to report a lack of interest (52.6%), compared with those in higher-paid occupations (42.2%), and this was particularly the case for men in low-paid occupations (57.8%). A similar pattern is evident across income groups, with employees in the lower-income groups (< $30 000) most likely to report lack of interest (50.9%; 65.3% of men in this group), compared with those in the higher-income groups ($60 000+) (46.4%).

Transport difficulties

A smaller proportion of respondents reported transport difficulties as a barrier to participation in education or training (14.2%), with younger people most likely to report this barrier (19.8%). Those in low-paid occupations were slightly more likely to report transport difficulties (16.7%), compared with those in higher-paid occupations (11.4%), and a similar pattern was evident between income groups. Overall, only a minority of employees anticipated transport difficulties from any of the demographic, occupational or income groups.

Concerns and supports for future education and training

This section continues to examine the barriers to and supports for participation in education and training. Respondents were asked to identify their main concern about undertaking education and training and a support or change that would assist them to participate. These two questions were presented as open-ended questions to all survey respondents and subsequently coded into categories. Perceptions of education and training may differ between those who are currently engaged in these activities compared with those who are not participating. Therefore, this section reports separately on the concerns and supports identified by these two groups. The main trends and findings are reported here, with further detail available from the tables in the support document (tables S19 to S30).

Summary

Costs were a common concern across demographic and occupational groups and were more common for employees currently participating in education or training compared with those who were not. Cost concerns were most often related to the cost of education and training itself, followed by concerns about loss of income.

For employees undertaking education or training, those in low-paid occupations, and particularly low-paid women, were most likely to cite cost concerns. Whereas for non-participants the opposite pattern was evident: those in higher-paid occupations were most likely to report cost concerns.

Around 40% of employees identified assistance with costs/funding as a support that would assist their future participation in education or training, and this was the case for participants and non-participants in education or training. Women were consistently more likely to report cost-related supports, compared with men in both sets of occupations.

For those not participating in education or training, time and cost supports were more likely to be identified by those in higher-paid occupations compared with low-paid occupations, whereas those in low-paid occupations were more likely to state that they had no interest in education or training or could not identify anything that would support their participation. This was particularly the case for low-paid men; almost 40% of low-paid men who were not participating reflected this view. Similarly, for those currently in education and training it was those in low-paid occupations who were most likely to report a lack of interest in future education or training participation.

Table 15 Overview of findings on concerns and supports for future education and training

Measure	Men vs women	Low vs higher-paid occupations	Lower vs higher income	Currently in education or training vs not
		Currently in education or training		
Cost concerns	n.a	Those in low-paid occupations more likely to report cost concerns (especially women)	n.a	Cost concerns more likely to be reported by those currently in education or training
Time concerns	n.a	Those in higher-paid occupations more likely to report time concerns (especially women)	n.a	Time concerns more likely to be reported by those not in education or training
Cost-related supports	Women more likely to report cost supports	Those in low-paid occupations more likely to report cost supports		
Time-related supports	n.a	n.a	n.a	No difference
No supports/no intention to engage in future education or training	n.a	Those in low-paid occupations more likely to report no intention to engage	Those in lower income groups more likely to report no intention to engage	No intention to engage more likely for those not currently in education or training
		Not in education or training		
Cost concerns	Women more likely to report cost concerns	Those in higher-paid occupations more likely to report cost concerns	No difference	
Time concerns	Women more likely to report time concerns	Those in higher-paid occupations more likely to report time concerns	Those on a higher income ($60 000+) more likely to report time concerns	
Cost-related supports	Women more likely to report cost supports	Those in higher-paid occupations more likely to report time and costs supports	Those on a higher income ($60 000+) occupations more likely to report time and costs supports	
Time-related supports	n.a			
No supports/no intention to engage in future education or training	n.a	Those in lower-paid occupations more likely to report no intention to engage (especially men)	Those on lower incomes more likely to report no intention to engage	

Note: n.a findings not discussed as reliable estimate not available.

Concerns about future education or training

The main concerns employees identified about future education were related to costs and time. This was the case for those currently undertaking education or training and also for those who were not participating at the time of the survey. Where possible, the specific types of cost concerns and time concerns nominated by respondents are described. Specific costs concerns were categorised as the cost of education or training itself (for example, course fees), loss of income, childcare costs, transport costs, or general costs not otherwise specified. Specific time concerns were categorised as finding the time to work and study, finding time to study and meet family responsibilities, lack of time for social/personal life, length of time to complete a course, or time concerns in general.

Estimates for some of the groups discussed in this section were not reliable (RSE > 25%), most likely due to small sample sizes. This placed limits on the commentary in some instances. Estimates that should be treated with caution are indicated by an asterisk(*).

Cost concerns

Employees currently in education or training

Costs were cited as a concern for 34.0%* of employees who were undertaking education or training, and the majority of these concerns related to the costs of education or training itself (70.4%).

Cost concerns were more likely to be cited by employees who were in low-paid (36.8%), compared with higher-paid occupations (30.9%*). In both groups the majority of costs concerns related to the cost of education or training (73.0% in low-paid occupations; 66.9% in higher-paid occupations).

Cost concerns were particularly salient for women in low-paid occupations: 38.9% of these women identified cost as their main concern, and the majority of these concerns related to the cost of education or training (71.5%).

Employees not in education or training

One-quarter (25.5%) of employees not in education or training cited costs as their main concern about future participation. This lower proportion compared with those in education or training may reflect their lesser experience and/or knowledge of actual costs.

Costs were most likely to be a concern for younger persons aged 18 to 24 years (38.8%) and for women (28.4%*). Over half of non-participant employees reported concerns related to the cost of education or training itself (53.7%). Loss of income was the second most common cost-related concern cited by 23.9% of employees, who identified costs as their main concern.

Cost concerns were more likely to be identified by those in higher-paid occupations (28.0%), compared with low-paid occupations (23.1%). This is the opposite pattern from that observed for employees currently in education or training. In both occupational groups specific cost concerns were most likely to be related to the cost of education or training itself (53.6%* in low-paid occupations; 53.8% in higher-paid occupations), followed by loss of income (22.1%* in low-paid occupations; 25.4% in higher-paid occupations).

It is interesting to note that low-paid women who were participating in education and training were more likely to cite costs as a concern (38.9%), compared with their low-paid counterparts who were not participating (25.1%). Once again, this may reflect more experience-based knowledge of the costs.

There was little difference in the prevalence of cost-related concerns between income groups, with around one-quarter of non-participant employees across all income groups citing costs as their main concern about participating in education or training.

Time concerns

Employees currently in education or training

Time-related concerns were the second most common barrier to participation identified by employees currently in education in education or training (30.6%*), and these were most commonly related to finding time to work and study (47.7%), lack of time in general (35.3%) and finding time to study and meet family responsibilities (20.3%).

In general, time concerns were more likely to be reported by participants if they were in higher-paid occupations (36.2%*), compared with low-paid occupations (25.8%), and this was particularly the case for women in higher-paid occupations (44.2%*; 26.3% of women in low-paid occupations). A similar pattern can be observed with personal income groups, with those with higher incomes ($60 000+) most likely to report time-related concerns (45.3%).

Of those current participants who reported time concerns, the most common concerns related to finding time to work and study, and this was the case for participants in low-paid (50.4%) and

higher-paid occupations (45.5%), and those from lower (48.6%), middle (64.3%) and higher (41.0%) income groups.

Employees not in education or training

Employees not in education or training were slightly more likely to report time-related concerns (35.8%), compared with their counterparts who were participants.

The most common concerns related to a lack of time in general (45.2%), finding time to work and study (35.8%) and finding time to study and meet family responsibilities (25.4%). The latter concern was more likely to be reported by non-participant women (29.7%), compared with men (21.4%), whereas there was little gender difference on the other time-related concerns.

For non-participants time concerns were more likely to be reported by those in higher-paid occupations (42.2%), compared with low-paid occupations (29.6%). This probably reflects the longer working hours of those in higher-paid occupations. It is interesting to note, however, that one-third (32.4%) of low-paid women who were not participating cited time as their main concern, whereas only one-quarter of their counterparts who were participating identified time-related concerns (26.3%). Time pressure appears to be a significant barrier for many low-paid women who were not participating in education or training.

Similarly, those in the higher-income group ($60 000+) were more likely to report time concerns (44.2%), compared with those on the lowest income (< $30 000) (27.9%).

The most common concerns related to a lack of time in general (44.8% in low-paid occupations; 45.4% in higher-paid occupations), finding time to work and study (35% in low-paid occupations; 36.3% in higher-paid occupations), and finding time to study and meet family responsibilities (28.8% in low-paid occupations; 22.9% in higher-paid occupations). Just over one-third of low-paid women who had time concerns were concerned about work–family–study fit (36.0%), compared with only 19.4% of their male low-paid counterparts and 23.5% of women in higher-paid occupations. These three time concerns were also the most common across the three personal income groups. The largest difference between the income groups was on concerns related to finding time to work and study, a concern more common for those in the higher income groups (39.4% in $30 000–$59 999 group; 36.7% in $60 000+ group), compared with those with lower incomes (30.4% in < $30 000 income group).

Other concerns mentioned by respondents included access or opportunity issues (for example, lack of suitable course, inconvenient scheduling, transport difficulties) (9.5% of those in education or training; 5.5% of non-participants) and a lack of interest/motivation or confidence (9.1% of those in education or training; 15.2% of non-participants).

Supports for future education or training

Mirroring the two most common concerns of time and costs, the two most common supports identified were assistance with funding/costs and more time. Specific cost supports were categorised as government assistance, employer assistance and financial support in general. Specific time supports were categorised as more time off work to study/attend classes, more time to complete a course of study, and more time in general.

Employees currently in education or training

The most common support mentioned by participants in education and training was assistance with funding/costs (42.9%), and this was more common for women, those with parenting responsibilities and those aged 44 years or younger. Around 20% of participants also identified more time as an important support to assist participation in education or training.

Participants in low-paid occupations were slightly more likely to identify assistance with funding/costs as a support (45.3%), compared with those in higher-paid occupations (40.1%). In both occupational groups just over half of women said that funding/costs supports would assist their participation in education or training. Participants in higher-paid occupations were more likely to identify time supports (26.6%*; 13.3%* of those in low-paid occupations). Low-paid workers were more likely to report that they had no intention to engage in future training, or could not identify any supports to assist them to participate: (28.5%; 16.5%* of those in higher-paid occupations). A comparison of income groups revealed the same pattern of findings.

Employees not in education or training

A similar proportion of employees not in education or training also identified assistance with funding/costs as an important support for their future study (39.2%). This support was more likely to be identified by women, those aged 44 years or younger, and those with parenting responsibilities. Specific cost supports identified were government assistance (27.8%), employer assistance (27.2%) and financial support in general (37.8%). Around one-fifth (21.5%) of non-participants stated that more time off work or to complete study would assist their participation; 28.2% stated they had no intention of participating in the future or could not identify any supports. Of those who identified time supports, the majority cited time off work to study as their preferred support (84.6%).

Comparing low-paid and higher-paid occupations, non-participants in higher-paid occupations were more likely to identify assistance with funding/costs (42.8%) and more time (27.9%) as supports for their future participation in education or training, compared with those in low-paid occupations (35.6% and 15.4% respectively). Detailed analysis of the funding/costs sub-categories was not supported by the data. The majority of non-participant employees who identified time supports cited more time off work as their preferred support. This was the case in both low-paid (83.8%) and higher-paid (85.0%) occupations.

Employees from low-paid occupations were more likely to state that they had no intention of participating in the future or could not identify any supports to assist their participation in education or training (35.0%; 21.2% in higher-paid occupations). This was particularly the case for low-paid men, of whom 39.4% stated they did not intend to participate in future education or training. These patterns were also reflected in the supports cited by employees from lower and higher-income groups.

The other major support mentioned by respondents related to increasing access such as providing online course, more flexible scheduling or more convenient course locations; 7.7% of those in education or training and 6.2% of non-participants mentioned this support.

Predicting likelihood of future education and training participation—a multivariate analysis

This section examines the predictors of participation in education or training using multivariate analyses. Multivariate analyses enable simultaneous consideration of a range of factors that may be related to a particular outcome. The focus of this section is on predictors of the self-reported likelihood of future education or training, and work–life barriers to participation in education or training. Detailed tables are provided in the support document (tables S31 to S84).

Summary

These analyses only included employees who were not in education or training at the time of the survey. Considering employees overall, expectations of future participation in education or training were more likely for younger persons, those with VET or university qualifications, and those with parenting responsibilities. These factors also predicted low-paid employees' expectations of future participation in education or training, with the exception of parenting responsibilities, which were not a significant predictor of low-paid women's expectations of future participation. For those in higher-paid occupations, educational qualifications were the only significant predictor of future education or training participation; those with a university qualification were more likely to expect future participation.

The two most consistent predictors of work–life and time barriers to participation in education or training were parenting responsibilities and higher levels of work–life conflict. There were important gender and occupational differences. Parenting responsibilities were a particularly strong predictor of women's perceptions of work–life barriers in both low-paid and higher-paid occupations. However, it was only for low-paid women that parenting responsibilities also predicted perceptions of time constraints to education or training participation. This suggests that parenting responsibilities have a much stronger impact on women's, compared with men's, capacity to engage in education or training, which is not an unexpected finding.

There was also evidence that the experience of work–life conflict is likely to cross over into perceptions of work–life barriers to participation in education or training. Higher levels of work–life conflict were associated with perceptions of work–life barriers, particularly for men in low-paid occupations and women in higher-paid occupations, whereas work–life conflict predicted time constraints for all employees, men and women and employees in low-paid and higher-paid occupations.

Likelihood of future participation in education and training

These analyses only included employees who were not participating in education or training at the time of the survey. Three sets of predictors of self-report likelihood of future participation in education or training were considered:

- personal demographics (gender, age, parental status, marital status, highest level of education and personal income)

- ✧ employment characteristics (occupational status, work hours, work hours fit with preferences)
- ✧ work–life interaction (Australian Work and Life Index).

Considering all non-participant employees, future participation in education or training was viewed as more likely by those aged 18 to 24 years compared with employees aged 45 years and over, those with a VET or university qualification compared with those with high school qualifications, employees with parenting responsibilities, those working longer hours, and those who want to work more hours compared with those who are working their preferred hours. All of the factors taken together accounted for only a small amount of variance (that is, change) in perceived likelihood of education or training participation (R^2 adj. = .05). Separate analyses of men and women did not reveal any meaningful differences in the pattern of findings.

Predictors of the perceived likelihood of future participation in education or training differed within low-paid and higher-paid occupations. For those in low-paid occupations the predictors of perceived likelihood of future participation were the same as for all employees, with the exception of those with university qualifications. Considering men and women separately, there were some differences in predictors of perceived likelihood of education and training participation. For low-paid men, those aged 44 years or younger and those with children were more likely to expect future participation, whereas for low-paid women those most likely to expect future participation were aged 18 to 24 years (compared with those aged 45 years or older) and those with a VET or university qualification. Parental status was not a predictor of perceived likelihood of future participation for low-paid women.

For those in higher-paid occupations the only significant predictor of perceived likelihood of future participation in education or training was university education. When men and women were considered separately, there were no significant predictors of women's perceived likelihood of participation, whereas for men those aged less than 45 years old were more likely to expect future participation.

Overall, the factors included in the model were stronger predictors of low-paid employees' expectations of future education or training participation (R^2 adj. = .07), compared with those in higher-paid occupations (R^2 adj. = .02). Within occupation categories, the model was a stronger predictor of low-paid men's perceptions (R^2 adj. = .14), compared with low-paid women (R^2 adj. = .02). This was also the case for higher-paid occupations.

Barriers to participation in education or training

This section examines the predictors of work–life barriers to participation in education or training, specifically perceptions of time restrictions ('insufficient time to undertake education or training') and work–life problems ('education or training would not fit in with family and other life commitments').

Work–life barriers

For all employees who were not participating in education or training, perceptions of work–life problems were less likely for those with VET compared with high school qualifications, and more likely for those with parenting responsibilities (r = .22) and those with higher work–life conflict (r = .09). For women, the only significant predictor of work–life problems was parenting responsibilities (r = .33), whereas for men VET qualifications reduced the likelihood of work–life problems, and parenting responsibilities (r = .16) increased the likelihood. These findings suggest, not surprisingly, that parenting responsibilities have a particularly strong influence on women's capacity to engage in education and training compared with men. Overall, the model was a stronger predictor of women's (R^2 adj. = .11), compared with men's (R^2 adj. = .03) perceptions of work–life problems (whole sample R^2 adj. = .07).

This set of factors were also predictors of work–life barriers for employees from low-paid occupations (R^2 adj. = .05). As for the whole sample, predictors differed for low-paid men and women. For low-paid women perceptions of work–life problems were associated with parenting responsibilities (r = .25) and were also more likely for middle-level income earners ($39 000 to $59 999), compared with those on higher incomes ($90 000+), although this effect was of borderline statistical significance (p = .07). For low-paid men, higher work–life conflict (r = .22) was the only significant predictor of work–life problems. Overall, the model was a better predictor of low-paid women's (R^2 adj. = .12), compared with men's (R^2 adj. = .02) perceptions of work–life problems.

For all employees in higher-paid occupations parenting responsibilities (r = .32) were the only significant predictors of work–life problems (R^2 adj. = .09). For women in higher-paid occupations perceptions of work–life problems were more likely for those with parenting responsibilities (r = .37) and women with higher levels of work–life conflict (r = 23) and less likely for those in the middle, compared with the higher-income group. For men in higher-paid occupations, parenting responsibilities (r = .27) was the only significant predictor of work–life problems. As with employees in low-paid occupations, the model was a better predictor of women's (R^2 adj. = .17), compared with men's (R^2 adj. = .07) work–life problems in higher-paid occupations.

Time constraints

For all employees, time constraints to education or training participation were more likely to be reported by women, those aged 25 to 44 years, compared with older employees, those with parenting responsibilities (r = .13), by employees working longer hours and those with higher work–life conflict (r = .24) (R^2 adj. = .15). With the exception of work–life conflict which predicted time constraints for men (r = .23) and women (r = .25), there were some gender differences. For men, time constraints were more likely for those aged 18 to 44 years, but parenting status was not a significant predictor. For women on the other hand, parenting responsibilities significantly increased the likelihood of time constraints (r = .28). The model accounted for slightly more variance in reported time constraints for men (R^2 adj. = .16), compared with women (R^2 adj. = .13).

For those in low-paid occupations a similar set of predictors were evident (R^2 adj. = .16). Time constraints were more likely for women, parents, and those with higher work–life conflict (r = .26). For low-paid women time constraints were more likely with parenting responsibilities (r = .26), for those who were partnered and those with higher work–life conflict (r = .22) (R^2 adj. = .14). A different set of predictors was evident for low-paid men. Time constraints for this group were more likely for those aged 44 years or younger and for those with higher work–life conflict (r = .30), and less likely for those with a university qualification (R^2 adj. = .21).

A similar pattern was evident for those in higher-paid occupations, where time constraints were more likely for women, those with parenting responsibilities (r = .14) and for those with higher work–life conflict (r = .20) (R^2 adj. = .14). For women in higher-paid occupations time constraints were more likely for those with higher work–life conflict (r = .27), whereas parenting responsibilities were not a predictor of time constraints (R^2 adj. = .08). For men in higher-paid occupations time constraints were more likely for those with parenting responsibilities (r = .14) and those with higher work–life conflict (r = .18) (R^2 adj. = .15).

Conclusions and directions for future research

This study has applied a work–life and social justice lens to examine the factors that influence workers' capacity to engage in education and training. There was clear evidence that low-paid workers and women are two groups that require particular focus and efforts to support their capacity to add study to their work, family and other life commitments. The benefits of applying a work–life lens to understand their motivations and capacities for participation in education or training were particularly apparent for these groups.

Women were more likely to be participating in education or training at the time of the survey and also more likely to be enrolled in higher education. On the other hand, their participation in education or training was more vulnerable to work–life pressures, both at the time of participation and as a barrier to future participation in education or training.

It is not surprising that women are more likely to experience work–life pressures that make adding another commitment (that is, study) to a busy lifestyle difficult to manage in the present, or to consider taking on in the future. The Australian Work and Life Index survey and other Australian and international research consistently finds that women are more likely to experience time pressure and high levels of work–life interference in their daily lives (Allan, Loudoun & Peetz 2007; Pocock, Skinner & Ichii 2009). The findings of this study indicate that these work–life demands are also a significant barrier to women's capacity to participate in education or training.

It was clear that time constraints were a major barrier to participation in education or training for all women, regardless of their occupational group. This was particularly the case for women in higher-paid occupations, where full-time work and long hours are often the norm. Time pressure was a major barrier identified by women who were not studying at the time of the survey. Their concerns are well founded: there was clear evidence of a work–life penalty (higher work–life conflict) associated with participation in education and training for women and also for those in low-paid occupations.

The second consistent theme associated with strategies to support participation was related to the financial costs of education and training. Although this was cited as a concern across the various groups studied in this report, women and low-paid workers were particularly likely to see financial costs as a barrier to their future participation.

Time and money are two factors that influence our capacity to undertake most of life's activities, whether related to paid work or other spheres. Providing funding and time release from work duties are the most obvious strategies suggested by these findings. However, for the most disadvantaged workers, such as those in low-paid occupations, a more comprehensive policy response is required.

In this study a complex picture emerged in regard to the way in which work–life pressures and demands impact on low-paid workers' capacity to engage in education or training. There was no difference in overall rates of participation in education or training between those in low- and higher-paid occupations. However, low-paid workers were more likely to be enrolled in higher education. This most likely reflects the concentration of university students in lower-paid jobs such as hospitality, community services and retail.

Women in low-paid occupations were more likely to be participating in education or training compared with men. However, of those respondents who were not studying, low-paid men were more likely to expect future engagement in education or training compared with women in these occupations. This disconnection between the pattern of current participation and future expectations is puzzling, and hence an important issue for future research. This finding may be partly explained by the larger proportions of women engaged in university study and employed in low-paid occupations. This is not likely to be the whole story. Of particular interest was the observation that low-paid mothers were less likely to expect future participation, compared with low-paid fathers. From a work–life perspective, this finding makes sense. As Pocock (2009) highlights, low-paid jobs often involve unpredictable or unsocial work hours, low job security and work that is physically tiring. Combining this type of work with parenting responsibilities is likely to create significant work–life challenges and demands, leaving little time or energy for adding another commitment such as study.

A useful metaphor for the policy interventions required to support low-paid workers' participation is that of 'springboards'. This metaphor is borrowed from Bartley, Ferrie and Montgomery (2008), who argue that 'springboards' rather than 'safety nets' are required to assist individuals with tenuous labour market attachment or unemployment to help them to avoid unemployment and gain secure employment. Analogously, the 'positive help in the shape of social, emotional, and improved financial support' that Bartley, Ferrie and Montgomery (2006) recommend is also required to support low-paid workers' capacity to engage in education and training 'springboards' that will provide opportunities for career pathways, higher income, promotion opportunities, and higher-quality jobs with more autonomy, status, interest and challenge. Such 'springboards' need to meet the time and cost concerns that clearly affect low-paid workers.

The complexity of factors that influence a worker's motivation and capacity to engage in education and training is perhaps best exemplified in this study of men in low-paid occupations. Low-paid men were least likely to be participating in education or training at the time of the survey, especially if they were working full-time. On the other hand, they were more confident of their future likelihood of studying, compared with low-paid women, and were more confident that their employer would support them to do so. Sixty per cent of low-paid men who were not studying at the time of the survey agreed that education or training has job and employment benefits (for example, increased income, promotion). Yet nearly 40% of these men also stated that they could not identify any supports that would assist their future participation or that they had no intention of engaging in education or training in the future. One possible explanation is that low-paid men are to some extent polarised into two 'camps'; those who are engaged and motivated to participate in further education and training, and those who are disengaged and not interested. Or, low-paid men may hold complex, and what may seem like contradictory, attitudes and intentions towards education and training. This is clearly an important area for future research and analysis.

This report is part of a larger project *Low-paid workers and VET: Increasing VET participation amongst lower paid workers over the life cycle,* which includes a large-scale qualitative study on the participation of lower-paid women and men employed or training in three industries: food processing, retail and aged care. Subsequent reports will bring together the analytical material in this quantitative report, with results of the qualitative study.

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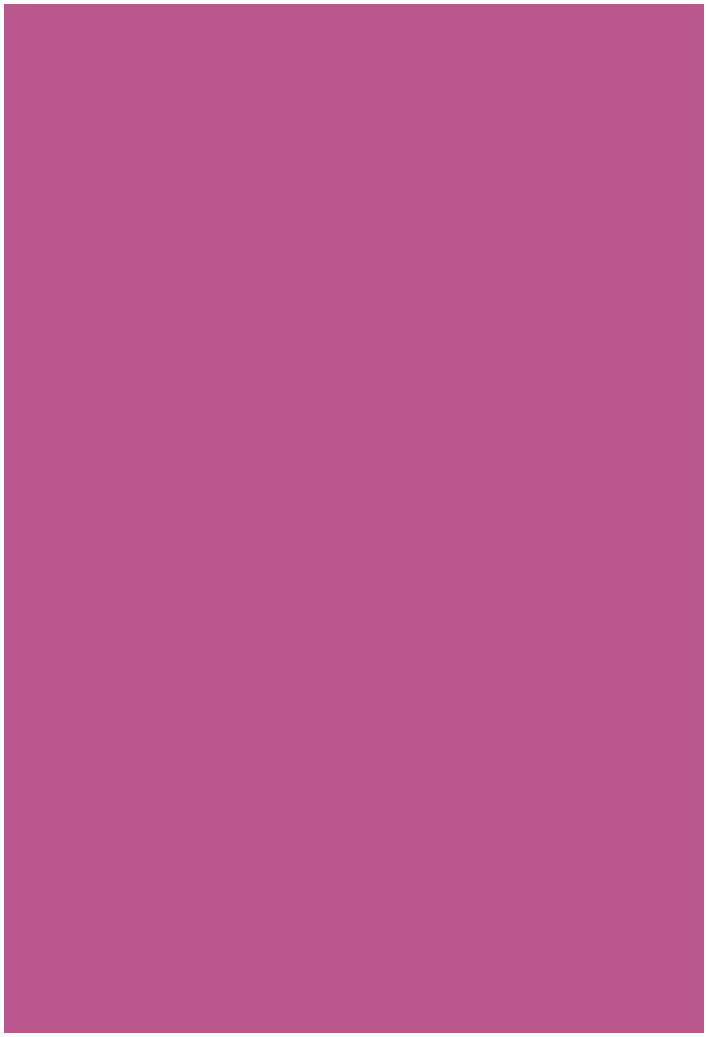
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Support document details

Additional information relating to this research is available in *Work–life issues and participation in education and training: Support document*. It can be accessed from NCVER's website <http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2216.html>.

- Participation in education and training
- Participation in education and training and work–life interaction
- Future participation in education or training
- Perceptions of education and training
- Concerns and supports for future education and training
- Predicting likelihood of future participation—a multivariate analysis.









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