

Adult learners and barriers to success in VET flexible delivery programs

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Government policy in Australia is increasingly encouraging training organisations in the VET sector to adopt flexible delivery approaches. The policy makers are not simply calling for current levels of flexible delivery to be maintained, official policy documents call for an acceleration of the pace with which new technologies are taken up within vocational learning.

Amongst this official enthusiasm for the increased use of flexible delivery, some researchers are sounding a note of caution. One research project found that over 70% of learners in the Australian VET sector have not developed the learning strategies required to be ready for flexible delivery. This lack of readiness is reflected in high attrition rates and low pass rates in many flexibly delivered courses. A recent review of the module outcomes achieved by VET students nationally in 1998 found that external/correspondence students had higher non-completion rates than students studying by other delivery strategies, and pass rates between 20 to 30 percentage points lower than the pass rates for other delivery strategies.

This paper reports on a research project, currently in progress, that is following up a small number of adult learners who enrolled in flexible delivery VET courses but who did not go on to achieve a successful outcome. The research project will develop narrative case studies based on the actual experiences of these adults. The completed case studies will illustrate the complexity of each individual case, and will contribute to a greater understanding of the diverse range of factors that can combine to prevent an adult successfully completing a course of study that they have chosen.