

FROM THE PRESIDENT



Robin Shreeve
President, AVETRA

“ The three top subject enrolments are in cardiopulmonary resuscitation, providing first aid and providing emergency life support. ”

Dear Colleagues

For many of us who have worked in VET for decades, one wonders what the perception is of VET from those politicians and senior bureaucrats who have little experience or exposure to VET but make important policy decisions about it.

Maybe they should have a compulsory briefing from the NCVET on the outcomes of the latest Total VET Activity (TVA) data. Would it come as a surprise that of the 4 million plus student enrolments in VET, there are 2.5 million students enrolled in subjects not delivered as part of a nationally recognised program? Of the 2 million students actually enrolled in nationally recognised programs, the largest cohort is at Certificate 111. This is well over twice the number enrolled in Diplomas and higher qualifications.

Drilling down, the three top subject enrolments are in cardiopulmonary resuscitation, providing first aid and providing emergency life support. Given the number of jobs that require first aid knowledge this should not be surprising, though I must admit I would have guessed Responsible Service of Alcohol (RSA) would be in the top three.

So, the most typical VET students are those doing a Certificate 111 or a certificate that we might characterise as a micro-credential. Diplomas are important, but you wonder if they should be given such a focus of policy given their comparatively low enrolment numbers. Is this focus due to diplomas being the closest qualification to degrees in AQF Levels and thus part of a VET offer that could be clearly seen as an alternative to a university or HE qualification? Put crudely have we invested more for status than impact??

One issue which is of undisputed concern to everyone in the VET sector, whether old hand or novice, concerns regulation and the regulator. I therefore wonder why I have come across so little research on the national VET regulator (ASQA), and its decisions.

Maybe it is time to explore if there are unexpected common themes amongst providers whose registration has been cancelled, suspended or not renewed? Can I encourage researchers to think about investigating this important area for policy and practice. ■

SAVE THE DATE

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Editor:
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School-to-work pathways

By Emerick Chew, National Centre for Vocational Education Research

The passage into work is a critical phase in young people's lives, with long-term implications for the future labour market and for social outcomes. An evolving labour market adds to the complexity of trajectories, further confounding youth transitions and highlighting the importance of understanding transitions as a process. The aim of the study is to identify the different types of pathways followed by young people in their journey from school to work and using this information to obtain a better understanding of the characteristics of young people in these pathways.

The analytical approach used in the study combines sequence analysis and cluster analysis in order to identify similarities between activity patterns. It enables the study of labour market transitions as a sequence of activities and exploits the longitudinal nature of the data by using a series of graphical representations, these providing a direct visual insight into the patterns of transition within each pathway.

This study is based on data from the 2006 cohort of the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY Y06). LSAY is a nationally representative survey that tracks 15-year-old students as they move from school to further education or other destinations until they are 25 years of age. The survey captures detailed information on education activities and employment, as well as socioeconomic and demographic characteristics, making it ideally suited for this analysis. The study sample is limited to the 3186 individuals who completed each annual survey until 2016. While analytical and data constraints limit the ability to generalise the results of this study, the initial LSAY sample is representative of the youth population of Australia and thus is useful in providing important insights into their transition pathways.

Link to data visualisation

Accompanying this report is an interactive data visualisation product, *Visualising school-to-work pathways using LSAY*, which presents the school-to-work pathways of young Australians aged 16 to 25, and can be accessed from www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/school-to-work-pathways.

Profiling the pathways

The pathways uncovered in this analysis are entirely data-driven and have not been pre-determined by the researchers. Certain statistical measures have been used to

determine the number of pathways that are most distinct from each other.

Sequence analysis allows for the visualisation of each pathway by the sequence index plot. The sequence index plot illustrates the activity sequences through the use of colour-coded horizontal stacked bars to show how individuals move between activities over time. Individuals are numbered along the vertical axis and time is shown on the horizontal axis.

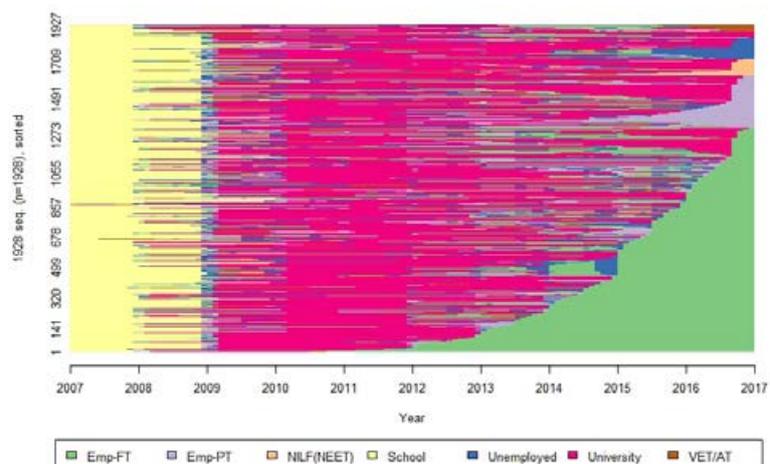
There are five pathways taken by young Australians between the ages of 16 to 25 years as they transitioned from school to work.

Pathway 1: Higher education and work

This represents the largest group (60% of the sample) and encompasses an extended period of post-school higher education, followed by employment.

- This is a relatively simple pathway and is basically an academic track, whereby students enrol in university upon leaving school and have a prolonged higher education period before transitioning into employment.

- This pathway contains the highest proportion of youth from metropolitan areas (77%), who have the highest socioeconomic status (43%) and who completed Year 12 (99%).
- This pathway also has the lowest proportion of youth with an Indigenous background (2%) or who were married (4%) or had children early (0.3%), and the fewest number of young people who undertook vocational subjects during secondary school (15%)



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VOCEDplus HIGHLIGHTS

NCVER's international tertiary education research database

A snapshot of a selection of items added to VOCEDplus

Each month Tracy Gamlin, one of the NCVER research librarians, produces a summary in which she showcases information about some of the latest research to be placed onto the VOCEDplus data base.

Right click on the icon below and copy and paste the link into your feed reader to subscribe to the VOCEDplus Highlights RSS feed. Subscription is free.



[September 2019](#)



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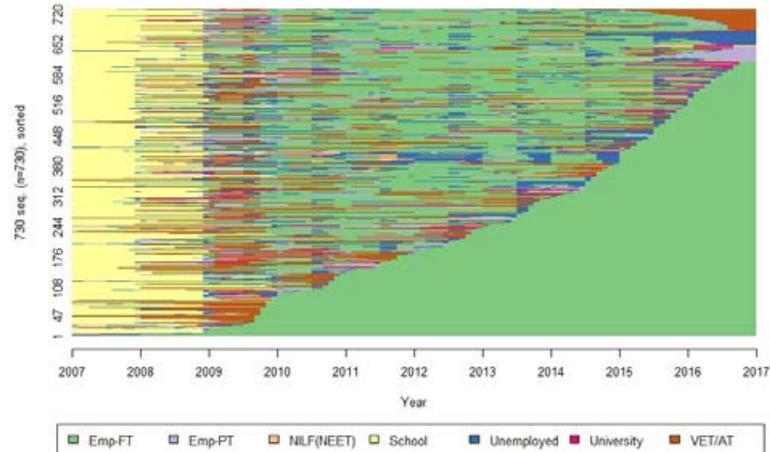
VOCEDplus

From previous page

Pathway 2: Early entry to full-time work

This is an 'express pathway' to employment and includes apprenticeships and traineeships (23% of the sample). This pathway comprises a relatively short spell (14.3 months on average) of post-school education or training, leading to full-time work. For many respondents, however, it is likely that training jointly in combination with full-time work extends beyond early post-school years, as part of an apprenticeship or traineeship. Young people in this pathway have the fastest entry to employment and spend the longest time in work.

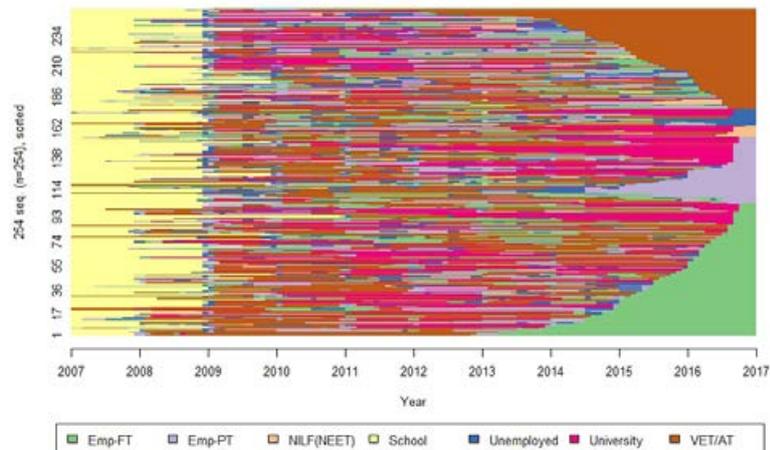
- This is a predominantly male pathway (64%), with a high proportion undertaking vocational subjects in secondary school (44%); almost half had undertaken apprenticeship/traineeships by the age of 25 years (47%).
- This pathway contains the highest proportion of young people who were married by the age of 25 years (51%), and the highest proportion in technical and trades occupations at the age of 25 years (29%).



Pathway 3: Mix of higher education and VET

This pathway comprises an extended period of higher education and VET activity, eventually leading to more stable employment or further VET activity (8% of the sample).

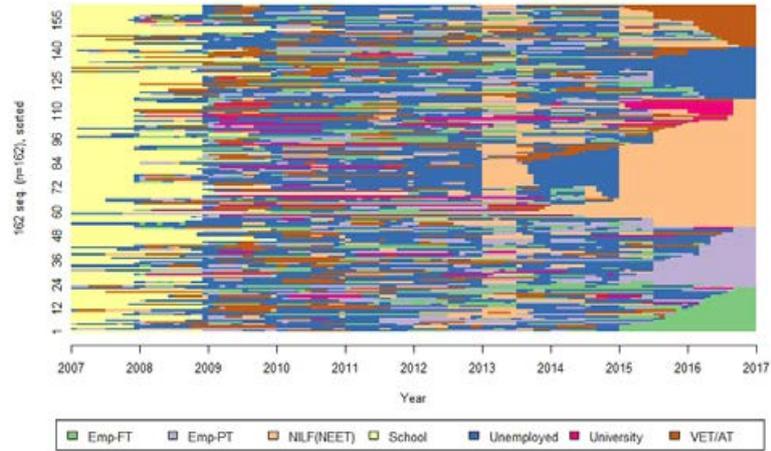
- Youth in this pathway have a relatively complex trajectory, with frequent switching between university and VET activities.
- This pathway is predominantly comprised of females (61%), with a large number engaged in VET activities after the age of 20 years; they also spend the highest average number of months (35.2) in post-school VET activities and hold the most VET qualifications by age 25 years. At this age, 27% held a bachelor's degree as their highest qualification, while a further 26% held an advanced diploma/diploma qualification, and 15% held a certificate IV.
- The highest proportions of these young people are working as professionals (20%) and community and personal service workers (23%), and in clerical and administrative occupations (17%) at age 25 years.



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Pathway 4: Mixed and repeatedly disengaged

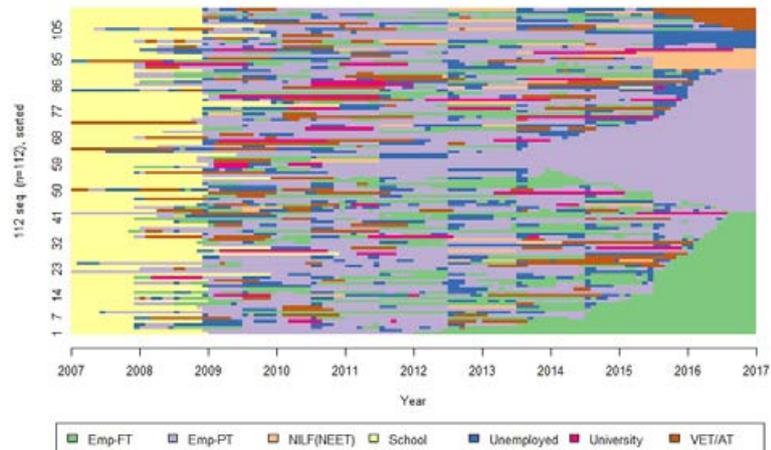
- This pathway is characterised by multiple and repeated labour market movements and disengagement, indicating tenuous labour market attachment (5% of the sample).
- This represents the most complex pathway and contains the highest proportion of young people experiencing more than 10 transitions between the ages of 16 and 25 years (70%).
- Young people in this pathway spend the highest average number of months disengaged from the labour market (16.2 months) or unemployed (41.2 months), with 53% not working at age 25 years.
- This pathway has the highest proportions of vulnerable youth, indicated by the higher incidence of teenage marriages (27%) or parenting (11%), disability (11%), early school leavers (28%) and youth from the lowest socioeconomic status (SES) (35%).



Pathway 5: Mostly working part-time

This represents the smallest group (4% of the sample), a group characterised by relatively early entry to the labour market and mostly employed part-time over the 10 years.

- Youth in this pathway spend the most time in part-time employment between the ages of 16 to 25 years.
- They hold the least qualifications of all the pathways (with the highest share, at 18%, holding a certificate III), and 51% have no post-school qualifications at the age of 25 years.
- At the age of 25 years, young people in this pathway are primarily in community and personal services (27%), sales (19%) and clerical and administrative occupations (13%).



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The role of vet in youth transitions

The modelling suggests that a number of factors influence pathway choice, with school education and achievement playing key roles. The modelling shows that studying a vocational subject at school age is a significant positive factor in all non-academic pathways, in particular raising the probability of the more employment-oriented Pathway 2 by 13 percentage points. Attaining less than the top school maths and reading achievement by age 15 years also raises the probability of Pathway 2.

Personal backgrounds are also shown by the modelling to play a role, with a less advantaged socioeconomic background raising the probability of Pathway 2, while an overseas background lowers the probability of Pathway 2.

Males are more likely to follow Pathway 2, with a probability of 14 percentage points higher, and have lower chances of taking Pathway 1, Pathway 3, and Pathway 4.

The transition pathways uncovered in this study confirm that, for some young people, the training opportunities provided by VET, are important means for facilitating pathways to the labour market. This is particularly true for young people in Pathway 2, where VET gave early entry to employment (mostly males), and for those in Pathway 3, who had an extended period of mixed VET and higher education activities (mostly females). Pathway 2, whereby VET provided a direct route to employment, resulted in 97.4% in work at the age of 25 years, the highest for any pathway. Note that in this pathway VET training started within school and extended beyond early post-school years but was mostly in combination with full-time work as part of an apprenticeship or traineeship. ■

The full report of this study can be accessed from www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/school-to-work-pathways.

A single source of information for busy VET practitioners and learning managers

The aim of the [VET Practitioner Resource](#) (VPR) is to provide a single access point via the VOCEDplus website to a range of resources designed to support VET practitioners in their teaching and assessment practice and in undertaking research. Launched in July this year, the VPR draws on the content of the VOCEDplus database, NCVER products and external links. It can be reached from the VOCEDplus home page via *Our Resources* or the *Resources* menu. Once on the VPR home page, the [Guide to navigating the VET Practitioner Resource](#) presents a site map of the kinds of information available with links straight to the relevant sections of the resource.

Items collated in the VPR are organised within the two general categories of 'research' and 'focus on practice'. Most items have a brief description along with information about the source and date of publication and a link to the full text online or to purchase from the publisher. The VPR signposts information only and is not intended as legal advice or other professional advice. It is organised into three sections and the pages within the resource follow a standard design as far as possible, with common navigation aids and organisation of information.

- [Teaching, training and assessment](#): access standards, guidance, research and good practice resources to inform daily work, and select from Australian resources with some international examples; this section is the largest and has been separated into six topic pages to make finding information easier.
- [Practitioners as researchers](#): this section is for those who would like to undertake research, whether to examine an aspect of their own educational practice or to participate in a funded research project.
- [The VET workforce](#): contains information about the size and profile, working life, and professional development needs of the VET workforce.

Users of the VET Practitioner Resource are encouraged to send in their suggestions for any resources – free or fee-based – that they found supported their work. Email any feedback and suggestions for content to voced@ncver.edu.au



Teaching, training and assessment resources



Practitioners as researchers



The VET workforce



VET Practitioner Resource

The role and function of small VET providers

By Patrick Korbelt and Kristen Osborne, National Centre for Vocational Education Research

Introduction

This article is based on our recent research report ‘The role and function of small VET providers’ (Korbelt and Osborne, 2019), available on the NCVET website at www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/the-role-and-function-of-small-vet-providers

Since the introduction of the national VET system in the early 1990s, researchers have been interested in understanding the role and function of different types of providers and in profiling the diversity that exists across the sector. This assists the management, regulation and funding of the sector.

A key driver of our recent research was to better understand the market served by smaller providers, those who continue to operate in the VET system despite some perceptions that it would be more profitable and sustainable for them to expand their operations (through growth or mergers and acquisitions), and therefore benefit from economies of scale.

A review of the Australian literature suggested that smaller providers may be fulfilling an important role in some sections of the VET market, especially in niche areas of training, regional or remote areas and training for particular cohorts, such as those who are educationally disadvantaged. This emphasises why the management, funding and regulatory design of the VET system needs to carefully consider the operation of smaller providers when considering efficiency and equity in the VET market.

Previous literature

Previous research suggested that small providers could be operating in niche markets and be offering a small, but highly specialised, range of courses. For example, Anderson (1994) suggests there is a place for highly specialised smaller providers with focused course offerings and that these arrangements make economic sense, especially if they do not have substantial administrative and infrastructure costs. These highly specialised providers may be operating in ‘thin student markets’. These are parts of the training market with few students, effectively limiting the number and size of providers operating in these markets.

The role played by different providers was also considered by Fieger, Villano and Cooksey (2016) in their analysis of TAFE institutes and other similar providers. Their research indicates that significant economies of scale apply, but that these are reduced once providers reach a certain size. Anderson (1994) also suggests that a large number of smaller providers offer ‘quantitative flexibility’ (the ability to vary the workforce and hours worked), whereas a smaller number of larger providers offer ‘qualitative flexibility’ (the ability to shift the workforce to other tasks).

Smaller providers may be better positioned to deliver training to students from particular cohorts, such as early school leavers, students with a disability and Indigenous students. For example, Myconos, Clarke and te Riele (2016) investigated the training provided by private training providers to young early school leavers. The providers participating in this research considered that their small scale, intimate learning settings and ability to engage students face to face in small groups placed them at an advantage to other providers. Another perceived advantage was their small and focused course offerings, allowing them to build strong links with local employers. Myconos, Clarke and te Riele (2016) did, however, note that small providers may lack the infrastructure, economies of scale and student support systems that are typically found in larger providers such as TAFE institutes.

More recent reports by Anlezark and Foley (2016) and Korbelt and Misko (2016) have taken advantage of the introduction, in 2014, of the total VET activity scope, which for the first time, covered government-

funded and fee-for-service training. This new scope allowed NCVET to quantify the diversity in the sector and the extent of smaller providers.

Characterising smaller providers

For our research, we categorised registered training organisations (RTOs) into three sizes: small providers (those with fewer than 100 students enrolled in VET); medium providers (with between 100 and 999 students); and large providers (with 1000 or more students). Schools were excluded from our analysis because they are only RTOs in some jurisdictions.

Some providers within a size category are in the process of transition and this may mean they have different characteristics from other providers of a similar size. Focusing on providers that were stable in size can enable better identification of the characteristics integral to the nature of providers of that size. For these reasons, we looked at providers that had remained small across all three years, from 2015 to 2017 – ‘stable small’ – and compared them with providers that were consistently medium or large – ‘stable medium’ and ‘stable large’.

Some characteristics of stable providers are listed in table 1. Despite stable small providers making up 24% of all stable providers in 2015-17, they had less than 1% of all students in 2017. While stable small providers were defined as having fewer than 100 students, 50% had 31 students or fewer, as shown by the median number of students. Stable small providers also tended to have been registered for a shorter period, but 98 of them had been registered for at least 17 years.

Table 1 Characteristics of stable providers

	Stable small providers	Stable medium providers	Stable large providers
Total number of providers (2015-17)	518	1,081	558
Total number of students (2017)	19,085	437,069	3,698,362
Median number of students (2017)	31	347	2,630
Median duration of registration (years)	9	11	14

Source: Korbelt and Osborne (2019).

Types of training

Stable small providers tended to focus more on higher level training than stable medium or large providers. Diploma and above qualifications made up 33% of program enrolments at stable small providers, compared with 22% at stable medium providers and 15% at stable large providers (figure 1).

Despite having fewer than 1% of all students in 2017, stable small providers had more enrolments in qualifications from the Funeral Services Training Package than stable medium and large providers combined (50 enrolments from a total of 95). Stable small providers also had more enrolments than stable medium and large providers in 45 national training package qualifications (separately) across 21 training package groups. Examples include the Diploma of Aviation (Instrument Rating), the Diploma of Aviation (Commercial Pilot Licence – Helicopter) and the Advanced Diploma of Dance (Elite Performance).

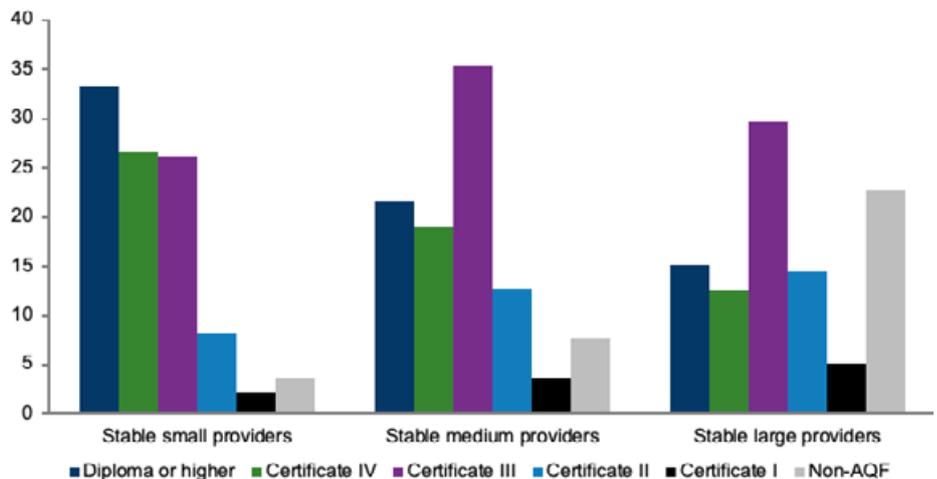
Other examples of stable small providers delivering high-level, highly specialised national training package qualifications were also identified, some of which were only delivered by stable small providers (see Korbelt and Osborne, 2019, table 11, pg. 23). Without stable small providers, there may well be no opportunities for students to undertake these qualifications, such as the Diploma of Access Consulting and the Advanced Diploma of Telecommunications Network Engineering.

Stable small providers also had more enrolments than stable medium and large providers in 108 nationally recognised accredited courses (not part of a training package). All but six of these courses were taught by a single stable small provider. Further investigation showed that many of the courses were created by the stable small providers themselves and were not necessarily available for other providers to teach, such as those related to dancing, acting, theology, religious ministry and yoga.

Student characteristics and outcomes

There was some evidence to indicate that stable small providers were catering for particular groups of students. Table 2 shows that, relative to stable large providers, slightly more students at stable small providers had a disability (7% of students at stable small providers compared with 4% at stable large providers). At stable small providers 6% of students were Indigenous, compared with 4% of students at stable large providers.

Figure 1 Program enrolments by AQF level and provider size category, 2017 (%)



Note: Does not include subject-only enrolments.

Source: Korbelt and Osborne (2019).

	Stable small providers	Stable medium providers	Stable large providers
With a disability	7	6	4
Indigenous	6	4	4
Born overseas	29	30	21
Highest school level lower than Year 12	30	35	33
Reside in most disadvantaged quintile	17	20	18

We combined data from the 2017 and 2018 National Student Outcomes Survey to look at the outcomes for graduates from stable small providers compared with graduates from stable medium and large providers. We found no substantial practical differences between the employment, further study or satisfaction outcomes for graduates of all stable small providers and stable medium and large providers. There was no evidence of better or worse performance across these provider size categories.

Regulatory comparisons

To determine whether stable small providers were experiencing more challenges with their regulatory requirements than stable medium or large providers, we analysed data from the provider audits undertaken by the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) in 2016-17. Most RTOs in Australia must adhere to nationally approved quality standards, as regulated by ASQA.

Overall, our analysis indicated that stable small providers were audited slightly less often and were slightly more compliant when selected for audit than

stable medium and large providers. This, alongside findings from audit results for applications for renewal of registration, indicates that stable small providers had fewer difficulties maintaining their ongoing registration to deliver particular programs or subjects. Although ASQA does not conduct direct assessments of learning quality, this at least suggests that stable small providers are not riskier educational choices than larger providers.

Conclusion

In our investigation, we sought to better understand the role and function of smaller providers in the VET sector. Our research showed that in many ways stable small providers are similar to medium and large stable providers.

However, in this article we have highlighted some of the important features of stable small providers that make them distinctive and unique, which may partly explain their role and function in the VET system. For example, many stable small providers deliver qualifications not offered by stable medium and large providers (or by very few of them) and some were specialised providers that had clearly focused on

providing training to students with a disability or Indigenous students.

Smaller providers have an almost paradoxical place in the VET system. On one hand, because there are so many of them and they make up a large percentage of the providers in the system, they represent a large part of the diversity of the expansive Australian VET system and thus cannot be ignored. On the other hand, stable small providers had less than 1% of students in 2017; it is the large providers with which most students will have contact in their experience of VET. ■

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20 years of LSAY: research about the factors that explain educational achievement and labour market outcomes

Cameron Forrest and Charlotte Scobie, National Centre for Vocational Education Research

The Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) are a series of nationally representative surveys of young people that follow their transitions from compulsory schooling to post-school education and employment. The program has been conducted since 1995 and comprises six separate cohorts of more than 10,000 young Australians each.

LSAY aims to understand the lives of young people, and as a longitudinal dataset spanning more than 20 years, it provides detailed information relating to the transitions and pathways of young people. Survey items focus on education, employment, and changes in life circumstances as young people leave school and prepare to enter the workforce.

In this article we provide an overview of findings from some of the studies which have used the LSAY data to investigate training participation and outcomes over the last two decades. They represent only a small fraction of the research interest in LSAY during the past two decades. As of July 2019, some 324 studies have been published using LSAY data, while an additional 2,400 have cited works published under the LSAY research program that ran from 2007 to 2013.

Investigating the factors that explain post-school educational achievement and employment outcomes

Chesters (2019) has looked closely at how home background affects academic achievement both in school and post-school, and found that:

- Both student and school socioeconomic status were positively associated with academic achievement at age 15 years and likelihood of enrolling in a bachelor's degree.
- Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds had higher levels of academic achievement at age 15 years if they attended high-socioeconomic schools.

- Students from high socioeconomic backgrounds were only half as likely to enroll in a bachelor's degree if they attended a low-socioeconomic school, as compared with attending a high-socioeconomic school.

Cooper, Berry, & Baglin (2018) have also used LSAY data to investigate the extent to which demographic factors predict participation in science subjects among students over the age of 16 years. They found that:

- Higher socioeconomic status and coming from a foreign or first-generation background had positive effects on participation in science subjects.
- Indigenous students were less likely to participate in science subjects.
- When controlling for other factors, gender had a non-significant effect on participation in science subjects.

Gemici, Lim & Karmel (2013) investigated the influence of school characteristics on university entrance. They found that after controlling for tertiary entrance ranks (TERs), the school attributes with the strongest influence on later university attendance were school sector, socioeconomic characteristics of the students, and the proportion of students from non-English speaking backgrounds.

In investigating the relationship between students' education, ability and experience and post-school employment outcomes, Karmel, Lu & Oliver (2013) found that young people with more education, ability, and experience have more opportunities to move to high-skilled jobs, with females and part-time workers more likely to remain in low-skilled jobs. There is no evidence to suggest that young people choose to stay in low-skill jobs for positive reasons, such as high job satisfaction or higher wages (Karmel, Lu & Oliver 2013).

Joanna Sikora and colleagues have examined the influences of early educational and occupational expectations on later outcomes (Sikora 2014; 2018; Sikora & Biddle 2015; Sikora & Saha 2011). The main findings of these various studies were:

- More than one quarter of participants had failed to achieve their occupational expectations at age 15 years by the

time they were 25 years old, with similar proportions failing to realise their expectation of completing university.

- Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds were more likely to downwardly adjust their educational and occupational expectations over time.
- Occupational uncertainty at age 15 increased the likelihood of occupational uncertainty at age 22 by 45%.
- The gender gap in expectations of STEM careers remained relatively stable between 1999 and 2015, with computing, engineering, and mathematics appealing to relatively few young women.
- Females were less likely than males to retain career plans concerning computing and engineering (19% vs. 32%).

Anlezark & Lim (2011) researched the extent to which young people who work are able to manage competing demands of school and work. They found that:

- Almost half of all students in Years 9 through to 12 combined part-time work and school, with slightly higher rates for females.
- Those students who worked while at school did so for 11 to 12 hours per week on average.
- Working for more than 15 to 20 hours per week, while at school, however, had a negative impact on school and post-school study outcomes.
- Working for around five hours per week while at school had a positive impact on post-school full-time employment.

When Gemici et al (2014) looked at how student Intentions to complete Year 12 and parent expectations affected educational outcomes they found that intentions to complete year 12 are most strongly associated with student academic performance and immigration background. Students whose parents want them to attend university are 11 times more likely to do so, and 12 times more likely to complete Year 12.

The impact of higher education on weekly pay

In investigating the effect of higher education on income Lee (2014) found that:

- University degrees result in higher income growth rates, with no effect on weekly pay at age 22 years, but higher weekly pay by age 25.

- Compared with Year 12 completion, obtaining a university degree improved mean annual income at age 25 by about \$7,000 for men and \$10,000 for women.
- Young people who studied health-related disciplines had the highest income and occupational prestige, while the lowest was among those who studied arts, humanities, and social sciences.

Lee also found that University 'prestige' had a significant effect on occupational prestige, but not on income, and that young people whose parents had university degrees and higher occupational prestige were more likely to obtain a university degree themselves.

Participation in VET in schools programs and its effect on educational achievement and employment

Polidano & Tabasso (2014) have used the LSAY data to estimate the education and employment outcomes for participants in VET in Schools programs, in their first year after leaving school. The main findings were:

- Participation in VET in Schools programs resulted in 14% higher rates of school completion. It was also associated with lower rates of enrolment in higher education, and higher rates of participation in VET courses at certificate III level and above.
- VET in Schools programs with workplace learning components yielded: higher rates of full-time employment; being in a job that the participant would like as a career; and higher income (\$25/week).
- Participation in school-based VET programs had a positive effect on Year 10 to Year 11 retention, but a negative effect on Year 11 to Year 12 retention.

Undertaking VET programs in Year 11, but not continuing to Year 12, had a positive effect on post-school outcomes, especially for girls (Anlezark, Karmel & Ong 2006).

The effect of taking a gap year on post-school study outcomes

Taking a gap year has increased among school leavers. Research by Curtis, Mlotkowski & Lumsden 2012; and Lumsden & Stanwick (2012) has found that the:

- Incidence of gap-year taking increased between 1999 and 2009, from 10% of school leavers to 24%.
- There was a greater occurrence of gap-year taking among respondents who

were employed in Year 12, with little difference between males and females.

- About half of gap-year takers worked during their gap year, while as many as 25% reported some form of non-university study.
- Gap-year takers appear to still be 'catching up' to students who do not take a gap year by age 24 years, with 12% fewer completing their course and 11% more still studying their first university course by then.

Dropping out of employment, education and training

Stanwick, Forrest & Skujins (2017) have studied the incidence, predictors, and outcomes of being persistently not in education, employment or training (NEET;). The main findings of this study were:

- Respondents spent two to four months (on average) in the NEET state between the ages of 15 and 24 years.
- The main demographic factors associated with NEET periods of six months or longer (persistent NEET) were having children and not completing Year 12.
- Respondents who were persistently NEET as teenagers were between 3 and 5 times more likely to experience persistently NEET periods in adulthood.

Summary and future directions

Since 1995 LSAY has provided a rich data source on the education, and career pathways of young Australians. In a forthcoming NCVER publication, we present research highlights spanning two decades of LSAY's history. Although the 'core' LSAY data record academic- and employment-related outcomes, wider research interest has been facilitated by the inclusion of detailed demographic information, as well as topics such as participation in VET in Schools programs, career advice and aspirations, subject choice, gap years, and NEET periods, among many others.

While the studies summarized in the publication will highlight these strengths, they represent only a small fraction of the research interest in LSAY during the past two decades. Also missing from these highlights is a discussion of current directions.

The latest LSAY cohort, which commenced in 2015, saw the introduction of several new modules, aimed at measuring 'soft' skills, personality, wellbeing, caring duties, 'gig' work,

homelessness, social support, as well as an expanded focus on volunteering and other topics. For the first time, LSAY data will be linked with administrative VET records, with additional linkages planned for NAPLAN, senior secondary results, and higher education. A recently completed series of consultations with data users identified several other emerging areas of research interest, which will likewise be incorporated into the design of future LSAY questionnaires.

As recognition of the usefulness of longitudinal data for understanding the education and employment trajectories of young people continues to increase among researchers and policymakers, the value of data sources such as LSAY similarly advances. The LSAY program has a long and proud research history, but the future promises to be brighter still. ■

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The Reading Writing Hotline Story

The story of the Hotline begins in 1990. This was International Literacy Year, and TAFE's Adult Literacy Information Office (ALIO) was funded to trial a free literacy hotline. Soon after, the ABC started screening their adult literacy TV series, *The Reading Writing Roadshow*.

The present Hotline was first set up by the Federal Government as a phone support line for people learning literacy through the TV program and took its first calls in April 1994. Viewers could call the Hotline to get help with their workbooks.

Soon after, the *Life Be In It* campaign started to feature TV and radio ads for the Hotline, and the now-familiar 1 300 6555 06 jingle was developed. Calls skyrocketed as the extent of the demand for adult literacy provision in Australia became clear. The Hotline's focus shifted from supporting the TV series, to providing information and referrals to literacy classes and tutors in Community Colleges, neighbourhood houses, TAFE and other sectors.

The Hotline was an important resource because phones were answered by experienced adult literacy teachers who understood the difficulties of callers and the barriers they faced. Often this was the first time that they had admitted to anybody that they had problems with reading and writing, and teachers had to deal sensitively with fears and embarrassment.

The Hotline continued to be funded by the Commonwealth Department of Education and managed by TAFE NSW. It was initially based at the Adult Literacy Information

Office (ALIO) in Redfern, and after moving around several TAFE locations is currently based at Ultimo, with a team of eight experienced teachers on the phones.

We receive more than 4000 calls a year from around Australia. Some people call for themselves, while others ring on behalf of a friend or family member, or from community organisations.

Australia is more complex and diverse than it was back in 1990, and the work of the Hotline has changed too. Nowadays we also provide advice and information to libraries, job agencies, employers and industry on adult literacy and numeracy issues, and increasingly on digital literacy. Our website has lots of information and resources for students, tutors and employers, as well as a dedicated section for Indigenous learners. Our social media keeps our campaigns and resources in the public eye.

Today, the Hotline's jingle is an Aussie icon, and we still get calls from people who say they have had the Hotline's number in their head for ten years, waiting for the courage to call up and get help. It's clear that there is still lots of work ahead for the Reading Writing Hotline. ■

Visit our website
www.readingwritinghotline.edu.au

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Research Chair of Skills Development, University of the Witwatersrand and Special Advisor to the Minister of Higher Education and Training.

Professor Rod McDonald
Principal, Ithaca Consulting and former Special Advisor to the Australian National Training Authority; author of seminal report on VET research: *No Small Change*.

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