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Why do students leave?

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Victor Callan

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Why do students leave?
Leaving vocational education and training
with no recorded achievement

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Contents

Key messages

✧ Students who are 'true' non-completers of any subject are more likely to be unemployed and to have a Year 10 or less level of previous education. Vocational education and training (VET) institutions need to offer greater support to these students in particular.

✧ The major reasons for leaving were the perceived poor quality of the teaching staff, the content of the course not matching students' needs and the course not being able to fit into the demands of their job.

✧ There needs to be greater segmentation in how courses are marketed, promoted, delivered and assessed, especially distinguishing between students who enrol for 'interest' as opposed to students who want the qualification, or those who enrol to gain a specific skill rather than a full qualification.

✧ VET providers and the national students collection need to introduce more effective data-tracking mechanisms to describe the movements of their students in and out of institutions, and across institutions and qualifications. Until then, we will be unsure of the true levels of students who leave with no recorded achievement in the VET sector.

Executive summary

The research investigated the characteristics and motivations of vocational education and training (VET) students who do not complete any of the subjects they enrol in. The project interviewed students with no recorded achievement, spoke to technical and further education (TAFE) teachers and administrators about this issue, and also through a questionnaire survey gained the opinions of Queensland students who were identified as having no recorded achievement. In addition, the Queensland and national student databases were examined to determine the defining characteristics of students with no recorded achievement.

Initially, student and teacher interviews confirmed the findings of a review of the literature—that a complex set of institutional, social and personal factors determine non-completions. In the interviews, students attributed their non-completion to the inflexibility of their course, in that family or work commitments made it difficult to complete their training. They were especially critical of the lack of night-time or weekend classes that would have allowed them to better match competing work, family and study commitments. Some courses were perceived to be too advanced for the 'at risk' students—particularly those students who enter TAFE with Year 10 or less education. Both students and teachers identified the cost of courses as another cause for non-completions.

Analyses of the Queensland and national databases examined the enrolment and completion history of students over time in order to explore further the real level of no recorded achievement. Using an identification code that allowed the tracking of students between 2000 and 2003, along with additional data, the percentage estimates of students with no recorded achievement declined from initial estimates of 10% of the Queensland TAFE population to 4%. Therefore, when followed over time, quite a number of these students actually completed their training in the following year.

Analyses of the Queensland and national databases also revealed that students with no recorded achievement were more likely than TAFE students as a whole to be unemployed while at TAFE, and to have Year 10 or less as their highest prior education level. These data also showed that many students with no recorded achievement had only enrolled in one module/unit of competency. In addition, 32% of students in the non-completer population had been enrolled in one module/unit of competency only during 2000, 2001, 2002 and 2003 (up to the time of the research). This percentage rose to 47% for those enrolled in two modules, and 58% for those who had enrolled in three modules.

A total of 508 students completed a survey questionnaire which examined in more detail the motivations for students enrolling and for not completing. A third of those replying had completed only up to Year 10 education, and the most frequent age for those replying was 18 years. On average, they left the uncompleted course after eight weeks. About 40% of students chose to do the course for interest or personal reasons, and others did the course to gain extra skills, to get a job or to try a different career. The major reasons for leaving the course were the perceived poor quality of the teaching staff, the content of the course not matching their needs, and the course not being able to fit into the demands of their job.

Final follow-up interviews with a small sample of students with no recorded achievement confirmed the role of these factors in students' decisions not to continue. In both the survey and interviews, students reported that they would return to their TAFE studies if the quality of teachers, and the flexibility and content of courses were improved.

The findings present strategies to identify in more detail the nature and extent of the problem of students leaving vocational education and training with no recorded achievement, and how to manage their needs more effectively. In an environment emphasising the importance of lifelong learning, practitioners and policy-makers need to put forward a clearer definition of what is meant by 'no recorded achievement'. In addition, there is a need to track the enrolment history and progress of students, as a number do return to complete their training.

Although there are obviously variations in the levels of no recorded achievement between the states and territories, this did not constitute a primary focus of this study and requires more intensive data analysis and investigation.

It is important that institutions acknowledge students' perceptions of inflexible courses and poor-quality teachers. Students were very critical of the perceived lack of flexibility of courses in their content and times of delivery in relation to the demands of students and their jobs. Employed students require access to blended modes of delivery, portfolio assessment and work-based assessment. Institutions need to reduce the mismatch between student expectations and course demands. While students were happy with the amount of general information they received, more detailed information is needed about specific courses, including their content, modes of delivery, levels of assessment and levels of required skills. Teachers felt improvements in this area were possible and that students, during the selection and orientation process, could be given additional support and tuition.

Introduction

In 2001, analysis of national data from vocational education and training (VET) providers revealed that 16% of VET students (that is, 281 000) did not complete any subjects in which they enrolled (NCVER 2002). Importantly, the Student Outcomes Survey shows that labour market entrants and apprentices/trainees who finish are more likely to get a job (increases of 12–15 percentage points) after completing training. Even for module completers, there is a 3–5% increase in the chances of getting a job. We know, therefore, that undertaking technical and further education (TAFE) training either to become a graduate, or even by being a module completer, increases the chances of getting a job (NCVER 2002).

International research reveals similar findings—individuals with more years of education and training obtain higher earnings and better outcomes in life (Chen & Kaplan 2003). Education and training opportunities are linked to gaining skills and knowledge that enable individuals to become more competent in how they plan and manage the various pathways throughout their lives.

Unfortunately, the existing databases provide little or no information about this 16% of students and why they discontinue their VET studies. In addition, we know little about what happens to them in regard to managing various pathways, like getting a job, establishing careers, and entering further training. It is important also to learn about what factors might facilitate the completion of their studies. At another level, students with no recorded achievement create considerable administrative costs for organisations, as they complete the full enrolment process. Furthermore, by accepting a place in the institution, they keep out other students who might have completed a module or qualification.

The aim of this research was to examine these issues using a range of methods and databases. In particular, the project used interviews with students with no recorded achievement and their teachers; analysed existing databases, especially the Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard (AVETMISS) database, in order to compare the characteristics of those with no recorded achievement and students who complete; and through a survey of a sample of Queensland students with no recorded achievement, examined in more detail the experiences and motivations of these students.

The research questions were:

✧ What are the socio-demographic, VET program and related characteristics of students with no recorded achievement?

✧ What are the reasons given by students for leaving the VET system with no recorded achievement?

✧ What strategies will encourage students with no recorded achievement to continue with their studies?

Past research

Past research demonstrates that student withdrawal, failure or non-completions are due to a complex set of institutional, social and personal factors (see the review by McInnis et al. 2000). The following section, through a brief review of some of the key literature, discusses in more detail some of the factors behind non-completions in order to identify what issues might be influencing students shown as having no recorded achievement in vocational education and training.

Institutional factors

The VET sector is working with a highly diverse group of students who have a wide range of motivations for seeking to complete various qualifications. Analyses like the Student Outcomes Survey data (Doran & Uren 2000), motivations-to-study projects (Maxwell, Cooper & Biggs 2000) and analyses of the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) (2002) Student Outcomes Survey confirm that VET clients are a highly diverse group. When classified into different motivation types, they include apprentices/trainees, self-employed, labour market entrants, career changers, skill improvers, bridgers and self-developers. In a large VET system which is attempting to meet the needs of multiple types of students, it is possible that non-completing students find that the current system does not support their particular needs and personal and work contexts. For instance, there is evidence (Maxwell, Cooper & Biggs 2000; Callan 2003) that many VET students in this large and complex system are generally unaware of their course options and ways to use their VET courses and choices to maximise the achievement of their career and life goals. Some non-completions in vocational education and training are linked to this lack of match between VET student expectations and course offerings (Uren 1999).

The NCVER (2002) analysis of the Student Outcomes Survey found that the main reasons given by module completers who did not continue their TAFE training were: 'the training was not what I expected'; 'the training did not meet my plans'; or it was 'not flexible enough'. Student dissatisfaction with the style and quality of teaching, workloads and a lack of fit between student capabilities and course demands are also major factors for non-completions in other areas of research outside the VET sector (see McInnes et al. 2000).

There are some institutional factors related to enrolment that also possibly influence non-completions. Prospective students often do not know what to ask and how to present their needs, feeling a sense of powerlessness (Evans 1994; Grace & Smith 2001). In addition, confusion and errors arise at the pre-enrolment and enrolment stages as staff members are dealing with multiple enquiries. During this period staff have little time to explore all of the issues with students, who themselves do not know what information to provide or what questions to ask (Grace & Smith 2001). Again, it appears that student failure and dropout are often attributable to interconnected factors which may stretch from the pre-enrolment and enrolment stages into initial classes.

In a major review of the literature on the reasons for non-completions, McInnes et al. (2000) proposed that the prominent factors behind non-completions in vocational education and training and higher education were the wrong choice of subject or course, poor preparation and a lack of readiness and commitment. They recommended a closer examination of the information, recruitment and the selection processes being used.

We know also that non-completers report that they have less satisfactory experiences with their instructors and the institution. Polesel, Davies and Teese (2003), for example, report that non-completer students at TAFE are less likely to be positive about the teaching and instruction standards and organisational systems at their institution. They report poorer relationships with their instructors than do students who complete, and have lower levels of satisfaction with the teaching and learning experience. In articulating this dissatisfaction, non-completers mention more often their poor relationships with instructors, difficulties with their course, and difficulties in accessing administrative and support services. In contrast, those who complete have overwhelmingly positive opinions about their teachers, and how these teachers and their expertise in particular contributed to a satisfactory learning experience.

In other research into learning experiences in vocational education and training it has been shown that learners often fail because they lack the readiness to manage certain modes of delivery being used by institutions. A review of module outcomes (Misko 2000) achieved by VET learners nationally found that those students studying by external and self-paced delivery modes showed higher non-completion rates and lower pass grades than those studying through other delivery strategies. According to Grace and Smith (2001), more flexible modes place even greater pressures upon the student's readiness for learning and highlight the need to balance study with work and family, as well as requiring appropriate social and learning supports.

Social and personal factors

While institutional factors are important, there is also a wide range of personal and social factors that impact upon young people as they engage in their decisions about study. The youth-in-transition project undertaken by the Australian Council for Educational Research (Hillman & Marks 2002) has provided a broad picture of the rate at which young Australians experience several landmarks in their transition to adulthood. This research reveals that, in looking at the transition to adulthood, certain social factors seem to influence choices of study. The increase in participation in higher education has been larger among Australian females, while children whose parents have some form of higher education are more likely themselves to extend their education and to participate in post-secondary education.

Other analyses (for example NCVER 2001; 2002) reveal that students in the VET sector have certain socio-demographic factors that might put them more at risk of non-completions. For instance, compared with students in the higher education sector, they are more likely to be balancing work and study, and to be looking for work after completion of their studies. They are also more likely to be Indigenous Australians, and to be from families with non-English speaking backgrounds.

We have also learned much about the role of social, economic and work-related factors from research into trainees' and apprentices' reasons for non-completions. This researcher (Callan 2000; 2001) and numerous others (for example, Smart 2001; Harris et al. 2001; Cully, VandenHeuvel & Goodes 2000; Grey et al. 1999) have found a range of factors at work in explaining non-completions by trainees and apprentices. Overall, we know that:

✧ multiple factors are at work in encouraging apprentices and trainees to leave their training before completion

✧ those who leave report a range of reasons:
  - personal (for example lack of support from family)
  - workplace (for example poor relations with supervisor and poor wages)
  - training (for example qualifications not seen as necessary)
  - accidental factors (for example developing relationships and moving away).

According to research completed in the United Kingdom, those most likely to continue with their studies are those who are able to train in a 'financially secure way'. That is, the training is organised

with an employer, and it is seen to maintain or improve job security (Greenhalgh & Mavrotas 1994). In other research conducted in the United Kingdom, the most positive experiences about training are from those who believe that their training and work experience package are most closely related to their work-related aspirations (BMRB International Limited 2001).

Finally, in other areas of research more focused upon the 'failing student', social and personal factors are major points of differentiation between students who fail or withdraw and those who pass or complete their courses. Results reveal that failing students:

✧ have less well-developed beliefs about their career intentions (Schnorr & Ware 2001)

✧ often experience a gap between their idealised view of the jobs they are training for, and the reality of the job (McGregor 1997)

✧ are more likely to have disabilities and to report levels of emotional disturbance (Harvey 2001).

These types of studies into the failing student often propose various interventions as useful in helping the failing student—extra assistance, interviews to determine problems affecting their study, training in study techniques and resolution of work-related problems. Overall, this field of research shows that it is important to examine what is happening in the students' lives both at college, at home and in the workplace, as we examine why they decide not to complete qualifications.

Applied to students who leave vocational education and training with no recorded achievement, this previous work suggests that, again, the factors at work will be dynamic, multiple, and where relevant, both the on-the-job and off-the-job training environments will play a role.

Overall, the weight of evidence suggests that decisions to withdraw from studies are linked not to a single negative factor, but to a complex interplay of institutional, social and personal factors that reach a stage where the sum of the negative experiences outweigh the benefits in continuing on with the training. The current analysis therefore expected to identify a range of factors at work.

Student flows through Australian TAFE courses

A previous report by Foyster, Fai and Chandra (2000) makes a number of points important to this current analysis of state and national VET data. In studying flows of students through TAFE courses, they conclude that not all those who enrol in a course intend to complete it. In the VET sector, many students actually intend to complete only some modules of the course. These students are primarily interested in acquiring specific skills, but they enrol in the whole course as a matter of administrative convenience for the VET system. These researchers noted that the number of students who fall within this category has been difficult to quantify. Given this, they argue that it is inappropriate to consider only those who complete the whole course as achieving a successful outcome. In fact, they have identified three possible outcomes for a student in a course: completion of the whole course; partial completion in that they complete all modules enrolled in but withdraw from the course; and non-completion where students fail some part of the course or withdraw. In their analysis of AVETMISS data, Foyster, Fai and Chandra found that completion and partial completion of a course are the most likely results, representing about 76% of outcomes. Some 24% of students fail part of the course or withdraw.

Method

Defining 'no recorded achievement'

After discussions with NCVER and the Queensland Department of Employment and Training, the definition of no recorded achievement excluded any students who in the 2002 AVETMISS recording had any enrolments with outcome 20: competency achieved/pass; had any enrolments with outcome 50: recognition of prior learning; had any enrolments with outcome 81: non-assessable enrolment; and who had satisfactorily completed. Exclusions also included any enrolments with an outcome code of 60: credit transfer, and 70: completion of study in a future collection period.

However, the meaning of non-completion has changed because many students return to study soon after withdrawing from a course, and a substantial number return at some time later, as noted by McInnis et al. (2000) in their analysis of non-completions in the VET sector. In the current report, as will be discussed later, it was possible to check the actual number of students with no recorded achievement by examining their history of enrolment. As will be seen, adopting this approach results in markedly reduced numbers of students classified as no recorded achievement.

Personal and telephone interviews with students with no recorded achievement

Initially, a random sample of 130 students from the Queensland AVETMISS database was mailed a letter inviting them to participate in a personal or telephone interview with the investigator. Students were sampled so that they were all living within the Brisbane area, and so were able to participate in a meeting with the researcher. In total, 14 students were interviewed, almost all by telephone. On average, interviews were completed in 15 minutes.

Teleconference with TAFE teachers and administrators

A 50-minute teleconference was conducted with 12 people either involved in student database management for the Queensland Department of Employment and Training, or who were teachers and senior managers in nine Queensland TAFE institutions who were very interested in discussing the factors behind completions and non-completions in vocational education and training.

Analysis of the Queensland AVETMISS database

The Queensland AVETMISS database was used for three purposes. First, it was used to identify the sampling frame for the survey, in that it was decided by NCVER that a Queensland survey would act as a pilot study into this issue of no recorded achievement. The Queensland survey in the longer term may be followed up by a national survey. Second, as explained earlier, the Queensland database with its identification code and opportunity to check the enrolment and completion history of students over time provided an opportunity to address further the actual levels of 'no recorded achievement'. Third, the analysis of the Queensland data would help to determine what variables should be the focus of attention in the analysis of the national AVETMISS data. These

analyses were conducted with the considerable assistance of Queensland Department of Employment and Training staff who were involved in numerous discussions with the researcher to determine the shape and nature of the analyses of the Queensland AVETMISS database in order to achieve the three objectives described above.

The Queensland AVETMISS data had a number of advantages over those from the national AVETMISS database. The Queensland AVETMISS data provide an identification code for each student. Moreover, other additional criteria contained within the Queensland AVETMISS and related databases could be applied to finetune the identification of students with no recorded achievement. Through this process, no recorded achievement was further refined to mean: not enrolled in 2003 after being enrolled in 2002; no record of completing a qualification in 2002; the removal of students who had achieved competency in the off-the-job component and had a competency not achieved/fail for the on-the-job component. Further outcome codes included the use of code 14: successful in off-job (k) but did not achieve on-job at second registered training organisation; 41: withdrawn and non-assessable; and 71: completion of study date in a future collection period for a non-assessable enrolment.

In addition, extra data runs were completed for 2001 and 2000 applying the following conditions:

1   If an enrolment was a non-completer in 2002 and not present in 2001 and/or 2000, it was part of the sample of no recorded achievement.

2   If an enrolment was a non-completer in 2002 and present in 2001 and/or 2000 and has an outcome of pass, RPL (recognition of prior learning), credit transfer, or continuing enrolment or satisfactory completion, it was removed from the sample.

3   If an enrolment was a non-completer in 2002 and present in 2001 and/or 2000 and has a non-completer outcome, it was included in the sample.

4   If an enrolment was a non-completer in 2002 and present in 2001 and 2000 and has a non-completer outcome in either year but an outcome of pass, RPL (recognition of prior learning), credit transfer, or continuing enrolment or satisfactory completion, in the other year, it was removed from the sample.

The inclusion of these features had a dramatic impact upon the levels of no recorded achievement. (See the findings section in this report.)

Analysis of the national AVETMISS database

Through the assistance of NCVER, the 2002 national database was interrogated to identify the sample of students with no recorded achievement and to determine the characteristics of students with no recorded achievement. In the national database, the characteristics of students with no recorded achievement in a calendar year were compared with the characteristics of all national TAFE students.

Survey of students with no recorded achievement in Queensland

The design of the questions in the survey was informed by the findings of the earlier brief literature review; the findings of the initial interviews with students with no recorded achievement; the results from the findings from the cross-tabulations on the Queensland AVETMISS database; and the initial results of the analysis of the national AVETMISS database.

In the survey questionnaire, respondents were informed in a cover letter that, in completing the survey, they were assisting the researcher to better understand students' motivations in doing VET studies. The survey questionnaire was totally confidential.

The six-page highly structured questionnaire was divided into three sections (refer to Appendix A):

✧ a covering letter explaining the purpose of the research, with contact details for the researcher

✧ their TAFE experiences—with questions about the number of courses enrolled in but not completed, the nature of the course, its mode of delivery, the year of enrolment, the type of institution, age at enrolment, the time period the student attended the course, reasons for enrolling, satisfaction with the enrolment process and the course, reasons for not continuing the course, and factors that would encourage completion of these studies at another time

✧ background characteristics—gender, current employment, current study, highest qualification completed prior to enrolment, and level of identification with being an Aboriginal person, Torres Strait person, person with a disability or person with a first language other than English.

Analyses of the Queensland AVETMISS data indicated that there were 647 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who would not be surveyed, reducing the no-recorded-achievement sample from 9247 to 8603. These students were not surveyed upon the advice of NCVER, in that other research will be commissioned using more appropriate research methods to elicit the opinions of Indigenous VET students. In addition, 553 students were excluded, as their AVETMISS entry indicated that they did not wish to have their particulars released.

From this final sample of 8050 students, 5000 students were selected at random to receive the questionnaire survey. Additional screenings of this 5000, however, revealed incomplete or misleading information about postal addresses that reduced the mail-out sample to 4850 students in total. All of these students were mailed the survey to the address they had provided on the AVETMISS database.

In calculating the survey response rate, 553 envelopes were received marked 'return to sender', reducing the actual mail-out sample to 4297. A total of 508 questionnaires were returned with the completed survey questionnaire. This represents a return rate of 12%, which is an acceptable rate of return for postal surveys to populations of respondents who are unaware of the survey until they receive it. In addition, other factors that obviously influenced the return rate are the characteristics of the sample being investigated. Students who have no recorded achievement have possibly a low level of interest in TAFE and VET courses, and a low level of motivation to complete a survey. Furthermore, like many student populations, they are also highly mobile. As a consequence, it is difficult to have up-to-date information on contact details that might assure a greater likelihood of students receiving a copy of the questionnaire.

Follow-up interviews with students with no recorded achievement

The findings of the data analyses and the survey were discussed with eight students with no recorded achievement who had participated in the first stage of telephone interviews. The purpose of the interviews was to talk through the major findings with students to determine their views on the meaning and significance of the findings. The investigator completed all interviews by telephone. Interviews were from 10 to 20 minutes in length.

Limitations of the research

The samples of students with no recorded achievement interviewed were very small. In addition, the response rate to the survey was small, but to be expected, given that these students did not complete their studies often owing to concerns they had with the flexibility of subjects and the match between the content and their needs. The survey sample is not representative, being limited to Queensland students, and does not include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents.

Findings

Issues emerging from the interviews with students with no recorded achievement

These 14 interviews with students with no recorded achievement highlighted that most students had not completed their studies for the following reasons:

✧ The course offered little flexibility in regard to when it was delivered. In particular, these students had gained a job or changed their family circumstances (for example, had children) and they found it difficult to attend courses that were predominantly scheduled as day classes at a TAFE college. They required weekend or evening classes if they were to return to study.

✧ The workload of the course proved to be too great, especially the demands of the workload relating to the demands of a newly acquired job or changes in their family situation.

✧ The need to complete various pieces of assessment caused difficulty. They were surprised by the compulsory nature of the assessment, and left the module since they were completing this study for personal reasons or from interest. They were not seeking a qualification and did not want to be assessed.

✧ The content of the course proved to be too difficult or too advanced for the student. A few respondents complained that they were brought together into classes with other students, in their view, to make up the numbers to justify the running of the class. But in doing so, students with a wide range of different skill levels were being managed by teachers who, those interviewed believed, were unable to cope with the varying demands of students. This issue was most obvious in information technology courses, where students who wanted to learn the basic skills found themselves well behind younger students who had a more advanced understanding of computers, software and various applications.

✧ The lack of competence shown by people delivering the course caused dissatisfaction, with students especially critical of the apparent lack of contact that some teachers had with industry and industry developments.

✧ The financial cost of some courses was prohibitive.

Asked what they did after leaving the course or qualification, there was a wide range of pathways described by the students. Most reported that they had either got a job, become self-employed or had continued to search for a job. Others went to university, had moved to a private college where they were happier with the quality of tuition, or enrolled in another course that they could afford to complete.

Findings from the teleconference with TAFE teachers and administrators

In this teleconference, TAFE staff emphasised that non-completions need to be examined in the context that many students are young, do not have a job, and are not necessarily living with or gaining the support of their families. TAFE teachers and administrators highlighted a complex set of financial and personal difficulties faced by many students as key factors behind non-completions. There were a number of financial constraints; namely, students were trying to manage study with

little income; experienced relatively high transport costs to get to some colleges; and with some specialist high-demand courses (for example, some types of hairdressing and computing courses), students had to meet quite considerable fees.

Among the personal factors at work, some teachers and administrators believed that, currently, the selection process was allowing entry to some students 'who were doomed to fail'. Students had a Year 10 education or less, and they were not prepared for the demands in TAFE of having to be self-motivated and self-directed learners in order to succeed. They felt that such students enrolled with little understanding about how difficult some courses will be. Teachers felt that further support needed to be given to such students, especially during their initial weeks in the institution to help them to make the transition to being a more independent learner.

There were practices at TAFE that teachers and administrators felt were disadvantaging weaker students. As a result of increased costs, institutes were not offering as many night-time classes as they once did. This situation disadvantaged students who gained regular day-time employment. Teachers felt that the current system also needed to be better tuned into meeting the cross-institutional and cross-sectoral movements of students, including more recognition of prior learning and cross-institutional credit arrangements for courses and qualifications.

Those interviewed did not believe that students with no recorded achievement were intentionally attempting to use the system to gain continued access to Austudy or other various benefits; nor did they feel that students left because they suddenly became aware of the workloads or assessment requirements. In fact, the survey results discussed later, confirm that students believed that they were fully informed about such requirements. Teachers believed that other factors; for example, getting a job, the lack of flexibility of the timetabling, and the content of the courses, were more critical determinants of students' decisions not to complete.

Results of the analysis of the Queensland AVETMISS database

The Queensland AVETMISS database with its identification code and other features provided an opportunity to check the enrolment and completion history of students over time to address the real level of no recorded achievement. In particular, it allowed the removal of students who came back the following year to study and to complete their module or modules.

By applying the definition of 'no recorded achievement' described earlier, the initial analysis of the 2002 Queensland AVETMISS data revealed 23 949 clients who were categorised as non-completers in 2002. Compared with the total number of clients in TAFE in 2002 (that is, 241 939), this represented 10% of the Queensland TAFE population.

The application of the additional criteria described earlier (for example, identification and other codes) reduced the numbers in the Queensland sample with no recorded achievement from 23 949 to 14 800 students in the population. Students who had a new enrolment in 2003 and had an outcome were removed from the sample. In addition, students who had a new enrolment in 2003, and the enrolment was not yet due for assessment, were left in the sample because their final outcome could not be assumed. The group of students with no recorded achievement came down to 9247, after the 2003 enrolments were checked in order to see if any of these students had enrolled in 2003 and the outcome status of the enrolment. This final number represents 3.8% of the total number of TAFE 2002 clients.

These data revealed that many of these students had been enrolled in only one module/unit of competency. Analyses revealed that 32% of students in the non-completer population had been enrolled in one module/unit of competency only during 2000, 2001, 2002 and 2003 (at the time of the research). This percentage rose to 47% for those enrolled in two modules, and 58% for those enrolled in three modules.

Next, the analysis of the Queensland data focused upon the characteristics of students with no recorded achievement compared with all Queensland TAFE students. This involved the calculation of 27 two-way cross-tabulations to determine possible differences between these two samples. In the analyses, all possible cross-tabulations (mostly two- and three-way) were completed on the following AVETMISS variables: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI or non-ATSI); gender (male or female); non-English speaking background (yes or no); region (six regions); persons with a disability (with or without); highest prior educational level (12 levels); employment status (eight categories); and age group (ten age groups). The data set involved comparisons of TAFE non-completers against all TAFE enrolments for 2002.

Overall, when the two groups were compared across this set of AVETMISS variables and, more significantly, across the levels within each of these variables (for example, by six regions, or by 12 levels of highest prior education), most differences were less than 1% between students with no recorded achievement and the 2002 TAFE population as the benchmark.

Where differences did emerge, it was decided to adopt the standard of a 5% or more percentage difference between students with no recorded achievement and the total TAFE population. A major reason for this is that, in most data sets for these variables, there is a considerable 'not stated' category, and the size of this group does influence the meaningfulness of the differences in percentages across all other comparisons.

Overall, the comparisons between students with no recorded achievement and all TAFE enrolments revealed differences of 5% or more between the comparison groups in the following areas:

✧ *Employment status*: this was by far the major difference between students with no recorded achievement and the total Queensland TAFE 2002 population. Male and female students with no recorded achievement were more likely to be unemployed (that is, a 6% difference existed between male students with no recorded achievement and the total TAFE population of male students who were unemployed; for females, there was a 7% difference).

✧ *Highest prior educational level*: female students with no recorded achievement were more likely to have a Year 10 education compared with all TAFE students (that is, 5% difference). There were no differences between males with no recorded achievement and all TAFE male students on the highest prior education level.

✧ *Employment status, educational level and students with no recorded achievement*: cross-tabulations between highest prior educational level and employment status indicated that students with no recorded achievement who were unemployed were much more likely (8% difference) to have completed only Year 9 or Year 10, compared with all TAFE 2002 students.

Results from the analysis of the national AVETMISS database

The findings from the analyses of the Queensland AVETMISS database guided the cross-tabulations performed on the national AVETMISS database. Initially, the same guideline of a 5% difference or more was applied. However, once again, most differences were small across the various levels or categories of the chosen variables, and were 1% or less. A 5% difference applied to the national database would have resulted in no differences being accepted between the national sample of students with no recorded achievement and the national TAFE population. Therefore, the percentage was lowered to 2% or more between students with no recorded achievement and the all-TAFE national database.

Based on the Queensland findings, cross-tabulations were only completed on the national AVETMISS database for the variables of gender, highest educational level and employment status.

Results revealed the following:

✧ *Employment status*: students with no recorded achievement were more likely to be unemployed (that is, unemployed, seeking full-time work; unemployed, seeking part-time work; and unemployed, not seeking employment) than the students in the total national database (a difference of 2% to 3% across these various unemployed categories of AVETMISS).

✧ *Highest prior educational level*: the students with no recorded achievement were more likely than the national TAFE database of students to have only completed Year 9 or lower, or Year 10 as their highest prior education level (differences of 2.3% and 1.5%, respectively).

No other differences emerged for these variables of interest flowing from the key findings of the Queensland data analysis, and, as highlighted, most differences that did emerge in the national data were quite small.

Variations between states and territories

A further analysis of the data was completed to explore differences in levels of no recorded achievement by states and territories. This analysis revealed that the three states of New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland had rates of no recorded achievement matching the national level, at around 10%. However, South Australia was about 3% points below this national level, while Western Australia, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory were 3 to 4 percentage points above the national level. The Northern Territory had the highest level of no recorded achievement, at around 17%. However, these analyses are preliminary, and the likely complex set of reasons for these apparent differences across various states and territories requires separate and more intensive data analysis and investigation.

Results of the survey of students with no recorded achievement in Queensland

A total of 508 students returned completed questionnaires. It is clear that a response bias is likely to exist when only 12% of the sample responded to the survey mailed to their home addresses. A low response rate was expected given the nature of respondents (for example non-completers of their TAFE studies), and the difficulties in gaining accurate mail-out addresses for respondents.

By comparing the characteristics of respondents to the Queensland population of students with no recorded achievement (that is, the AVETMISS database), it was found that the survey respondents were more likely than the population with no recorded achievement to be females (61%, compared with 49%); were about as likely to have completed Year 10 only (35%, compared with 33%); but survey respondents were slightly more likely than the Queensland AVETMISS sample of students with no recorded achievement to be employed when they enrolled (50%, compared with 46%). Therefore, the survey sample cannot be seen as representative of the Queensland population of students with no recorded achievement, and it is not possible to make strong assertions about the generalisability of these survey findings to either the Queensland or the national population of students with no recorded achievement. At best, however, the survey sample does provide some important insights, especially where findings seem to match those to emerge from the other methods used in the current research (that is, the analyses of various statistical databases, and interviews).

In more detail, some 61% of the survey respondents were females, and 39% were males. In total, 87% had completed Year 10 or more of a high school education; that is, 35% had completed Year 10 only, 10% had completed up to Year 11, and 42% had completed Year 12. At the time of completing the survey, the vast majority of respondents were employed (75%). Eighty-six per cent were not currently studying, and those who were studying were equally spread across TAFE, university and other colleges. Before enrolling in the TAFE course for which they were listed as a no recorded achievement, respondents had completed the following: a certificate (27%); certificate of competency/statement of achievement (20%); trade certificate (20%); secondary school

qualification (17%); or bachelor or higher degree (14%). At the time of enrolling in the course that gave them a no recorded achievement on AVETMISS, respondents were employed full-time, part-time or casual (50%); unemployed (24%); or engaged in study, family care or other activities.

The vast majority of respondents with no recorded achievement reported that, when they enrolled, the institution had made clear to them the total hours of attendance (85% of respondents); the amount of assessment that must be done to achieve a record of achievement for the course (78%); and the benefits to them in fully completing the course (71%).

Other major points of interest about the enrolment were:

✧ 90% of students reported that they had enrolled and did not complete one course as a no-record of achievement since 2000; 9% reported a no-record of achievement of two courses

✧ the most recent courses they had enrolled in, but did not complete, were predominantly in information technology, office work, clerical, hospitality-service and health care

✧ when they enrolled, their intentions were to complete the full qualification (60%), or to complete only one module (22%), or to complete more than one module but not to complete the qualification (13%)

✧ the module or course was predominantly delivered in a classroom with no work placement (58%), in a classroom with work placement (21%) or by correspondence (11%)

✧ on average, respondents left the course after eight weeks

✧ the most recent course that was not completed was enrolled in during 2002 (78%) or 2001 (10%)

✧ 92% of students had enrolled in a TAFE institution for this most recent non-recorded achievement course; that is, 46% in a TAFE college at a city location and 46% at a TAFE college at a regional/country location

✧ the most frequently recorded age of respondents at enrolment was 18 years of age, and ages ranged from 14 to 80 years.

The next focus of the survey questionnaire was upon students' motivations for studying the qualification. Respondents were able to select from a wide range of motivations for enrolling. Results revealed that they enrolled:

✧ for interest or personal reasons (40%)

✧ to gain extra skills for their job (32%)

✧ to get a job (21%)

✧ to try for a different career (19%)

✧ to get a better job or promotion (14%)

✧ as it was a requirement of their job (9%)

✧ to develop an existing business (8%).

When asked to nominate the major reason for enrolling in the course that was not completed and so gained a no recorded achievement, respondents mentioned most often that they had enrolled for interest or personal reasons, to gain extra skills for a job, and to get a job (table 1).

In addition, all respondents rated the course that was not completed on a number of characteristics. In line with earlier findings, the majority of respondents began the course with a clear idea of what was expected of them (79%), and they were satisfied with the level of information received about what they were expected to do (70%). During their training, they were satisfied with the level of support that they received from family and friends (88%). However, levels of satisfaction were lower (60%) concerning the support that they received from their boss.

Table 1:   Students with no recorded achievement—major reason for enrolling in the course

		Frequency	%
1	to get a job	65	13.7
2	to develop my existing business	18	3.8
3	to start my own business	10	2.1
4	to try for a different career	44	9.3
5	to get a better job or promotion	41	8.6
6	it was a requirement of my job	25	5.3
7	I wanted extra skills for my job	98	20.7
8	to get into another course of study	16	3.4
9	for interest or personal reasons	126	26.6
10	other	31	6.5
Total		**474**	**100.0**

Note: 34 missing responses.

Table 2 presents the major reasons reported by respondents for not continuing with the most recent not-completed course. It should be noted that some 35% of respondents cited 'other factors', but where they did take up the opportunity in the survey questionnaire to expand upon such reasons, they were typically elaborations and combinations of the factors listed in table 2.

As table 2 reveals, respondents were able to list up to four factors that influenced their decision not to continue with their course. While a wide range of factors were mentioned by respondents, they included in particular the perceived poor quality of the teaching staff, being unable to fit the course into the demands of work, the content of the course not meeting their needs, their family situation, and the perceived inflexibility of the course in regard to its delivery.

Table 2:   Students with no recorded achievement—reasons for not continuing the most recent course

		Frequency	%
1	the inflexibility of the course in terms of its time of delivery	73	15.7
2	the content of the course did not match my needs	86	18.5
3	the poor quality of the teaching staff	97	20.9
4	teachers did not have relevant industry experience	20	4.3
5	my family situation (for example having a young family)	78	16.8
6	I got a job	42	9.0
7	could not fit the course into the demands of my job	93	20.0
8	the workload of the course	54	11.6
9	my financial situation	46	9.9

Note: Percentages may sum to more than 100% because respondents could provide more than one answer; 43 missing responses.

When asked in a further question to nominate from the list in table 2 the major reason for non-completion and so being subsequently listed in AVETMISS as having a no-record of achievement, respondents mentioned most often three factors well ahead of other issues:

✧ The quality of the teaching staff was unsatisfactory.

✧ The content of the course did not match their needs.

✧ They could not fit the course into the demands of their job.

Finally, all respondents were asked what would need to change to encourage them to complete this course or qualification. Again respondents could list one or more developments that might influence their decision. As table 3 highlights, there was general agreement about the importance of most listed factors. Again, however, a number of factors did stand out somewhat more than others.

These were improvements in the quality of teaching staff, changes at work, and the content and flexibility of the course.

Table 3:   Factors that would encourage completion of the course or qualification

		Frequency	%
1	flexibility of the course in terms of its time of delivery	84	19.4
2	the content of the course	84	19.4
3	the quality of the teaching staff	100	23.1
4	my personal situation (for example having a young family)	65	15.0
5	my work situation (for example my hours of work)	93	21.5
6	the workload of the course	46	10.6
7	my general financial situation	45	10.4
8	a reduced level of fees for the course	55	12.7

Note: Percentages may sum to more than 100% because respondents could provide more than one answer; 75 missing responses.

Follow-up interviews

Follow-up interviews with eight students with no recorded achievement re-affirmed the major issues to emerge from the survey of students with no recorded achievement.

When they were told about the findings of the survey and results from the analysis of the various databases, respondents were not surprised about the range of institutional, social and personal factors behind the decisions of survey respondents not to complete their studies. Again, respondents emphasised the perceived lack of flexibility in the content and in how it was being delivered. They felt that getting and maintaining a job was more important than struggling with studies that were costly or difficult to access owing to the timing of classes. They were highly critical of the value of the classes because of the poor industry experience and skills of some TAFE instructors.

When asked to elaborate on why the course was perceived not to match their needs, respondents suggested that the mis-match was due to personal changes in their needs and expectations, changes due to their getting a job, and because they were still unclear about what type of job or career they wanted to really pursue. Similar to the first group of students with no recorded achievement consulted at the start of this research, they felt that classes were not well organised to take account of the various learning needs and capabilities of students. They were not surprised to hear that those students with a Year 10 education and those who were unemployed were more likely to be among the no-recorded-achievement group. They felt that many less educated students were disadvantaged by poor literacy and numeracy skills, and the difficulty of the content of some of the courses.

Future strategies

The findings of the present research highlight the need, first, to design and implement strategies to identify in more detail the nature and extent of this problem of students leaving vocational education and training with no recorded achievement; and, second, to manage the needs of this group of students more effectively so that they are able to complete their studies.

These final sections propose a range of ideas for improving the ability of the VET system to identify these students, and to work more closely with them to support them through their training.

Improving the definition and measurement of 'no recorded achievement'

As a first step, practitioners and policy-makers need to put forward a clearer definition of what is meant by no recorded achievement. It is clear that students are coming in and out of the system or are actually enrolled for longer periods than the existing databases can accurately reflect. As the analyses of the Queensland AVETMISS database revealed, the application of an identification code allowed examination of students coming in and out of the VET system. This identification code, together with the use of additional cross-checks into related enrolment databases in future years, reduced the estimates of no recorded achievement from around 10% to 4% of the total TAFE client base. The current findings emphasise that more accurate reporting of non-completions might be gained through the inclusion of such codes or related strategies.

It is important that additional effort is put into clarifying our definitions of, and distinctions between, the concepts of no recorded achievement, non-completion, withdrawal, failure and attrition—to name just a few of the concepts being applied in the VET sector at present. It is becoming increasingly difficult to define what students mean by non-completion. In the current study, the analysis of the Queensland AVETMISS database indicated that 32% of students with no recorded achievement had enrolled in only one module, and 47% had enrolled in only two. Also, the survey revealed that the vast majority of students with no recorded achievement had enrolled in only one course. It seems that many students are more motivated to gain a specific skill or skills relevant to their personal interests and current or future jobs than to gain a qualification.

While course completion might be the measure perceived to be important to VET institutions, course completion in the official sense is possibly becoming a less relevant measure to students (see also Foyster, Fai & Chandra 2000). We know that more students are moving across various sectors towards establishing highly individualised, less standard pathways to building the skills profile they believe are necessary for an existing or future job. In the current study, teachers recognised this trend. They felt that their institutions needed to move more fully into recognition of prior learning, cross-credit arrangements within and across institutions, and to give more support for students, as increasingly, they plan less standard pathways.

Future examinations of students with no recorded achievement

A strength of the current research is that it used a range of methods to examine the issue of 'no recorded achievement'. The research gathered new data through interviews with various stakeholders and the questionnaire survey, and also made use of existing databases that profile the socio-demographic characteristics of students with no recorded achievement. The combination of these multiple methods is an appropriate and effective way to deal with the biases and shortcomings inherent in any one method.

At the same time, despite such efforts, the real reasons for leaving may be hidden and more complex than shown in such retrospective examinations. In order to more accurately examine the motivations for students with no recorded achievement and other non-completion groups of students, a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods should continue. However, these should include a longitudinal component ideally involving interviews and surveys over time, combined with the collection of more accurate enrolment data on students as they progress through their studies and along various pathways within and across institutions. Such longitudinal data will allow the tracking of students as they leave, re-enrol and move through various courses at the same or different institutions.

The current research has a number of strengths but also major shortcomings that need to be addressed in future research. The samples of students with no recorded achievement interviewed were very small, and although the purpose of such interviews was to guide the design of the survey or to explore the implications of the findings, there is much to be gained from the completion of a larger number of more in-depth interviews with students as they enter and progress through their VET studies. In addition, the response rate to the survey was small, but to be expected, given that students with no recorded achievement did not complete their studies often because of concerns they had with the flexibility of subjects and the match between the content and their needs. The survey sample is not representative, being limited to Queensland students, and does not include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents. Such survey research needs to be extended with a larger budget to include a national sample with more effort and funds devoted to ensuring the representativeness of the sample of respondents than was possible in the current project.

Continuing to attend to the quality and flexibility of courses

The initial brief literature review that set the scene for the current research suggested that a complex set of factors were likely to be at work in influencing students to leave their TAFE studies with no recorded achievement. Both the interviews with students with no recorded achievement and the survey, revealed just that. However, some specific issues did emerge ahead of others as being more important in shaping the decision not to complete.

Many students were very critical of the quality of teachers in the courses that they had left. In their elaboration of this factor, they talked about teachers who were poorly organised and not motivated, who were conducting inflexible courses, who were not linked in well with industry and who were unable to manage the range of students and student needs. In teacher interviews, however, they tended to attribute non-completions to financial and work demands, as well as personal factors being faced by students. There is a well-established finding in educational research that students attribute failure to external factors (for example, the quality of the teachers and course content) more than to personal factors (for example, their lack of effort or motivation). It is quite possible that such external attributions are at work here, with students who do not complete attributing blame to external factors; for example, quality of the teachers and the lack of flexibility of the subjects, rather than to internal factors such as a lack of effort or application on their part.

However, institutions can more readily manage concerns about the perceived lack of flexibility of courses, including achieving a better match between the times of the delivery of subjects and the

work commitments of students. This issue was a major criticism by students interviewed at the commencement and also at the conclusion of this research. Half of the students surveyed were working, and the inability to fit the demands of their course around work was also a major reason given by them for their non-completion. Students who were employed full-time especially felt disadvantaged about courses not being available in the evenings or through more flexible modes of delivery. On the other hand, the major changes occurring throughout the VET sector in the flexibility of course delivery, the use of more blended modes of delivery, the application of portfolio assessment, and work-based assessment should result in the greater levels of course flexibility being delivered to employed students now and in the future.

Other strategies

A lot has already been written in vocational education and training and related literatures about the best set of strategies for reducing non-completions. By examining the findings of the current study and in the light of recommendations made in other contexts, what do the findings from this set of analyses suggest might be appropriate strategies to better assist students? How can we respond to the range of institutional, social and personal factors that are influencing students not to complete?

Overall, given the findings to emerge from the current research, it is considered that most of the solutions for reducing the current levels of no recorded achievement rest with the training institutions themselves, rather than with the students. The following are some strategies that might be considered, and almost all of them are underpinned by well-established research or educational practice:

✧ Reduce the mismatch between student expectations and course demands.
   In the current research, students were satisfied with the level of information they received. They felt that the institution had clarified the total hours of attendance, the amount of assessment and what had to be done to gain a record of achievement. Despite these efforts, among the major reasons for not completing was that the course did not match their needs. This reason for non-completion emerged in both the student interviews and also in the student survey. While the amount of general information might be appropriate, it seems that more detailed information might be needed about the specific courses, including their content and modes of delivery (which were concerns for many students). Teachers in their interviews felt that improvements were also needed in the recruitment of students to ensure that weaker students, especially those with literacy and numeracy problems, were given additional support and tuition. Some institutions were introducing 'taster' sessions to allow students to be introduced to the numerous types of courses across the institution in order to facilitate a better matching of student needs and course demands. Orientation and induction programs such as those employed in most workplaces today would also provide structured sessions to introduce students to the range of available facilities and support mechanisms at VET institutions.

✧ Make a greater distinction between the needs of 'interest' students and 'job-focused' students.
   In the interviews and survey, almost half of the students identified personal or interest reasons for studying at TAFE. The other half was more focused upon getting a job or gaining skills for their current job. The former are classified in market research as possibly bridgers or career changers, and the latter are labour market entrants, apprentices and trainees, skill improvers and self-employed. VET institutions need to improve their skills in segmenting their student markets to accommodate students' motivations for studying. There needs to be greater segmentation and recognition of motivational factors as drivers for designing how courses are marketed, promoted, delivered and assessed, especially for 'interest' students versus those who need and want the qualifications to get or maintain a job.

✧ Recognise the at-risk factors of being unemployed and having a Year 10 or less level of education.
   These two background factors most identified students with no recorded achievement. As teachers and administrators also observed, this group is also more likely to be among the students who, in relation to literacy and numeracy, find that the transition to college places considerable demands upon them financially, and in meeting student workloads. Institutions need to better target such students at enrolment, advising and providing them with interviews and specialist guidance. Access to volunteer student peer support programs, where new students are given a

'student buddy', are a related mechanism that has proved to be successful in both high school and tertiary environments. Tutor training, where students can access existing students who are paid to be tutors in the course, is also being successfully implemented to support at-risk students. Basic skills programs in literacy, numeracy and foundation information technology skills can also be provided to students identified in initial classes as needing additional learning support.

In summary, the current research has used a range of research methods to explore the characteristics of students with no recorded achievement. Together these methods reveal that students with no recorded achievement have profiles generally similar to those of other types of non-completers who have been investigated in the literature. Like other types of non-completers, these students are much more likely to be balancing work and study, or to be looking for work. In addition, their background of having a Year 10 or less education and being more likely to be unemployed puts them at increased risk of non-completion. When they do get a job, they find it difficult to fit the demands of the job around the workloads and perceived inflexibility of the content and delivery of their courses. In looking at solutions to assist such students, it seems that most of the strategies lie in the hands of the institutions themselves.

The VET system is a large, complex and expensive system to manage effectively, and it has difficulty, it seems, in responding to the growing individuality and the tremendous diversity of students. At the same time, many institutions are planning their growth and continued financial success around their ability to work with their diverse range of student, industry and community stakeholders. In doing so, many institutions will need to identify more fully the diversity of needs and motivations of their students, and to support them so that their needs are accommodated within institutional restraints and requirements.

The good news is that there is a wide range of strategies that can be used to better identify and to support these more vulnerable students, and many institutions are very experienced in using such strategies for other student groups. Given the size of this group of students with no recorded achievement, and their reasons for non-completion, it is time for institutions to put this group of students under special care.

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Appendix A: Questionnaire

CONFIDENTIAL AND IMPORTANT

YOU CAN HELP US TO BETTER UNDERSTAND YOUR EXPERIENCES AS A STUDENT AT A TRAINING INSTITUTION IN QUEENSLAND

PLEASE COMPLETE AND RETURN IN THE ENVELOPE PROVIDED BY NOVEMBER 28, 2003

Dear Sir/Madam,

We are currently seeking the assistance of people like you who began, but did not complete, some form of training at a Queensland TAFE institution or similar organisation.

We have been asked by the Queensland Government to look at:

- **the factors that encourage people to enrol in some form of training**
- **the reasons why people decide not to complete this training**
- **what can be done to improve training in Queensland**

As someone who began but did not complete a course or qualification, your opinions are very important to the success of our research.

We simply ask for 15 minutes of your time to complete this questionnaire. We would like to assure you that all replies to this questionnaire are strictly confidential and your identity will remain anonymous. All completed and returned questionnaires will be destroyed once the information is processed.

You do not need to provide your name – just simply complete the questionnaire and return it to The University of Queensland in the reply paid envelope that is provided.

Please return your completed questionnaire by no later than Friday, November 28th, 2003. If you have any questions, please contact Professor Victor Callan at the University of Queensland on 07 3365 9009 or e-mail v.callan@business.uq.edu.au

We sincerely thank you for your cooperation.

Q1   **Our focus is upon your experiences at TAFE institutions in Queensland. Since 2000, how many courses have you enrolled in at TAFE institutions and decided not to complete?** *(insert a number please, for example, 1, 2 etc)*

_____ **course(s)**

From here onwards in the questionnaire, if there was more than one TAFE course that you did not complete, answer the questions only about the most recent course

Q2   **In enrolling in this most recent course or qualification that you did not complete, which industry or profession were you training for?** *(please circle one number)*

1. Healthcare	12. Hospitality/Service	22. Other *(please*
2. Building	13. Civil Construction	*write in)*
3. Information Technology	14. Plastics Production	_____
4. Engineering	15. Transport & Storage	_____
5. Automotive	16. Forestry	_____
6. Electrical/Electronic	17. Office Work	
7. Carpentry/construction	18. Security	
8. Food Production	19. Cleaning	
9. Agriculture	20. Timber Production	
10. Clerical	21. Freight/Horticulture/Mining	
11. Sales		

Q3   **Which of these describes how the course was delivered?** *(please circle one or more numbers)*

1.   In a classroom (with no work placement)

2.   In a classroom (with work placement)

3.   In your workplace

4.   Group or individual project work

5.   By correspondence

6.   Online learning

7.   Other (please write in)_____

Q4   **When you enrolled in this course, were you intending at the time to** *(please circle one number)*

1.   Complete 1 module only   2. Complete more than 1 module   3. Complete the full qualification

4.   Other (please explain)_____

Q5.   **What year or years did you enrol in this course?** *(please circle one or more years)*

1. 2000   2. 2001   3. 2002   4. 2003

Q6 **What type of TAFE institution did you enrol in?** (*please circle one number*)

   1. A TAFE college at a city location

   2. A TAFE college at a regional/country location

   3. Other (please write in)_____

Q7 **How old were you when you did not compete this course or qualification?** *(please write in a number)*

   I was _____ years of age.

Q8 **Were you employed at the time you enrolled in this course?** (*please circle one number*)

   1. employed, full-time
   2. employed, part-time
   3. employed, casual work
   4. unemployed, and actively looking for work
   5. unemployed, and not looking for work
   6. student studying at another institution
   7. parent at home with children
   8. other (*please write in*)_____

Q9 **When you started in this course or qualification, did they make it clear to you** *(please circle Yes or No for each item)*

What the total hours of attendance would be?	1. Yes	2. No
The amount of assessment that you would need to complete to achieve a record of achievement in the course?	1. Yes	2. No
The benefits to you in completing the course?	1. Yes	2. No

Q10 **What were your reasons for studying the qualification you enrolled in?** *(please circle one or more numbers)*

   1. To get a job
   2. To develop my existing business
   3. To start my own business
   4. To try for a different career
   5. To get a better job or promotion
   6. It was a requirement of my job
   7. I wanted extra skills for my job
   8. To get into another course of study
   9. For interest or personal reasons
   10. Other (please write

      in)_____

      _____

Q11 **Of the 10 reasons listed above, what was the major reason for enrolling in this course?** *(write in the number from 1 to 10)_____*

Q12   **About how long did you attend the most recent course that you decided not to complete? If more than one course was not completed, give a time for those courses also**

Most recent course   The number of weeks was_____

Second course   The number of weeks was_____

Other courses   On average, the number of weeks was_____

Q13   **Please circle 1, 2 or 3 for the following items**

I began the course
with a clear idea of what was expected of me   1. Yes   2. No   3. Not relevant

I was satisfied with the level of
information I received about what I was expected to do   1. Yes   2. No   3. Not relevant

I was satisfied with the level
of support I received from my boss   1. Yes   2. No   3. Not relevant

During my training, I was satisfied with the level
of support I received from my family and friends   1. Yes   2. No   3. Not relevant

Q14   **Why did you not continue the most recent course?** *(Please circle one or more numbers or give us your reasons in the space provided)*

1.   the inflexibility of the course in terms of its time of delivery
2.   the content of the course did not match my needs
3.   the poor quality of the teaching staff
4.   teachers did not have relevant industry experience
5.   my family situation (e.g. having a young family)
6.   I got a job
7.   could not fit the course into the demands of my job
8.   the workload of the course
9.   my financial situation
10.   other *(please write in below)*

_____

_____

_____

Q15   **Of the 10 reasons listed above, what was the major reason for not continuing the course?** *(write*

in the number from 1 to 10)_____

Q16   **Based on your experiences, what would need to change to encourage you to complete this course or qualification?** *(please circle one or more numbers)*

1.   the flexibility of the course in terms of its time of delivery
2.   the content of the course
3.   the quality of the teaching staff
4.   my personal situation (e.g. having a young family)
5.   my work situation (e.g. my hours of work etc)
6.   the workload of the course
7.   my general financial situation
8.   a reduced level of fees for the course
9.   other *(please write in below)*

_____

_____

ABOUT YOU

These final questions help describe the types of people who have replied to this survey.

Q17 **Are you** *(please circle one number)* 1. Male 2. Female

Q18 **Do you identify as a member of one or more of these groups?** *(please circle one or more numbers)*

1. Aboriginal people 2. Torres Strait islander people
3. People with a disability 4. People whose first language is a language other than English
5. I do not identify with any of these groups

Q19 **Do you speak a language other than English with your parents or friends?** *(please circle a number)*
1. No 2. Yes

Q20 **What year of high school education did you complete?** *(please circle one number)*

Year 8 9 10 11 12

Q21 **Which of the following best describes your current employment?** *(please circle one number)*

1. I do not have a job and I am looking for work 6. I do not have a job and I am not looking for work

2. I work in the private sector 7. I am currently a student

3. I work in the Commonwealth Government 8. I am currently involved in raising a family/child care responsibilities

4. I work in Local council 9. I am self-employed

5. I work in State Government 10. Other *(please write in)* _____

Q22 **Are you currently working?** *(please circle one number)*

1. Full-time 2. Part-time 3. Not employed

Q23 **What level of study are you doing at the moment?** *(please circle one or more numbers)*

1. Not currently studying 2. Studying full-time 3. Studying part-time
4. At University 5. At TAFE 6. At College

Q24 **Which of the following educational qualifications or trade certificates had you completed <u>before</u> enrolling in the TAFE course that you did not complete?** *(circle one or more numbers)*

1. Bachelor degree, or higher

2. Undergraduate diploma (e.g. TAFE institute, university)

3. Associate diploma

4. Trade certificate (e.g. Apprenticeship)

5. Traineeship

6. Certificate

7. Certificate of competency/Statement of attainment

8. Pre-vocational training

9. Secondary school qualification (e.g. mature age)

10. Other *(please write in below)*

_____

BELOW IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO WRITE IN ANY OTHER COMMENTS YOU THINK ARE USEFUL. PLEASE USE THIS SPACE TO GIVE US ANY IDEAS OR INFORMATION THAT YOU FEEL IS IMPORTANT

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THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO COMPLETE THE QUESTIONNAIRE. YOUR CONTRIBUTION IS VERY VALUABLE AND WE APPRECIATE IT. PLEASE PLACE THE COMPLETED QUESTIONNAIRE IN THE POSTAGE PAID, RETURN ADDRESSED ENVELOPE PROVIDED AND POST BACK TO ME AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

IF YOU HAVE MISPLACED THE ENVELOPE, SEND THE COMPLETED QUESTIONNAIRE TO: PROFESSOR VICTOR J CALLAN, UQ BUSINESS SCHOOL, THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND Q 4072

National Centre for Vocational Education Research

NCVER

This report investigates the characteristics and motivations of
students who do not complete the training course they enrol in.
The report finds that non-completion is associated with poor
educational background, and also finds that the numbers of
students who leave vocational education and training without any
achievements are over-estimated, and improvements to data
systems are needed.

NCVER is an independent body responsible for collecting,
managing, analysing, evaluating and communicating research and
statistics about vocational education and training.

Informing **policy** and **practice**
in Australia's **training system**