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Understanding the value of pre-apprenticeships

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INTRODUCTION

Governments and organisations across Australia have invested in pre-apprenticeship programs with the aim of improving apprenticeship commencement, completion and satisfaction. Understanding the value of pre-apprenticeships is essential for informing government funding decisions and ensuring that the most appropriate student and industry supports are in place. Until now, the impact of pre-apprenticeships on apprenticeship commencement and completion has not been quantified, and our understanding of the motivations and expectations of both students and employers regarding pre-apprenticeships has been limited.

This research consisted of several complementary elements, designed to evaluate the value of pre-apprenticeships in delivering improved apprenticeship outcomes:

- a novel methodology was used to track pathways from pre-apprenticeship programs into apprenticeships and other VET for 60 679 pre-apprenticeship students from four jurisdictions between 2015 and 2021
- the probability of apprenticeship completion was modelled for 280 707 apprenticeship commencements between 2016 and 2018, comparing results for apprenticeships with a prior pre-apprenticeship enrolment (4% of the total cohort) to those without a prior pre-apprenticeship enrolment (96% of the total cohort)
- interviews with students and employers were conducted to gain insights into their pre-apprenticeship experiences.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

While the findings from this research support the effectiveness of pre-apprenticeships in improving apprenticeship outcomes, their impact varies according to student characteristics and training type.

- The positive effect of enrolling in a pre-apprenticeship prior to commencing an apprenticeship is especially pronounced when students complete their pre-apprenticeship and train in the same field of education (7.3-percentage-point increase in the probability of completion). Various factors may explain this: that pre-apprenticeships are an unofficial prerequisite for certain high-demand apprenticeships; or, that they provide students with the skills and knowledge required for the apprenticeship; or, that they stoke a passion to persist in that vocation.
- The effect of completing a pre-apprenticeship was particularly evident among trade apprenticeships, where there was a 4.1-percentage-point increase in the probability of apprenticeship completion. This increase potentially reflects the close alignment between the technical and skill-based pre-apprenticeship training and the hands-on, practical aspects of the apprenticeship. In contrast, non-trade apprenticeships do not show the same level of benefit from completing a pre-apprenticeship (0.8-percentage-point increase), potentially due to the more generalised nature of the pre-apprenticeship training, which may be disconnected from the content of the non-trade apprenticeship.
- The benefits of pre-apprenticeships to apprenticeship transition and completion are most evident for males, younger apprentices and those not identifying with an equity group. Although at an aggregate level pre-apprenticeships do not improve accessibility or completion for under-represented cohorts, the impact of tailored programs with interventions targeted at specific demographics, such as women in trades and First Nations peoples, should not be discounted, given that such programs have reported strong completion rates.
- Students enter pre-apprenticeships with diverse motivations and expectations, and satisfaction can be high, even among those who do not complete or transition into an apprenticeship, since individuals may still be exploring career options. Several clear themes emerged regarding the factors influencing pre-apprenticeship satisfaction, including the importance of having clear program expectations, effective teachers and accessible and meaningful work experience. Addressing the gaps in areas of student satisfaction may result in improved pre-apprenticeship completion rates and a smoother transition to apprenticeships.
- Employers and group training organisations (GTOs) recognise the value in pre-apprenticeships when they closely align with the apprenticeship: students are better prepared for the workplace and have demonstrated greater interest and commitment to their chosen trade. GTOs also expressed support for expanding multi-trade taster courses, suggesting that such courses could better assist students to explore career options than highly specific one-trade pre-apprenticeships.
- Nearly one third (32.4%) of non-completers transitioned into an apprenticeship, with employers recruiting apprentices directly from pre-apprenticeship programs, prior to completion. However, the probability of apprenticeship completion among this group was significantly lower than for those who had not enrolled in a pre-apprenticeship program.

While both the quantitative and qualitative findings confirm the value of pre-apprenticeships in improving apprenticeship outcomes, they also highlight the need for careful program design and implementation. To maximise their impact in preparing apprentices for successful careers, pre-apprenticeship programs must: be tailored to the specific needs of different student and training cohorts; support completion; and maintain strong alignment with apprenticeships, where appropriate.

ABOUT THIS RESEARCH

To obtain a clearer picture of how pre-apprenticeships affect apprenticeship outcomes, this research uses data on pre-apprenticeship students provided by state government departments in four jurisdictions combined with training activity data held in the National VET Provider and National Apprentice and Trainee collections. In addition to quantitative analysis, qualitative interviews captured the lived experience of pre-apprenticeship students, GTOs and employers.

For this research, the terms 'pre-apprenticeship' and 'apprenticeship' include both apprenticeships and traineeships. Here an apprenticeship is defined as a combination of a student, their jurisdiction and a program enrolment, rather than the traditional contract-based measure.

For the purposes of this research, four state government departments provided data on students who received funding for training intended as a precursor to an apprenticeship. These programs may have taken various forms, from introductory vocational training to structured pathways into specific trades.

The quantitative analysis was conducted in two distinct stages. The first stage examined pre-apprenticeship students and their transition into apprenticeships. The second stage focused on apprenticeships, evaluating the impact of a prior enrolment in a pre-apprenticeship on the probability of completing the apprenticeship.

The following analysis windows were used:

- pre-apprenticeship student analysis: 2015—21
- apprenticeship outcome analysis: 2016—18.

This report summarises key findings from both the quantitative and qualitative research. The full methodology and detailed results are available in the supporting documents. Given the complexity of the data analyses, the results should be interpreted with consideration of the methodological limitations. The following titles are the support documents accompanying this report:

- *A quantitative assessment of the effect of a pre-apprenticeship on an apprenticeship completion*, Craig Hansen & Melinda Lees
- *Exploring the lived experiences of pre-apprenticeship students and employers*, Joanne Waugh & Melinda Lees.

WHY DO A PRE-APPRENTICESHIP?

Individuals choose to enrol in a pre-apprenticeship program for various reasons, including:

- to gain insight into industries and occupations to make informed career choices
- to develop workplace-relevant skills
- to gain a pathway into an occupation via an apprenticeship
- to achieve an alternative pathway into the workforce, without necessarily aiming for an apprenticeship (Arrowsmith 2020; Dumbrell & Smith 2013; Karmel 2021).

This research confirms these motivations while offering deeper insights into the factors that drive participation. Interviews revealed that students' decisions to undertake a pre-apprenticeship were influenced by a combination of personal beliefs and knowledge about trade careers and external drivers, such as course affordability and employer preferences.

A key motivator for many students was a belief in the value of trades as rewarding careers. Exposure to information about trade careers in high school played a role, although some did not immediately pursue this path due to a lack of motivation, opportunity, financial support, or encouragement at the time.

> *"I saw having a really, really important job to society, higher earning job and something that's interesting. And the changes from day to day as something that's that really is kind of impactful."*
>
> *(Student #1)*

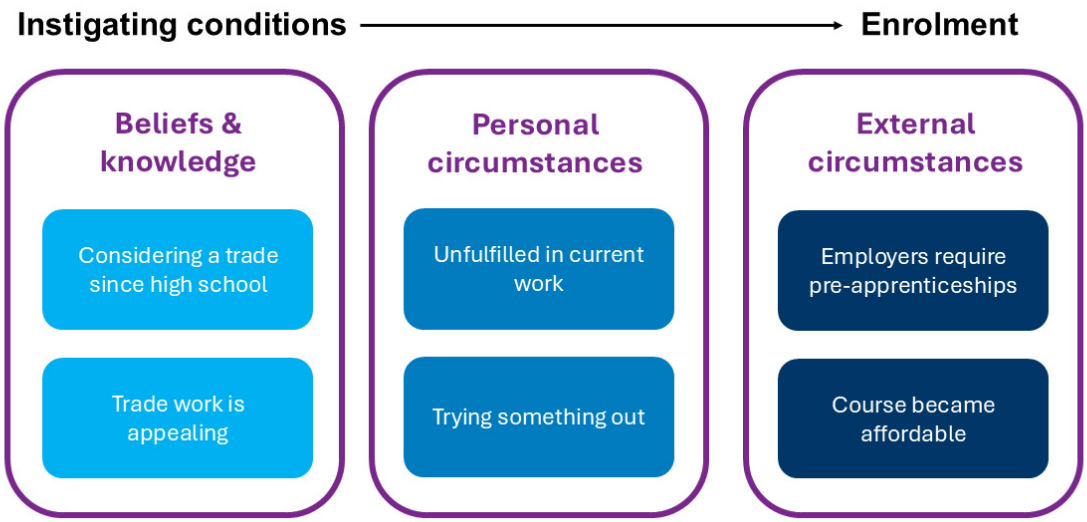
Many students revisited the idea of a trade career when they became dissatisfied with their current work or career trajectory. Some had taken time out to travel or worked in jobs with limited progression opportunities before reconsidering their options. At this stage, they researched trade careers, sought advice from family and friends, and explored the possibility of a pre-apprenticeship. Notably, the students reported strong encouragement from their support networks.

> *"Mum was saying that you could do taster courses originally, about trades, and I thought maybe I could do electrotechnology and go towards being an electrician."* *(Student #26)*

For some, employer preferences played a significant role. Certain students discovered that completing a pre-apprenticeship was either required or highly valued by employers. Others faced financial barriers to entering their chosen trade, and reductions in program fees enabled them to pursue this path.

> *"I started looking into that and found that most employers won't hire apprentices, especially mature-age apprentices, unless they've done their pre-apprenticeship."* *(Student #17)*

The figure below provides an overview of the beliefs and conditions that inform students' motivations for enrolling in a pre-apprenticeship.



Key takeaways for student recruitment and retention

The enrolment pattern of the students interviewed suggests that career guidance provided in high school plays a valuable role, even if students do not immediately transition into an apprenticeship or pre-apprenticeship. Information about trade careers is often absorbed over time, influencing decisions after individuals have explored other options such as travel, further study or unskilled work.

Students who enrolled in a pre-apprenticeship consistently reported strong support, both moral and financial, from their family and friends. Many also demonstrated high levels of self-efficacy and resilience, enabling them to overcome challenges during their training. However, this research did not capture perspectives from individuals who did not consider, or enrol in, a pre-apprenticeship. It is possible that a lack of support networks or key personal attributes distinguishes those who commence from those who do not. Further research into this 'almost' cohort could provide valuable insights into barriers to participation.

For some students, financial constraints had delayed their enrolment in a pre-apprenticeship. In addition to course fees, students faced the challenge of reduced income while studying, often having to rely on family support to manage costs. Lower program fees may help to attract a more diverse group of students, particularly those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and contribute to improving equity in pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship participation rates.

The figure below provides an overview of the factors that influence student recruitment, retention and transition to apprenticeships.

Factors that facilitate pre-apprenticeship enrolment and success

Sowing interest

- Trade career information
- Sector-specific information
- Readiness to begin
- Values trade careers

Facilitating access

- Affordable & accessible courses
- Facilitating personal circumstances
- Supportive family/friends
- Self-efficacy

Propagating success

- Supportive study peers
- Connections in trades
- Supportive trainers
- Persistent & determined nature

Budding apprentices

- Training provider-industry connections
- Flexible training organisation
- Industry values the pre-apprenticeship

DO EMPLOYERS VALUE PRE-APPRENTICESHIPS?

Research by Dumbrell and Smith (2013) found that most employers viewed pre-apprenticeships as 'useful, essential, and important'. This study supports those findings, with employers and GTOs highlighting the value of pre-apprenticeships in identifying candidates more likely to succeed as apprentices.

GTOs interviewed as part of this research reported that the employers with whom they work actively seek apprentices who have completed a pre-apprenticeship. These employers believe that pre-apprenticeship completers demonstrate greater interest in and commitment to their chosen trade, possess relevant skills and knowledge, and are better prepared for workplace safety.

> *"They've done a little bit of safety. Yes, they've done some use of hand and power tools. Yes, they've got a little bit of basic knowledge in and around you know what's going on in the industry and that side of things, which means that they're not starting 100% green."* *(GTO #1)*

On the other hand, some employers expressed scepticism about the value of pre-apprenticeships. Their concerns included:

- a perceived misalignment between certificate II training focused on practical skills and the interpersonal skills required for their trade
- the belief that pre-apprenticeships attract the wrong candidates
- a preference for hiring based on personal attributes rather than on formal qualifications.

> *"I've had a lot of apprentices over the time. I've had a lot of good ones and had a lot of bad ones. I've changed my interview process, now it's based on hiring on attitude, not on any qualifications they might have."* *(Employer #3)*

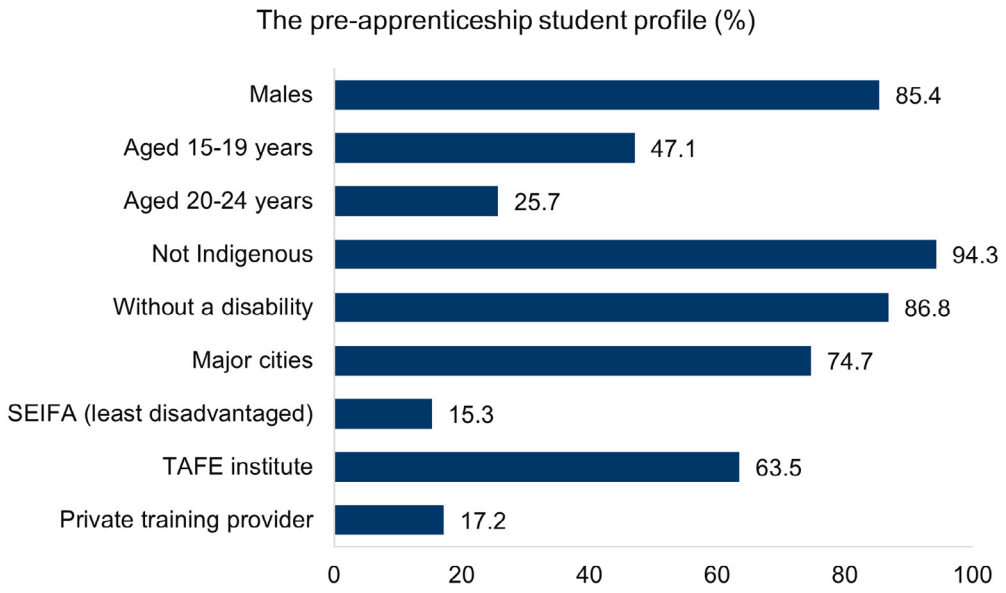
The value employers placed on pre-apprenticeships varies by occupation. Those who did not value pre-apprenticeship completion often cited a mismatch between program content and the realities of the work of an apprentice. This suggests that ensuring pre-apprenticeship training closely aligns with apprenticeship requirements could increase employer confidence in these programs. This finding is further reinforced by the quantitative analysis results regarding the effect of pre-apprenticeship field of education on apprenticeship outcomes (see section 'Does alignment between the pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship matter?').

WHO IS DOING PRE-APPRENTICESHIPS?

There is little evidence that pre-apprenticeships improve access to apprenticeships for students belonging to equity groups

The demographic profile of pre-apprenticeship students closely mirrors that of typical apprentices (NCVER 2024a). Most pre-apprenticeship students are male, aged 15 to 24 years, and do not belong to identified equity groups.

Pre-apprenticeship students were primarily enrolled in certificate II-level trade-related qualifications, with the majority training at TAFE (technical and further education) institutes, followed by private training providers. Pre-apprenticeships focused heavily on the fields of Engineering and related technologies (50.1%) and Architecture and building (31.2%). Nearly half of all pre-apprenticeship students were enrolled in non-training package qualifications (46.5%), which are designed to provide pre-vocational training in a particular industry area. The figure below highlights the most prominent pre-apprenticeship student and training characteristics.



Note: SEIFA Index of Relative Disadvantage (IRSD) is a general socioeconomic index that summarises information about the economic and social resources of people and households within an area. This index focuses on disadvantage. A high score (or quintile) reflects a relative lack of disadvantage rather than relative advantage.

Targeted pre-apprenticeship programs have shown promise in improving apprenticeship participation among under-represented groups, even though the aggregate data in this study do not indicate a significant impact. Across Australia, employers, GTOs, industry bodies and others have developed pre-apprenticeship programs tailored to specific demographics, such as women in male-dominated trades and First Nations peoples (Department of Employment and Workplace Relations 2024). These programs often report higher apprenticeship transition and completion rates than broader aggregate data suggest, indicating that targeted programs and funding are more effective at addressing specific access and equity concerns.

WHICH STUDENTS ARE MORE LIKELY TO COMPLETE A PRE-APPRENTICESHIP?

Pre-apprenticeship students belonging to equity groups have lower-than-average completion rates

The overall completion rate for students who commenced a pre-apprenticeship between 2015 and 2021 was 55.8%. This figure is higher than the completion rate for those who commenced nationally recognised VET qualifications in 2019 (47.3%) (NCVER 2024b).

Pre-apprenticeship completion rates were higher than average for males, students aged 20 to 39 years and high school completers. The analysis examined pre-apprenticeship completion across key equity categories. While these categories provide insight into completion trends, they do not fully capture the range of challenges students may face, nor does belonging to one or more equity groups necessarily equate to disadvantage. The analysis found that Indigenous students, those with disabilities, students from regional or remote areas, students who spoke a language other than English at home, and those from the most socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds had lower pre-apprenticeship completion rates. These patterns are consistent with broader VET completion trends and previous research (Karmel 2021; NCVER 2024b).

Despite some differences, completers and non-completers shared similar characteristics; however, completers were more likely to:

- be employed at the time of commencing their pre-apprenticeship
- reside in less socioeconomically disadvantaged areas
- enrol in Engineering and related technology fields.

In contrast, non-completers were more likely to enrol in Architecture and building, and Food, hospitality and personal services. These fields of education made up 43.0% of all pre-apprenticeships among non-completers compared to 33.4% among completers.

Overall, students at private training providers had higher completion rates than those enrolled at TAFE institutes, universities and community education providers. This may reflect enrolment patterns, given that public and community education providers often serve higher proportions of students from equity groups, who face greater barriers to completion (NCVER 2023).

Boosting equity group completion

Some pre-apprenticeship programs have resulted in strong completion rates for students from equity groups (Group Training Association of NSW & ACT 2014). However, persistently lower completion rates among these groups at an aggregate level suggest the ongoing need for targeted support.

In addition to the categories of disadvantage captured in the data, qualitative research found that personal circumstances and learning challenges can also have an impact on completion; for example, one student hesitated to ask for help in an online forum due to shyness and instead sought assistance from a family member.

Students often avoid seeking support due to stigma, fear of judgement or discrimination, lack of confidence, or embarrassment (Andrahannadi & Griffin, 2025). Training providers can potentially improve completion by establishing rapport early and providing multiple avenues for seeking assistance and proactively reaching out to students who are disengaged from avenues of support.

Is completion related to satisfaction?

This study did not explore the link between pre-apprenticeship completion and student satisfaction. However, the qualitative research revealed key factors that influenced students' satisfaction with their pre-apprenticeship experiences, such as:

> *"[The trainer] should think about how they treat people because in the class, sometimes we have to do the hair in front of the client. The way she talked to us was so embarrassing. They look at us look like we're stupid, like, we're learning. That's why we're learning. But you don't to talk to us the way she talked to us."* *(Student #22, completer)*

Factors that boost student satisfaction

Clear expectations

Being upfront and clear with students about program requirements, costs, work experience, and available support helps to set realistic expectations and reduce disappointment.

VET teacher quality

Students highly valued knowledgeable, supportive teachers, who fostered an inclusive learning environment. Even students who did not achieve their initial goals reported satisfaction if they had experienced strong teachers. Conversely, poor trainer engagement led to dissatisfaction, even among those who completed their apprenticeship and progressed to an apprenticeship.

Work experience quality

Students look forward to participating in some kind of work experience, believing it will help to inform their decision about whether the occupation is suitable for them. Students were more satisfied with the program if: they could easily secure a placement; employers made them feel part of the work team; and tasks aligned with their classroom learning.

Students whose social networks included tradespeople were most readily able to secure work placements, putting others at a disadvantage. Training providers facilitating placements could help to bridge this gap.

Program content and assessment

Student expectations about the content and assessment of pre-apprenticeship programs were generally broad; for example, 'I was hoping to get a better understanding of how to use like the tools and stuff' (Student #26).

Many students were satisfied with the classroom-based learning. Others were frustrated by: feeling rushed through the content; being denied the chance to practise skills before assessments, particularly with tools; and being confronted by repetitive or unengaging content. The shift to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic challenged many students who had chosen pre-apprenticeships for the hands-on experience.

Peer support

Students who developed relationships with their peers were more likely to be satisfied. They enjoyed the chance to reinforce their own learning and offer and receive learning support, and for future networking purposes.

Training provider flexibility

Small accommodations could significantly impact upon completion. Some non-completers had finished all but one unit of competency, and a little flexibility or better record-keeping on the part of their training provider or assessor would have enabled them to complete the full qualification. While they were told employers would overlook this, their lack of completion negatively affected both their confidence in applying for apprenticeships and their self-esteem, particularly for those overcoming prior educational struggles or periods of unemployment.

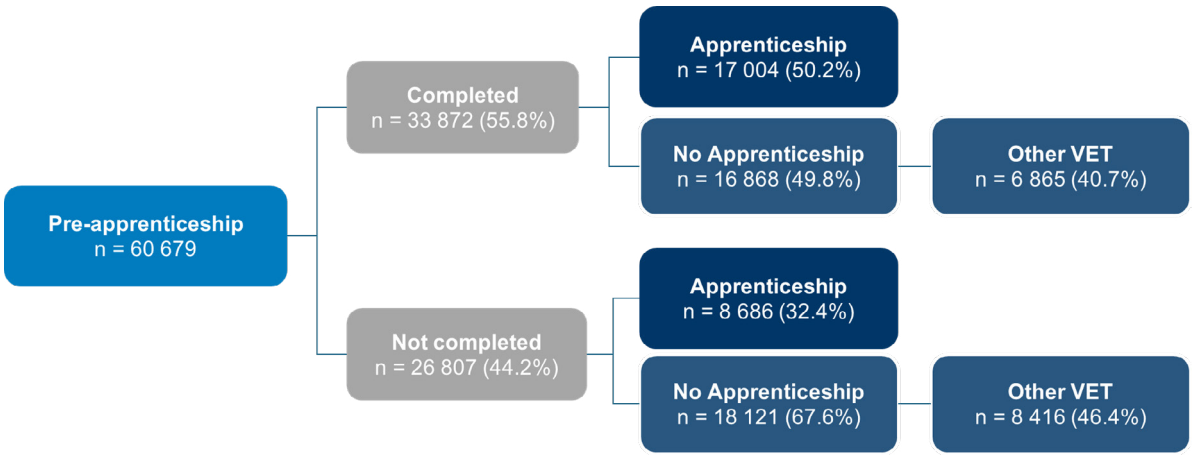
TRANSITIONS INTO APPRENTICESHIPS

Students who completed a pre-apprenticeship were more likely to commence an apprenticeship than non-completers

Completing a pre-apprenticeship is an important milestone, but securing an apprenticeship is another. Overall, 42.3% of pre-apprenticeship students commenced an apprenticeship; however, the transition rate was significantly higher for those who had completed a pre-apprenticeship (50.2%) compared with non-completers (32.4%). This trend was consistent across most student and training characteristics.

Similar to the trend observed for pre-apprenticeship completion rates, apprenticeship commencement rates were higher than average for males, younger age groups, high school completers and those not belonging to an equity group. The type of training provider was also associated with apprenticeship commencement rates, with higher rates among TAFE institutes (45.1%) compared with private training providers (29.3%).

Notably, many pre-apprenticeship students pursued other VET study rather than an apprenticeship (40.7% of completers and 46.4% of non-completers who did not commence an apprenticeship). The figure below demonstrates the pathways of pre-apprenticeship students to apprenticeships and other VET study.



Transitioning into trade and non-trade apprenticeships

Trade occupations dominate apprenticeship commencements

Most apprenticeships that followed a pre-apprenticeship were in trade occupations, accounting for 91.9% of all apprenticeship commencements among pre-apprenticeship students. Trade apprenticeships primarily attracted: young males; individuals with higher levels of school achievement; and those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. In contrast, non-trade apprenticeships, although smaller in number, were more diverse, with a greater representation of females, older individuals, people with disability, and those from lower socioeconomic areas.

Trade apprenticeships were mainly undertaken at TAFE institutes and were concentrated in traditional skills areas, such as construction, automotive and electrical trades. Non-trade apprenticeships were spread across a broader range of fields, although enrolments were lower. These patterns reflect government funding and program priorities in recent years (NCVER 2024c).

Five most common trade apprenticeships commenced following a pre-apprenticeship

Certificate III in Electrotechnology Electrician

Certificate III in Carpentry

Certificate III in Automotive Underbody Technology

Certificate III in Plumbing

Certificate III in Engineering – Fabrication Trade

Five most common non-trade apprenticeships commenced following a pre-apprenticeship

Certificate III in Business

Certificate III in Hospitality

Certificate III in Supply Chain Operations

Certificate III in Retail

Certificate III in Civil Construction

A large proportion (70.8%) of pre-apprenticeship students who commenced an apprenticeship did so in the same field of education as their pre-apprenticeship. This alignment was higher among pre-apprenticeship completers (72.9%) compared with non-completers (66.7%).

Transitioning away from apprenticeships

Many pre-apprenticeship students continue in VET

Although more than half (57.7%) of pre-apprenticeship students did not transition into an apprenticeship, 43.7% of those who did not commence an apprenticeship went on to enrol in another VET program. Participation in other VET was higher among females, younger people, unemployed individuals and among some equity groups. This suggests that some students:

- recognised the need for additional vocational training before entering the workforce
- discovered that an apprenticeship pathway was not the right pathway for them
- were exploring different options to determine their career direction.

Many of these students pursued a qualification at a higher level, often at certificate III level, rather than returning for foundational study to support an apprenticeship. Some changed to a different field of education, while others continued studying in the same field of education but opted for an institution-based pathway. Notably, the majority of VET programs in which students most commonly enrolled after their pre-apprenticeship had equivalent apprenticeship pathways (NCVER 2024d).

Student perspectives on non-transition

Qualitative research found that students who did not transition to an apprenticeship were often satisfied with their decision. For example, one participant (Student #13) who initially said, 'It was a waste of six months and $800', later acknowledged, 'I think it [the pre-apprenticeship] gave me a bit of confidence to come up here [regional town where they were employed and undertaking an unrelated traineeship]'.

However, students who wanted an apprenticeship but were unable to secure one expressed frustration. They cited barriers such as a lack of advertised apprenticeship opportunities; not having the right industry connections; and being mature-aged and therefore requiring a higher wage.

Addressing transition rates

The characteristics of students who transitioned from a pre-apprenticeship to an apprenticeship closely align with the typical apprentice profile. This suggests that, at a broad level, pre-apprenticeships are not increasing accessibility for under-represented cohorts, although this does not discount the impact of individual programs that incorporate targeted interventions and support measures.

Students who do not transition to an apprenticeship are each on their own journey, and many may be satisfied with their decision. A better understanding of how non-transitioning students view their outcome could help tailor support services, for both those who wish to move to their selected occupation and those who feel they need assistance.

If the intention of pre-apprenticeships is to give students an opportunity to explore a career, then some level of attrition is to be expected. That said, pre-apprenticeship programs with very high transition rates may signify accessibility issues. Are students whose characteristics align with those most likely to complete an apprenticeship being selected for pre-apprenticeships? If so, what does this mean for pre-apprenticeships as a pathway for career exploration and skill development?

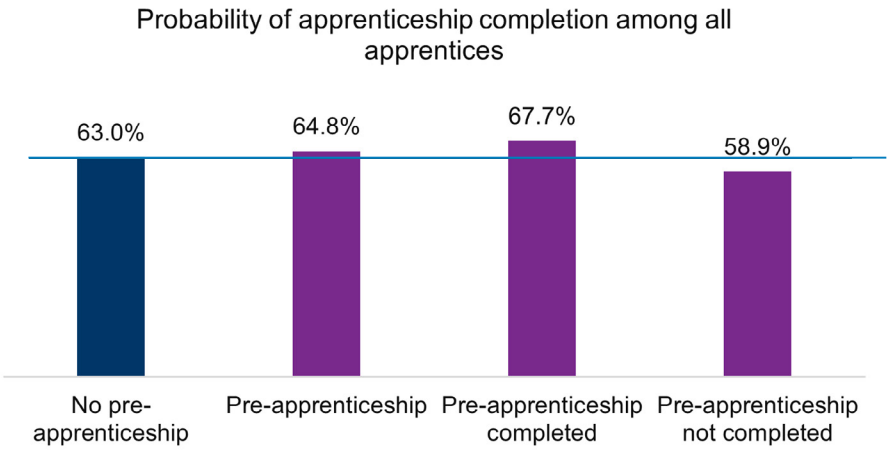
DO PRE-APPRENTICESHIPS INCREASE THE PROBABILITY OF APPRENTICESHIP COMPLETION?

Trade apprentices who completed a pre-apprenticeship had a significantly higher probability of apprenticeship completion than those who had not enrolled in a pre-apprenticeship

The qualitative research found that employers value pre-apprenticeships for their role in preparing apprentices for success. This section quantifies the impact of pre-apprenticeships on apprenticeship completion.

The overall unmodelled apprenticeship completion rate was 61.2%, with similar rates observed for both trade and non-trade apprenticeships. After controlling for all confounding student and training characteristics in the data, the analysis found that apprentices who had enrolled in a pre-apprenticeship had a significantly higher probability of apprenticeship completion than those who had not enrolled in a pre-apprenticeship. Additionally, apprentices who had completed a pre-apprenticeship had an even higher probability of completion than those who had not enrolled in a pre-apprenticeship.[1]

The overall unmodelled completion rate represents the percentage of apprenticeships that were completed. In contrast, the modelled results in the figure below show the probability of apprenticeship completion for each pre-apprenticeship group, compared with the non-pre-apprenticeship group.



Trade apprentices

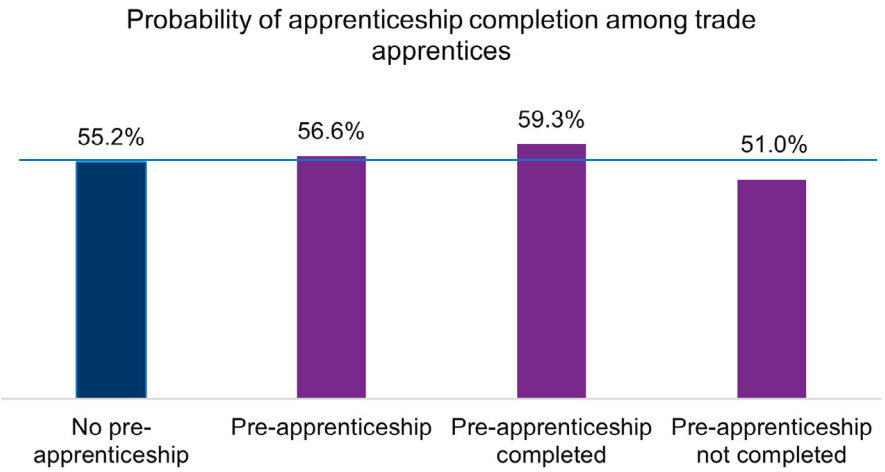
The positive impact of pre-apprenticeship programs on apprenticeship completion was most evident among trade apprentices. Trade apprentices who had enrolled in a pre-apprenticeship had a significantly higher probability of completion than those who had not enrolled in a pre-apprenticeship. Furthermore, trade apprentices who had completed their pre-apprenticeship had a significantly higher probability of completion than those who had not enrolled in a pre-apprenticeship program.

One possible explanation for this phenomenon, particularly among pre-apprenticeship completers, is that the technical and skills-based training provided in a pre-apprenticeship closely aligns with the hands-on, practical nature of trade apprenticeships. This topic is explored further in the section 'Does alignment between the pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship matter?'

On the other hand, trade apprentices who did not complete their pre-apprenticeship had a significantly lower probability of completion than those who had not enrolled in a pre-apprenticeship. This may be because they were recruited into an apprenticeship before they had decided whether they enjoyed the work (in the pre-apprenticeship), or because they lacked commitment to the apprenticeship due to the same personal or external

1 Refer to pp.41, 48—51 of the quantitative support document for a full explanation of unmodelled completion rates and modelled probability of apprenticeship completion.

factors that had hindered their pre-apprenticeship completion. Alternatively, pre-apprenticeship non-completers may have been less prepared for the workplace compared with individuals who actively pursued an apprenticeship without completing a pre-apprenticeship.



Apprentice recruitment – cast a wide net

Employers of trade apprentices can expect students who have completed their pre-apprenticeship to be slightly more likely to complete an apprenticeship compared with those who did not. A pre-apprenticeship completer brings the skills they have acquired with them, as well as a readiness for work, which are advantages, as this employer explained:

> *"They've done a little bit of safety. Yes, they've done some use of hand and power tools. Yes, they've got a little bit of basic knowledge in and around you know what's going on in the industry and that side of things, which is means that they're not starting 100% green."* *(GTO #1)*

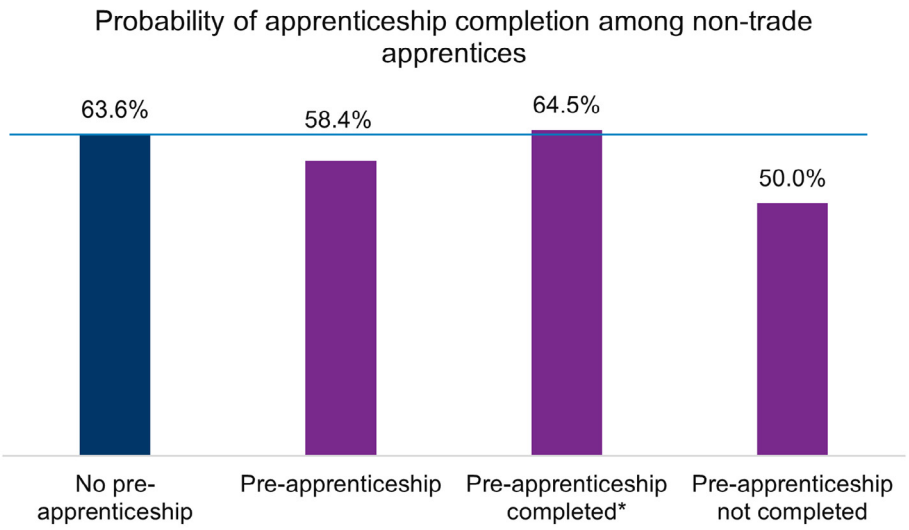
However, while pre-apprenticeship completion offers some advantages, the small increase in likelihood of completing an apprenticeship suggests that employers and GTOs would be wise to consider additional factors in recruitment decisions. An individual's attitude, general work preparedness, and available support system are just as important in determining their likelihood of completing an apprenticeship, as another employer indicated:

> *"I've had a lot of apprentices over the time. I've had a lot of good ones and had a lot of bad ones. I've changed my interview process now is based on hiring on attitude, not on any qualifications they might have."* *(Employer #3)*

Non-trade apprentices

For non-trade apprentices, the relationship between a pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship completion was different. Non-trade apprentices who had enrolled in a pre-apprenticeship had a significantly lower probability of apprenticeship completion than those who had not enrolled in a pre-apprenticeship. There was also no significant completion advantage for non-trade pre-apprenticeship completers. However, similar to trade apprenticeships, non-trade apprentices who did not complete their pre-apprenticeship had a significantly lower probability of apprenticeship completion than those who had not enrolled in one.

This finding suggests that, while pre-apprenticeships may provide a strong foundation for trade apprentices, their benefits are less clear for non-trade apprenticeships. It may be that there is a mismatch between the content of pre-apprenticeship programs and the work requirements of non-trade apprentices. Alternatively, differences in salary expectations, working conditions, or job tasks may contribute to lower completions among non-trade apprentices who enrolled in a pre-apprenticeship.



Note: The asterisk denotes a non-significant increase in the probability of apprenticeship completion for non-trade apprentices who completed a pre-apprenticeship when compared with non-trade apprentices who did not enrol in a pre-apprenticeship.

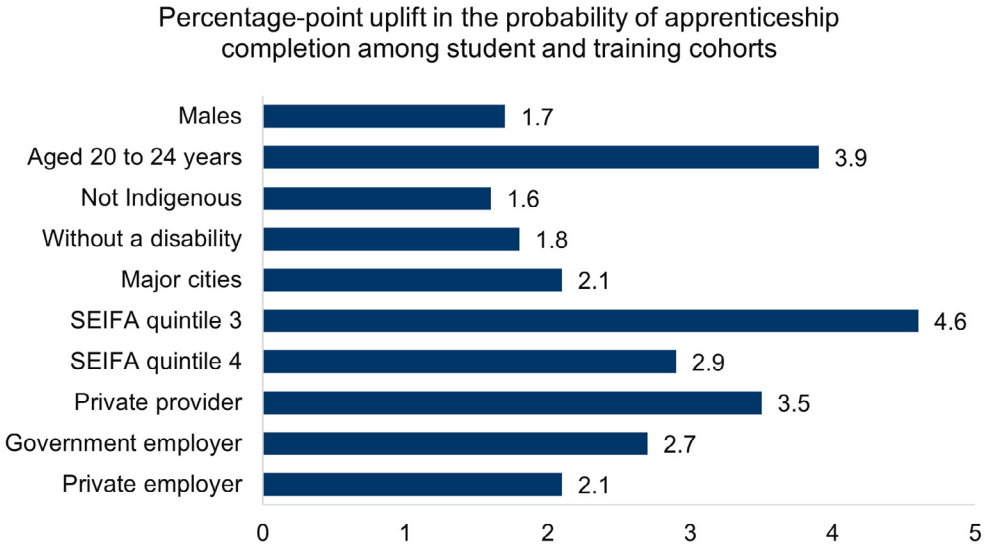
THE EFFECT OF A PRE-APPRENTICESHIP AMONG DIFFERENT STUDENT AND TRAINING COHORTS

Pre-apprenticeships were particularly beneficial for certain student cohorts, increasing their probability of apprenticeship completion

Younger apprentices and those from more advantaged socioeconomic areas benefited most from pre-apprenticeships. Modest but significant increases in the probability of apprenticeship completion were also seen among males, those from major cities, non-Indigenous students, and students without a disability.

At the aggregate level, the quantitative analysis indicated that pre-apprenticeships do not seem to improve accessibility or completion for under-represented cohorts; however, the impact of tailored programs should not be discounted. Programs targeting specific cohorts (such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students with disability or those living in low socioeconomic areas) have achieved strong completion and transition rates, for example, the National Electrical and Communications Association's (NECA) Women in Trades pre-apprenticeship program (2023). The success of targeted programs highlights the importance of taking a nuanced view when determining the effectiveness of pre-apprenticeships.

The figure below highlights the student and training cohorts with the largest percentage-point increase in the probability of apprenticeship completion. In terms of training characteristics, apprentices employed by both government and private-sector bodies and those trained by private training providers showed the largest increase in the probability of apprenticeship completion.



Note: SEIFA Index of Relative Disadvantage (IRSD) is a general socioeconomic index that summarises information about the economic and social resources of people and households within an area. This index focuses on disadvantage. A high score (or quintile) reflects a relative lack of disadvantage rather than relative advantage.

Overall, these findings emphasise the importance of considering individual, geographic and institutional factors when assessing the effectiveness of pre-apprenticeship programs, particularly when aiming to enhance completion under specific conditions.

DOES ALIGNMENT BETWEEN THE PRE-APPRENTICESHIP AND APPRENTICESHIP MATTER?

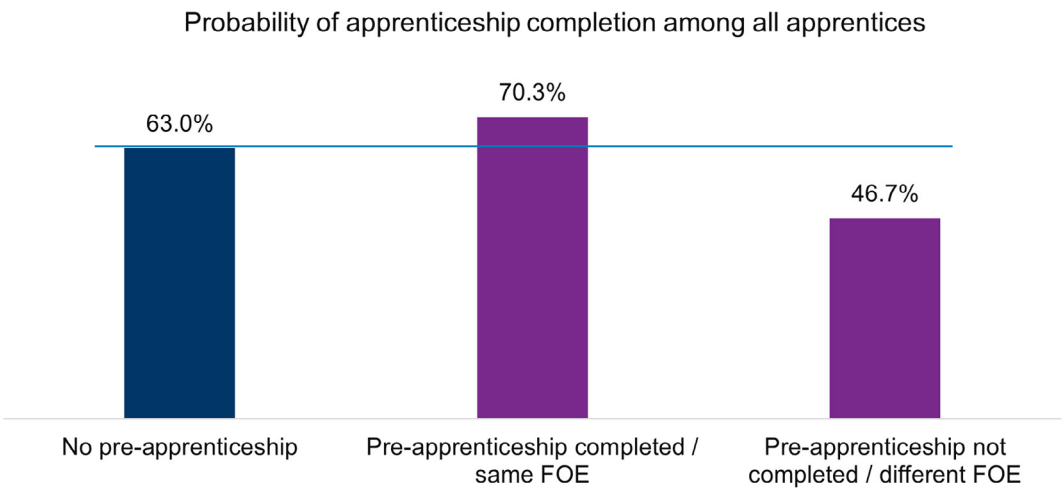
Highly relevant pre-apprenticeship training leads to a higher probability of apprenticeship completion

Karmel (2021) found that highly relevant pre-vocational training led to greater satisfaction with apprenticeships. This research builds on this finding, demonstrating that pre-apprenticeships closely aligned with an apprenticeship field of education (FOE) result in a higher probability of apprenticeship completion.

The highest probability of apprenticeship completion was seen among pre-apprenticeship completers whose pre-apprenticeship was in the same FOE as their apprenticeship. Conversely, the lowest probability of apprenticeship completion was found among non-completers who had undertaken a pre-apprenticeship in a FOE different from the apprenticeship.

This trend may partly be influenced by the number of qualification pathways in which completing a pre-apprenticeship is considered 'a requirement'. For example, students studying electrotechnology — the pre-apprenticeship program with the highest volume of enrolments — believed they would be unable to access an apprenticeship unless they had completed the pre-apprenticeship. Moreover, entry into these programs was highly competitive, suggesting that the selection processes for certain trades influence the profiles of both pre-apprentice students and subsequent apprentices.

The figure below illustrates the combined effect of pre-apprenticeship completion/non-completion and FOE on the probability of apprenticeship completion.



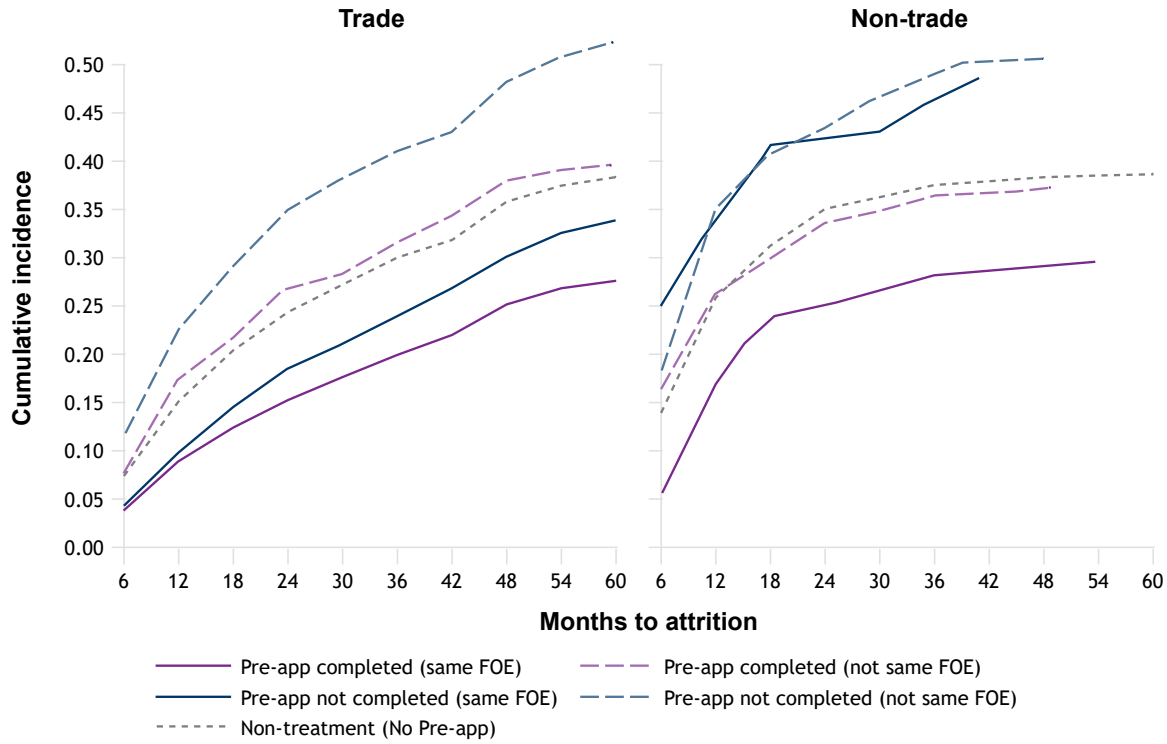
HOW DOES A PRE-APPRENTICESHIP IMPACT ON APPRENTICE RETENTION?

Completed and aligned pre-apprenticeships are most effective for retention

For both trade and non-trade apprenticeships, completing a pre-apprenticeship in the same FOE was associated with longer retention in the apprenticeship compared with apprentices who had not undertaken a pre-apprenticeship at all. Apprentices who did not complete their pre-apprenticeship and then commenced an apprenticeship in a different FOE were the least likely to stay in the apprenticeship.

As shown in the figure below, trade apprentice attrition was gradual, while non-trade apprentice attrition rose sharply in the first 18 months before levelling off, potentially reflecting the shorter duration of non-trade apprenticeships.

For trade apprentices, continuing in the same FOE as the pre-apprenticeship had the strongest impact on retention and completion, regardless of pre-apprenticeship completion. In contrast, completing the pre-apprenticeship was the more important factor in the retention and completion of non-trade apprentices.



Pre-apprenticeships – taster programs or occupational pathways?

Employer participants expressed strong support for expanding multi-trade taster courses, suggesting that these could more effectively serve students exploring career options than highly specific one-trade pre-apprenticeships. The ongoing debate in education about broad versus specialised training is equally relevant to pre-apprenticeships.

This research suggests that different cohorts of prospective apprentices may find value in different types of pre-apprenticeship programs, whether specific or broad. Pre-apprenticeships closely aligned to the apprenticeship field of education are more likely to promote transition and completion for trade apprentices by comparison with their non-trade counterparts. This finding warrants further exploration, as it could inform refinements to pre-apprenticeship programs and their alignment with relevant qualifications, ensuring they provide the greatest benefit to students.

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