NCVER

The student journey: the many faces of completion and non-completion in VET

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Completing a program is an important outcome for many students, in that they are provided with the skills necessary to enter a defined career. Completion rates, and their reporting, are central indicators of success in the vocational education and training (VET) system, but they do not account for the multitude of ways in which students use the VET system to acquire new skills and update existing skills, as well as move within the system to meet their needs. Program completion is one part of the picture, but to gain a better understanding of training outcomes and success we need to look more broadly.

- An additional measure of success might be the completion of *all subjects* in which a student enrolled, even if a program is not completed. Based on this measure, an additional 19.8% of students who commenced in 2016 had a successful outcome with VET. This is on top of the 49.5% who successfully completed their program.

- Understanding the different types of training success provides a more nuanced view of differing student groups, which may enable more tailored policy development. For example, while remote students have a slightly lower program-completion rate than all students (47.9% compared with 49.5%), a higher proportion complete all enrolled subjects (24.4% compared with 19.8%). Considering both measures together means that 72.3% of remote students had some training success, compared with 69.3% of all students. Conversely, compared with all students, First Nations students and students with disability have lower rates of program completion, as well as lower proportions who completed all enrolled subjects.

- An analysis of how students move through the VET system indicates that they are mixing and matching various elements of training by enrolling in and completing subjects, either alone or in addition to program enrolments. This behaviour may be intended to complement or add to the skills they have already gained through VET programs or other training. Changes to qualification design, such as those currently under consideration by the federal government, may better support the ability of students to supplement their prior or current training.

- A significant volume of VET subject enrolments fulfils regulatory or licencing-compliance purposes. (Examples include administering first-aid, serving alcohol responsibly and working safely in the construction industry.) For these subject enrolments, completion of a full program is not generally the aim. Indeed, this data exploration shows that program-completion rates are generally lower when compliance-related subject enrolments are included, although a high proportion of students who enrol in compliance-related subjects successfully complete them. Program enrolments where students have only enrolled in a sub-set of subjects may result from funding arrangements, restrictions on reporting systems or other reasons.

CONTEXT

There are many potential measures of success in vocational education and training. The National Student Outcomes Survey highlights a number of employment- and non-employment-related outcomes of training that can be deemed as successes for individual students (NCVER 2023a). Individual successes might include gaining a job, improved employment conditions or gaining some personal benefit. Completion of a program is also a successful outcome for an individual.

At a system level, the performance and success of the training sector is often judged through the reporting and assessment of program-completion rates (NCVER 2023a; Papadimitriou 2023). Across the sector there are broad concerns that completion rates are too low, and a recent call for urgent work to improve them led to the formation of a National VET Completions Taskforce (Papadimitriou 2023). Qualification completion is a critical outcome for many students, especially for, but not limited to, those in trade occupations. The completion of a full qualification holds significant value for industry, while it provides students with the skills necessary to enter an ongoing career (Papadimitriou 2023).

The VET sector serves many purposes, however, and completing a program is not necessarily the end goal for every enrolment. For example, individuals may enrol in VET to gain employment, to comply with the licencing or regulatory requirements of their job (such as first-aid or working on a construction site), to upskill, or for personal reasons (which may not be job-related). For these students, the completion of a qualification may not be a priority if their training goal has been achieved (Fieger 2015). In such situations, a broader consideration of what constitutes training success is needed, beyond program completion.

This research summary explores the many faces of course completion and non-completion and identifies instances where some non-completions can be considered to be successful outcomes of VET. In a sense, this approach, which uses student enrolment data, broadens the parameters for measuring success. By using the unique student identifier in the National VET Provider Collection, we track student enrolments from 2016 to 2021 to gain a greater understanding of how individuals mix and match training types, as well as their movement through the VET system. This approach enables identification of a broader range of training successes.

A more detailed account of the analysis can be found in the accompanying technical paper.

UNDERSTANDING SUCCESS IN VET

In some circumstances training can be successful without qualification completion

Measures of training success

The concept of training success is (at least partly) dependent on the initial intent of the training. Most students enrol in VET for employment-related reasons, such as gaining initial employment, upskilling in a current job or changing careers. Some students, however, enrol in VET for purposes that are not employment-related, including for entry into a higher qualification or university, for recreational purposes or to build self-confidence (NCVER 2023b).

Understanding the different types of individuals who access the VET system helps to explain the diversity of reasons for undertaking training. The Western Australian Department of Training (2001) identified several different student groups who use the VET system for (mostly) employment-related reasons, including:

- apprentices/trainees
- skill improvers
- further education
- bridgers
- self-employed
- labour market entrants
- career changers/late career starters.

These groups enter VET training with different aims and, as such, a variety of measures of success should be applied. Success could mean qualification completion, subject completion(s), progression to another qualification, or improved employment status (Western Australian Department of Training 2001).

Reasons for non-completion

Understanding the reasons why individuals do not complete their program enables us to identify other potential measures of success, beyond completion rates.

Much Australian research over the years has examined the reasons for students' non-completion of VET qualifications. (See, for example, Greenland & Moore 2022; Hutton, Skues & Wise 2019; Centre for Post-Compulsory Education and Training 2001; McInnis et al. 2000.). Most of the reasons can be grouped into the following categories:

- employment-related reasons, such as changes in work circumstances (for example, found job, started new job, work hours increased)
- training-related reasons, such as issues with course content and inconvenient class times
- personal circumstances, for example, health issues, financial troubles, or personal relationships
- achievement of their goals from the course (before completion)
- requirement for different training, with a better match to abilities and interests.

The National Student Outcomes Survey provides data on the main reason for a student not completing their qualification (table 1). The data shows that, in 2023, around 14% of qualification part-completers did not complete their qualification as they had already achieved what they needed; that is, they had either completed all intended training, learnt the skills needed for a job or achieved their training goals. These could be seen as training success stories, despite non-completion of a qualification.

Table 1   Main reason for not completing training, for qualification part-completers, 2023 (%)

Main reason	Percentage reported
Changed or started a new job	21.3
Personal reasons	20.7
Training was not as expected	11.8
Training no longer related to plans	8.6
Completed all intended training	6.1
Started other training	5.9
Learnt skills needed for job	4.4
Problems with the work placement	4.2
Lost job	3.2
Achieved training goals	3.1
Training timetable was not flexible enough	2.9
Other	7.9

Note: Qualification part-completers are 'students who commenced but only completed part of a training package qualification or an accredited qualification (and are no longer undertaking that training)' (NCVER 2023b).

Source: NCVER (2023b).

It should be noted that a combination of reasons may influence an individual's decision not to complete their training (McInnis et al. 2000).

International research has also considered reasons for non-completion, suggesting the need to look at what happens *after* non-completion to understand whether the incomplete training has been successful in some way. With a focus mainly on apprentices and trainees, Krötz and Deutscher (2022) achieved this by considering four drop-out directions:

- upwards (move to higher education)

- downwards (no qualification)

- horizontal (change company)

- horizonal (change occupation).

They found that various training and workplace characteristics or experiences influenced the direction taken by apprentices and trainees when they dropped out of their training. Some of these changes in direction, such as moving to higher education, a different occupation or a different company, could be seen as a successful outcome if the initial incomplete training enabled a student to identify a better match to their needs.

Similarly, Wydra-Somaggio (2017, 2021) advocated for the need to identify whether students who terminate their VET studies are 'dropouts' — individuals who do not complete a VET qualification — or 'stopouts' — individuals who may begin another VET qualification in either another establishment and/or in a different occupation. She found that 71% of German apprentices continue with another VET program after a termination (Wydra-Somaggio 2021). A key message from these international examples is that qualification non-completion does not tell the whole story, and that understanding the student's next step is important in determining the success or otherwise of the training.

A broader perspective on training outcomes and success

This current project explores what additional measures of success, beyond program-completion rates, can be determined through enrolment data. The analysis:

- considers subject completion, whereby all subject enrolments have been completed, as a measure of training success within a VET program

- examines student movement, to help in understanding how students are using the VET system and how this affects how we might view 'success'.

BROADENING THE CONCEPT OF TRAINING SUCCESS – WHAT DOES VET DATA SHOW?

Including subject completion(s) can broaden the measure of training success beyond qualification completion

Using the unique student identifier to track students in the National VET Provider Collection, this research explored subject completion as an additional measure of training success. In this analysis, we consider the following as having some degree of training success:

- completion of a VET qualification or short-course program (herein referred to as program completion)
- completion of all enrolled VET subjects or modules within a VET program (without program completion).
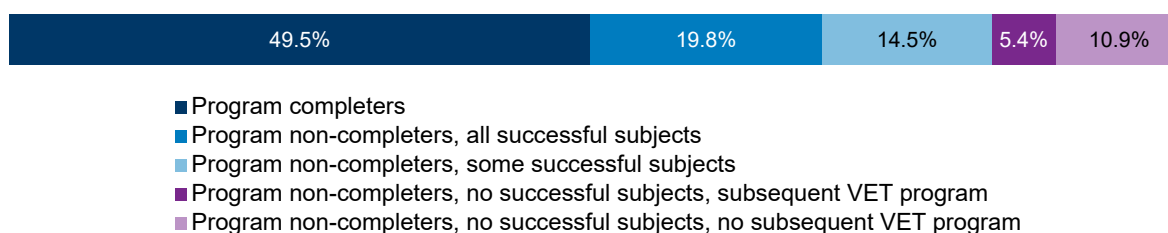
Two measures of VET success

An examination of VET enrolments from 2016 to 2021 indicates that around 69% of VET students had at least one of the indicators of success listed above (figure 1). Of the 1.5 million students who commenced a VET program in 2016, 49.5% completed one or more VET programs. While the remaining students did not record a program completion, 19.8% passed all subjects in which they had enrolled in one (or more) of their programs.

Just over 30% did not fall into the two groups of success defined above. Around half of this group (16%) did not complete any of the subjects in which they had enrolled. Looking at this group more closely, we found that around 5% subsequently enrolled in another VET program, which was completed by around 43% of that group. Although we are unable to determine the extent to which their 2016 program enrolment influenced a student's decision-making for their subsequent program enrolment, the fact that these students eventually recorded a successful outcome is a positive indicator. Similarly, the 11% of students who took no further part in VET may well have been successful in gaining employment or enrolling in higher education, but the data available here do not enable us to attribute such successes to their 2016 program enrolment.

Around 15% of students completed some, but not all, of the subjects in which they had enrolled, making this a potentially complex group to understand, with likely differences in training intentions, patterns of training activity, and subsequent training/education and employment outcomes. Further research is required to better understand this group and how success for those students might be defined.

Figure 1   Student outcome groups, 2016 commencing students

49.5%	19.8%	14.5%	5.4%	10.9%

- ■ Program completers
- ■ Program non-completers, all successful subjects
- ■ Program non-completers, some successful subjects
- ■ Program non-completers, no successful subjects, subsequent VET program
- ■ Program non-completers, no successful subjects, no subsequent VET program

Note: Compliance-only enrolments have been excluded. See box 2 for an exploration of the impact of compliance activity.

Source: NCVER Total VET Students and Courses, 2015–21.

Exploring subject activity in qualifications with low completion rates

While program completion is an important indicator of student success in VET, it fails to recognise the achievement of students who successfully complete all the subjects in which they were enrolled, despite not completing the full program. This is particularly relevant for compliance-only training activity but is still relevant even after accounting for compliance-only subject enrolments (see box 2 for more discussion of compliance training activity).

To further explore the group of students who complete all enrolled subjects, we examined successful subject

completion for qualification non-completers, specifically focusing on qualifications in the bottom 25% of completion rates. These qualifications had completion rates of 34.5% or lower and captured 24.3% of total qualification enrolments.

If we look specifically at the non-completers of these qualifications, we can see how many subjects these students successfully completed. Figure 2 demonstrates that, even though the completion rates for these qualifications were low, many non-completers passed all of the subjects in which they were enrolled. The analysis also revealed that, on average, 52.1% of non-completers in low-completion rate qualifications successfully completed 100% of the subjects in which they enrolled. This means that, although these students did not meet the requirements of a full qualification, they enrolled in and passed a subset of subjects. It is possible that some of these students never intended to complete the full qualification and may have enrolled in the qualification to access only one or two subjects to expand their skills.

Figure 2   Average subject pass rates for qualification non-completers in qualifications with low completion rates (34.5% or lower), 2016 commencing enrolments
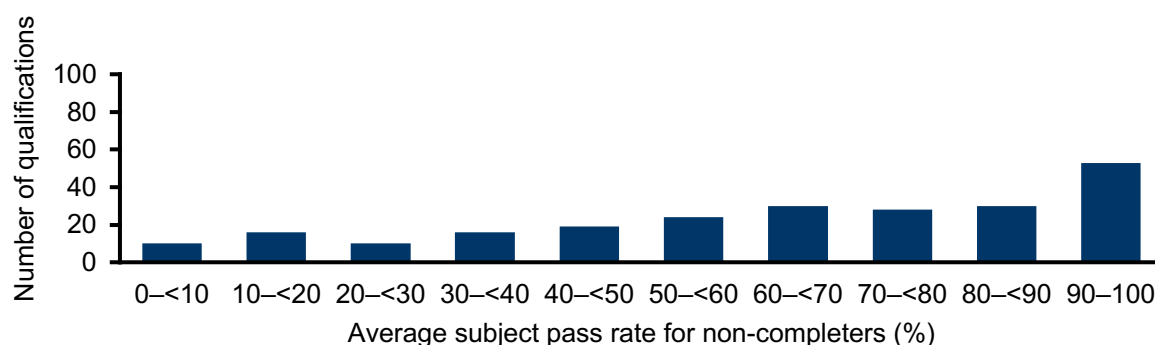
Note: Compliance-only enrolments have been excluded.

Source: NCVER Total VET Students and Courses, 2015–21.

VET success for different training attributes

Previous research by Ong and Circelli (2018) identified several training and student attributes with the potential to impact on qualification completion. Their findings showed that students are more likely to complete if they:

- are studying full-time
- have multiple modes of attendance
- are enrolled in mixed field of education courses
- are enrolled in a certificate III or higher (compared with certificate I and II)
- have prior educational attainment at time of commencement
- are employed full-time, compared with those unemployed.

How do these results compare with this current exploration of VET data, whereby we are looking beyond qualification completion as a measure of success? Figure 3 provides a snapshot of the results for different training and student attributes using the broader measures of VET success. Key findings from this figure are:

- While training package qualifications and skillsets had higher program-completion rates (53.3% and 51% respectively), accredited courses and training package skillsets had the highest proportion of all enrolled subjects passed (36.3% and 32.9%, respectively), demonstrating some differences in how these types of training were used.

- Government-funded programs tended to have higher program-completion rates (54.5%) compared with domestic fee-for-service programs (45.2%), but this pattern was reversed when investigating non-completers who passed all enrolled subjects (18% and 23.7%, respectively) suggesting that fee-for-service training may be used to gain specific skills where a qualification is not required.

- While certificate I and II enrolments had a lower program-completion rate (51.7%) than certificate III and IV enrolments (54.5%), supporting the findings of Ong and Circelli (2018), they had higher rates of all enrolled subjects being completed (24.9% compared with 18.7%, respectively).

- Also supporting Ong and Circelli (2018), students with higher levels of prior educational attainment had higher rates of program completion. There is no discernible relationship, however, between prior education level and the proportion of those who complete all enrolled subjects.

- Those enrolled full-time in their studies had a higher rate of program completion (73.8%) than those enrolled part-time (45.7%), aligning with the findings of Ong and Circelli (2018), although it should be noted that students who commenced their training full-time accounted for less than a quarter of the cohort analysed (23.4%). When considering program non-completers who completed all enrolled subjects, however, the pattern is reversed (10.3% and 22.3%, respectively).

- Additionally, students who were employed when they commenced their training had a higher program-completion rate (54.6%) than those who were unemployed (49.9%), consistent with the previous research, as well as a slightly higher rate of successfully completing all enrolled subjects (18.9% compared with 15.2%).

Figure 3   Student outcome groups by selected training and student attributes, 2016 commencing students
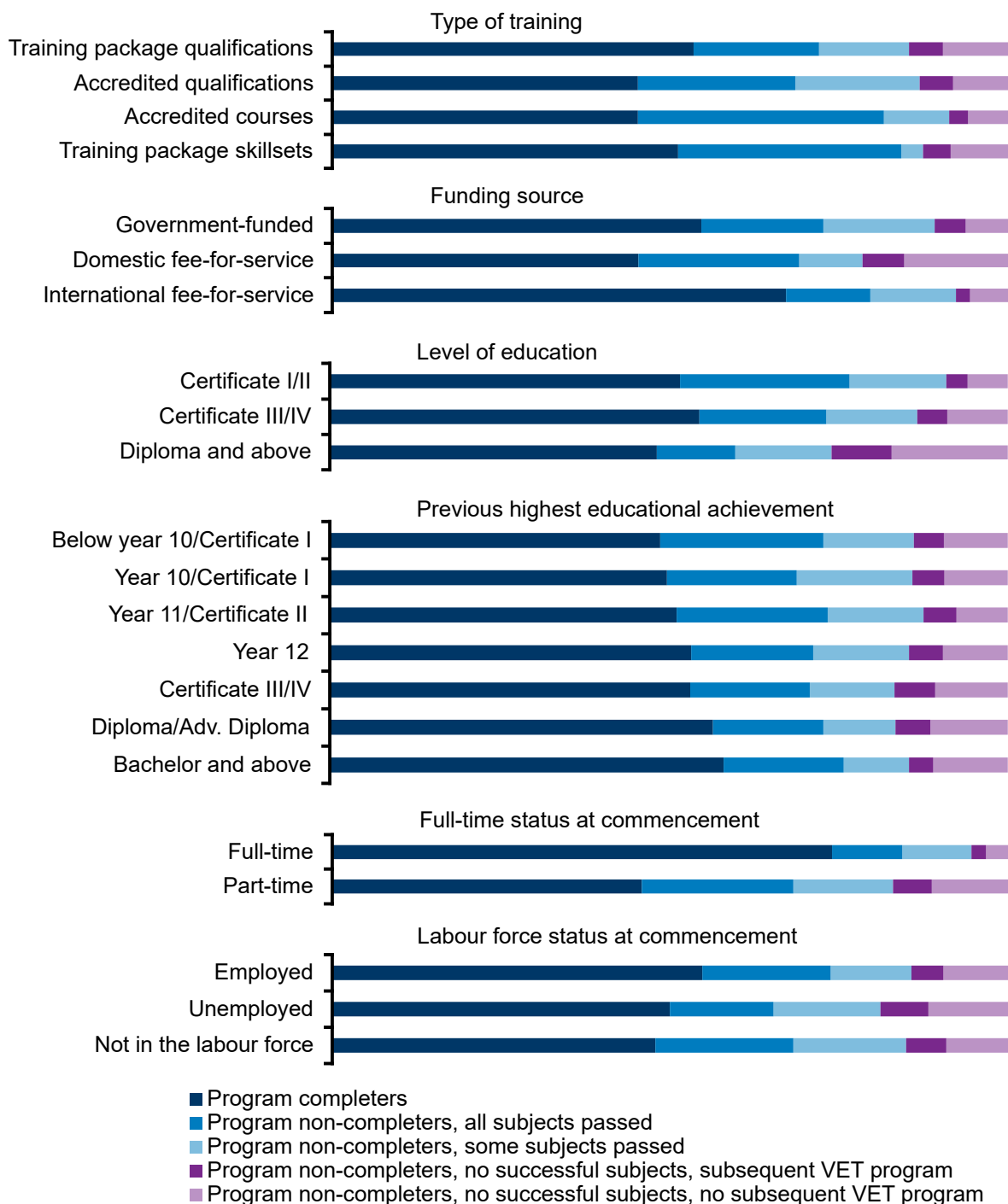
Note: Compliance-only enrolments have been excluded.

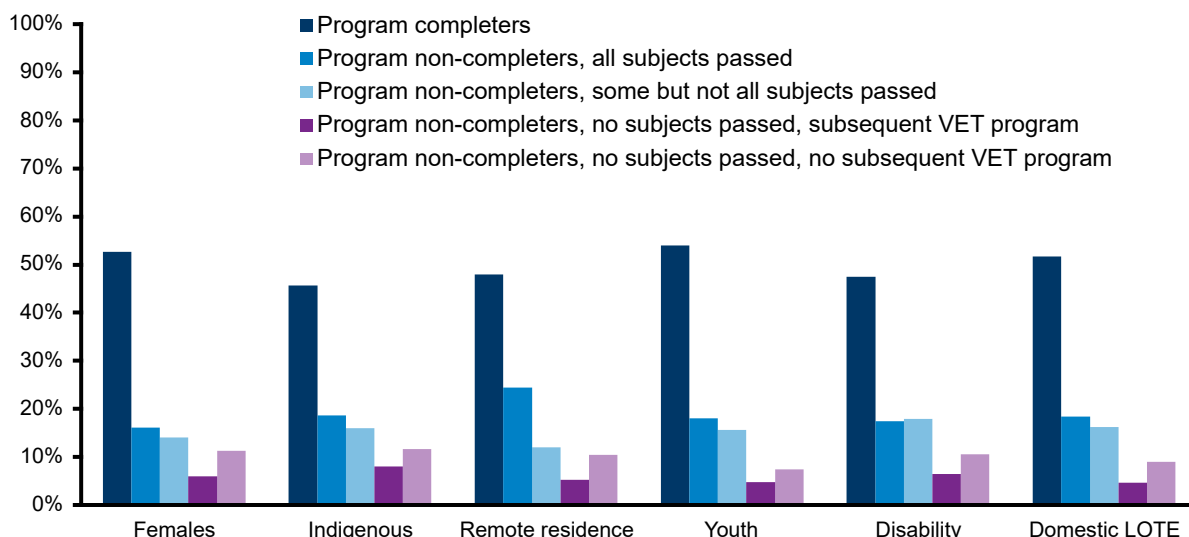Source: NCVER Total VET Students and Courses, 2015–21.

VET success for different student groups

The prior research by Ong and Circelli (2018) identified differences between student groups in terms of program completion. They found some student groups, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, students with disability and students from a low socioeconomic background, are less likely to complete their training. In the context of the broader concept of success discussed in this publication — which includes subject completion — figure 4 presents a comparison of the success profiles across several different student groups.

The pattern of outcomes is relatively consistent across the cohorts, but differences emerge in the relative size of the differing outcome groups. Comparing these groups with all students highlights some nuances in how success is being achieved (or not) in some groups (figure 4). Program-completion rates are lower for Indigenous students (45.6%), students who reside in a remote area (47.9%) and students with disability (47.4%) by comparison with all students (49.5%, as shown in figure 1). Students residing in remote areas, however, had the highest proportion of non-completers who passed all of their subjects (24.4%), compared with less than 20% for the other groups, including for Indigenous students and those with disability.

While it is important to note that these groups may experience other positive outcomes from training (such as those discussed for First Nations people in NCVER 2023c), this analysis highlights that some do not appear to have the same levels of success as other student cohorts in terms of program completion or passing all of their enrolled subjects within a program.

Figure 4   Outcome groups for selected student cohorts, 2016 commencing enrolments (%)

Note: Compliance-only enrolments have been excluded.

Source: NCVER Total VET Students and Courses, 2015–21.

Box 1 Outcomes after training

A limitation of the National VET Provider Collection data analysis is that, with the exception of enrolment in a subsequent VET program, it cannot examine post-training outcomes, such as improved employment outcomes or movement to the higher education sector. The National Student Outcomes Survey allows us to explore these outcomes for qualification and short-course completers, as well as qualification and short-course part-completers, six months after completing their training. Table 2 gives a comparison of outcomes for these different groups.

Table 2   Main reason for not completing training, for qualification part-completers, 2023 (%)

Key performance indicators	Qualification completers	Qualification part-completers	Short-course completers	Short-course part-completers
Improved employment status after training	67.6 (0.2)	58.9 (1.3)	64.9 (0.7)	68.6 (0.8)
Of those employed before training: better job after training	37.8 (0.3)	31.2 (1.4)	22.8 (0.7)	20.1 (0.8)
Of those employed in the same job as before training: improved skills	51.3 (0.6)	52.0 (2.8)	54.6 (1.2)	59.8 (1.3)
Of those not employed before training: employed after training	50.6 (0.5)	41.4 (2.3)	44.2 (1.6)	51.6 (2.1)
Improved writing skills	54.5 (0.3)	43.5 (1.3)	36.2 (0.7)	31.7 (0.9)
Improved numerical skills	49.3 (0.3)	42.1 (1.3)	33.5 (0.7)	28.4 (0.9)
Developed problem-solving skills	80.0 (0.2)	70.9 (1.1)	76.8 (0.6)	75.2 (0.7)
Commenced further study after training	33.6 (0.2)	22.2 (1.0)	24.6 (0.6)	20.9 (0.7)
Commenced further study at a higher level after training	21.7 (0.2)	11.0 (0.8)	na	na
Achieved main reason for doing the training	88.1 (0.2)	77.2 (1.0)	90.9 (0.4)	92.5 (0.5)

Notes: Qualification completers are students who completed a training package qualification or an accredited qualification; qualification part-completers are students who commenced but only completed part of a training package qualification or an accredited qualification (and are no longer undertaking that training). Short-course completers are students who completed a training package skillset or an accredited course; short-course part-completers are students who commenced but only completed part of a training package skillset or accredited course (and are no longer undertaking that training) (NCVER 2023b).

The margin of error is shown in brackets for each survey estimate in the table.

Source: Derived from NCVER (2023d).

The results for qualification part-completers are lower on nearly every outcome compared with qualification completers, except for improved skills for those who were employed in the same job before training. The outcomes for short-course completers and part-completers were mixed. While most of the skills-related outcomes were higher for short-course completers, two of the three employment-related outcomes were higher for the part-completers.

Overall, these findings demonstrate that the outcomes for qualification and short-course completers and part-completers are mixed. While some students have reported successful post-training outcomes without completing their qualification or short course, the rate is lower for many outcomes.

LOOKING AT STUDENT MOVEMENT THROUGH VET

Most students who move from one program enrolment to another enrol in a higher- or same-level program, although this depends on whether they complete their initial program or not

There has long been interest in student movement, especially that from VET to higher education (HE), although recent research has explored student movement in both directions. Some recent examples include:

- the Australian Government Department of Education's 'Better understanding student journeys' project, which linked students using the unique student identifier (USI) and Commonwealth Higher Education Student Support Number (CHESSN) to investigate student movement between the two sectors (2020)

- Fowler (2017), who used enrolment data to examine previous qualifications achieved, as well as National Student Outcomes survey data to examine subsequent training six months after VET.

In this current study, we use the unique student identifier to track individual VET students to better understand how students mix and match different training options and how they move through the VET system. This approach enables a view of their movement over time as opposed to the more static point-in-time view provided by the National Student Outcomes Survey.

Understanding how students mix and match VET qualifications, accredited courses, skillsets and subject-only enrolments

Table 3 shows the percentage of students who went on to another VET program, for each of the student groups presented in figure 1. Overall, more than 40% of students who commenced a program in 2016 went on to commence another program between 2017 and 2021.

Table 3   Rates of movement to further VET following a 2016 commencing program enrolment, by outcome group

Student group	Total number of students	Number of students who moved into other VET (%)
All students	1 477 300	638 300 (43.2%)
Program completers	730 700	341 600 (46.8%)
Program non-completers, all successful subjects	291 900	118 800 (40.7%)
Program non-completers, some successful subjects	214 200	98 200 (45.9%)
Program non-completers, no successful subjects, moved into other VET	79 700	79 700 (100%)
Program non-completers, no successful subjects, no movement into other VET	160 700	NA

Note: Excludes compliance-only enrolments. Note that the 2016 commencing enrolments may not reflect initial engagement with the VET system, as students may have participated in VET prior to 2016. Student counts have been rounded to the nearest 100.

Source: NCVER Total VET Students and Courses, 2015–21.

Figure 5, which looks at the movement of students through VET over time, shows movement between programs, stand-alone subjects, or a combination of the two. In figure 5, the length of the bars (representing groups of students at different commencing time points) and the width of the ribbons (representing transitions between time points) reflect student counts.

Of the 1 962 000 students who commenced a VET program or stand-alone subject in 2016, most (71.5%) commenced programs only, while 21.6% commenced stand-alone subjects only, and 6.9% commenced a combination of the two.

Most students did not go on to a second commencing enrolment, but for the 42.0% who did, their second commencing enrolment(s) could have commenced in any year between 2017 and 2021. Looking at figure 5, we can determine some of the pathways for the students who went on to enrol in other VET:

- Of the students who went on to enrol in other VET, most (62.4%) continued to enrol in programs only in their second commencing year.

- 15.9% moved from programs only to either stand-alone subjects only or a combination of stand-alone subjects and programs in their second commencing year.[1]

- 10.6% continued to enrol in stand-alone subjects only in their second commencing year.

- 8.3% moved from a combination of stand-alone subjects and programs in 2016 to either programs only or a combination of stand-alone subjects and programs in their second commencing year.

- Only a small proportion of students (1.0%) moved from stand-alone subjects only in 2016 to either programs only or a combination of subjects and programs in their second commencing year.

Overall, we can see that students who went on to other VET tended to enrol in programs only; or, initially, in programs only before moving on to stand-alone subjects (either alone, or in combination with a program); or only stand-alone subjects. It was less common for students to move from stand-alone subjects or mixed enrolments to enrolments in programs.

Figure 5 **Student movement between programs, stand-alone subjects, or a combination of the two, 2016–21**
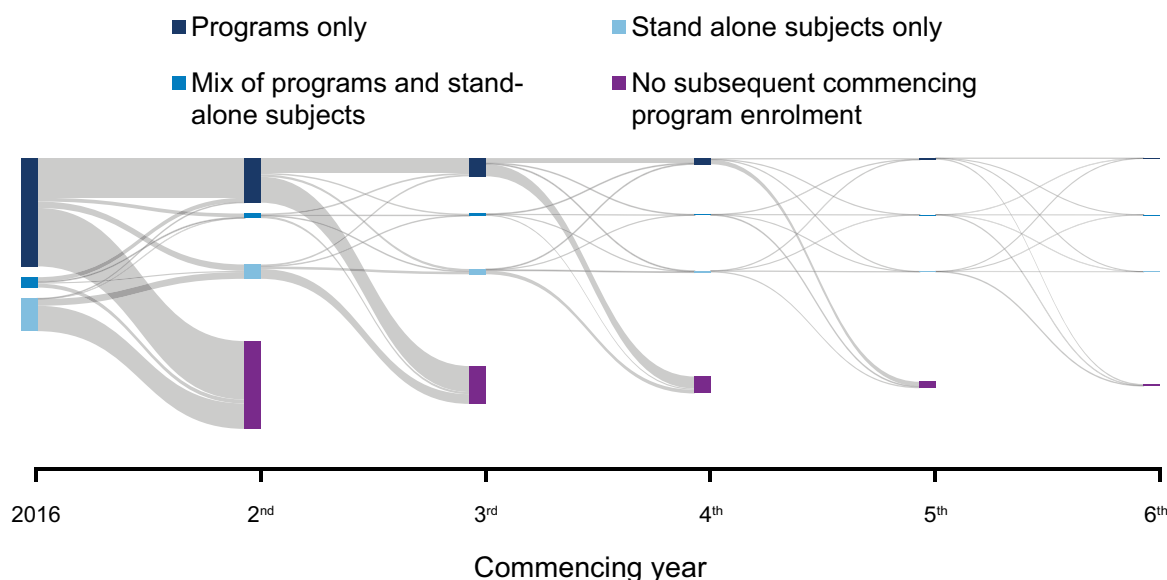
Note: Compliance-only enrolments (subjects and subject bundles) have been excluded. See the technical paper for more information about the contribution of compliance activity to these pathways.

Source: NCVER Total VET Students and Courses, 2015–21.

Understanding movements between levels of education

This pathway analysis can be expanded to demonstrate the movement of students between different qualification levels, based on the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF). Figure 6 shows the pathways of the 468 800 students who commenced a qualification in 2016 and commenced another qualification between 2017 and 2021.

From their 2016 enrolment to their second commencing enrolment, students were more likely to go on to enrol at the same (35.4%) or a higher (41.3%) level of education than at a lower level of education (23.4%). Most students did not go on to a third commencing enrolment, and very few students had commencing enrolments in every year from 2016 to 2021. Figure 6 indicates that, for those students who did have a third commencing enrolment, a similar pattern is evident: the ribbons flowing into a higher or the same level of education are more substantial than the ribbons flowing into a lower level of education, meaning that more students were enrolling in the same or higher level of education than lower.

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1 This does not include students continuing training in the same program at the same RTO as the analysis only considers commencing enrolments.

Figure 6

Figure 6   Student movement between enrolments in qualifications, by level of education, 2016–21

■ Higher level of education ■ Lower level of education

■ Same level of education ■ No subsequent commencing program enrolment
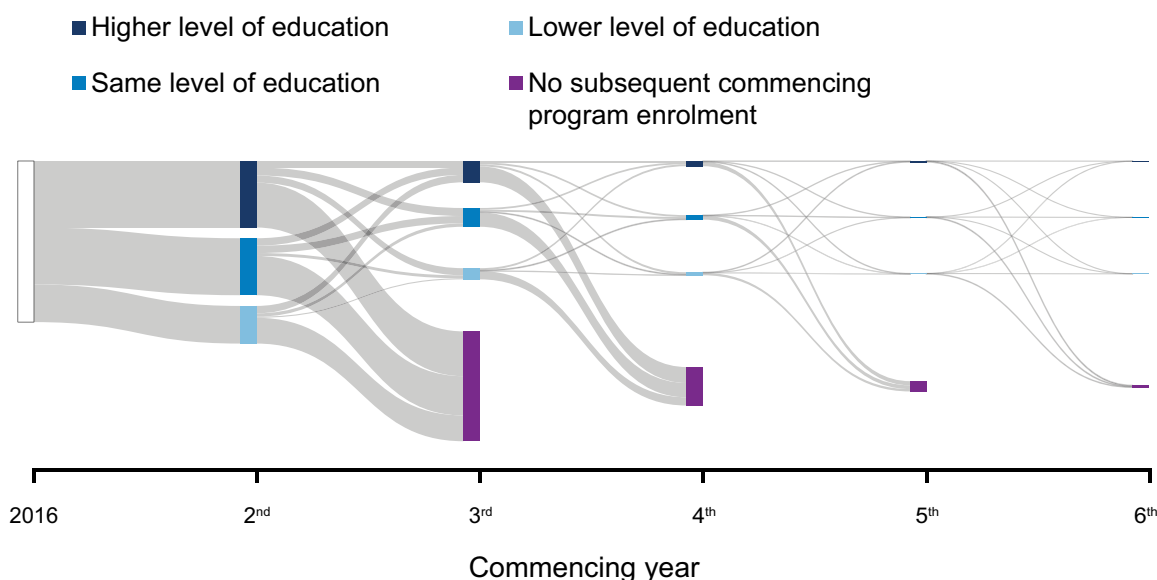
Notes: Students who enrolled across mixed levels of education in 2016 and students who commenced a program in 2016 but did not commence another program between 2017 and 2021 are not shown in the figure.

Compliance-only enrolments (subjects and subject bundles) have been excluded. See the technical paper for more information about the contribution of compliance activity to these pathways.

Source: NCVER Total VET Students and Courses, 2015–21.

Comparing VET pathways for qualification completers and non-completers

The analysis also looked at the distinct pathways taken by the 262 300 completers and 232 000 non-completers of 2016 commencing qualifications.[2] A higher proportion of qualification completers went on to enrol in another qualification at a higher level of education (51.2%) than qualification non-completers (31.5%).

Popular qualification pathways by level of education

Table 4 presents the most frequent qualification combinations for students who completed their initial 2016 commencing qualification and moved to another qualification.

In each of these combinations, there is a clear relationship between the initial and subsequent qualification, regardless of whether a student went on to enrol in a higher- or lower-level qualification. For those moving to higher-level qualifications, it is reasonable to suggest they are advancing their studies. It is less clear why students who completed their 2016 commencing qualification would subsequently enrol in a related but lower-level qualification, but it may be that they are interested in developing specific skills not covered in their initial qualification.

Table 5 presents the same information but for those students who did not complete their initial qualification. Once again, the top qualification combinations are all in related areas, regardless of whether the students transitioned to a higher- or lower-level qualification. It is possible that these students transitioned to a qualification at a different level without completing their initial 2016 qualification because of a mismatch between their skills or ability and the qualification in which they had enrolled. It could be that these students were seeking to commence a qualification that better met their needs. According to the literature, these types of non-completions should be viewed positively as they may lead to better outcomes for the students (Schmid & Stalder 2012, cited in Krötz & Deutscher 2022).

2   Some students had more than one 2016 commencing enrolment, with a mix of completion and non-completion. 'Completers' includes students who completed at least one of their 2016 commencing enrolments. For these students, non-completed 2016 enrolments have been analysed. 'Non-completers' includes students with no completion for any of their 2016 commencing enrolments and no 2016 commencing enrolment in which still enrolled in 2021.

Table 4   Top 5 qualification movements by level of education, for 2016 commencing qualification completers

Higher level of education	Lower level of education
Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care (CHC30121) → Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care (CHC50121)	Diploma Early Childhood Education and Care (CHC50121) → Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care (CHC30121)
Certificate III in Carpentry (CPC30220) → Certificate IV in Building and Construction (CPC40120)	Certificate III in Automotive Underbody Technology (AUR32518) → Certificate II in Automotive Tyre Servicing Technology (AUR21920)
Certificate III in Individual Support (CHC33015) → Certificate IV in Ageing Support (CHC43015)	Diploma of Nursing (HLT54121) → Certificate III in Health Services Assistance (HLT33115)
Certificate III in Commercial Cookery (SIT30816) → Certificate IV in Commercial Cookery (SIT40516)	Certificate III in Surface Extraction Operations (RII30120) → Certificate II in Surface Extraction Operations (RII20220)
Certificate II in Workplace Skills (BSB20120) → Certificate III in Business (BSB30120)	Certificate III in Electrotechnology Electrician (UEE30820) → Certificate II in Skills for Work and Vocational Pathways (FSK20119)

Notes: Movement to the same level of education has been omitted from the table as the top 5 program movements are into the same qualification. Re-enrolment in the same qualification may be due to a change in provider, a break in training or program supersession.

Table 5   Top 5 qualification movements by level of education, for 2016 commencing qualification non-completers

Higher level of education	Lower level of education
Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care (CHC30121) → Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care (CHC50121)	Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care (CHC50121) → Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care (CHC30121)
Certificate I in Spoken and Written English (10362NAT) → Certificate II in Spoken and Written English (10363NAT)	Certificate III in Catering Operations (SIT30916) → Certificate II in Kitchen Operations (SIT20416)
Certificate II in Spoken and Written English (10363NAT) → Certificate III in Spoken and Written English (10364NAT)	Diploma of Business (BSB50120) → Certificate III in Business (BSB30120)
Certificate II in Workplace Skills (BSB20120) → Certificate III in Business (BSB30120)	Certificate IV in Fitness (SIS40221) → Certificate III in Fitness (SIS30321)
Diploma of Leadership and Management (BSB50420) → Advanced Diploma of Leadership and Management (BSB60420)	Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care (CHC50121) → Certificate III in Individual Support (CHC33015)

Notes: Movement to the same level of education has been omitted from the table as the top 5 program movements are into the same qualification. Re-enrolment in the same qualification may be due to a change in provider, a break in training, or program supersession.

Box 2 How does compliance activity affect the measures of success?

A significant volume of VET activity serves compliance purposes, whereby employees undertake training to meet the regulatory or licencing requirements of their job (Palmer 2021). Examples of such training include providing cardiopulmonary resuscitation, administering first-aid, serving alcohol responsibly and working safely in the construction industry.

As Palmer notes, compliance activity is relatively distinct from other VET training as it tends to:

> be of short duration

> address skills maintenance rather than the development of new skills

> be relevant only to employees, and only those whose job has regulatory requirements

> require refresher training.

Importantly, much of this type of compliance-related training activity results in the enrolment and completion of one or several subjects, with no requirement to complete a full qualification. In the context of the current research examining student success and student pathways, it was important to identify and account for this type of training activity.

Note that in this research we distinguish between the compliance activity described above (which may be single subjects or subject bundles) and full qualifications, which are required for employment in some occupations, such as qualifications in electrotechnology, early childhood education and care, and training and assessment.

A total of 704 compliance subjects were identified in the analysis. (See appendix B in the technical paper for more detail of our approach to identifying compliance.) In 2016, these subjects accounted for 80.5% of enrolments in stand-alone subjects and 16.4% of subject enrolments delivered as part of a program enrolment.

Including compliance-related subject enrolments skews the results for the different student groups defined earlier. Our analysis shows that program completion is lower (46%, figure 7) when compliance activity is included, compared with when excluded (49.5%, as shown in figure 1). Additionally, there is a much larger proportion of students in the 'program non-completers, all successful subjects' group than when compliance activity is included (7.2 percentage points higher). This is because a substantial number of students who enrolled in compliance units (only) also enrolled in a full qualification, despite having no intention of completing the full qualification. This situation may occur due to funding arrangements, restrictions on reporting systems or other reasons.

Figure 7   Student outcome groups, 2016 commencing students, including compliance activity

| 46.0% | 27.0% | 12.3% | 4.9% | 9.7% |

■ Program completers
■ Program non-completers, all successful subjects
■ Program non-completers, some successful subjects
■ Program non-completers, no successful subjects, subsequent VET program
■ Program non-completers, no successful subjects, no subsequent VET program
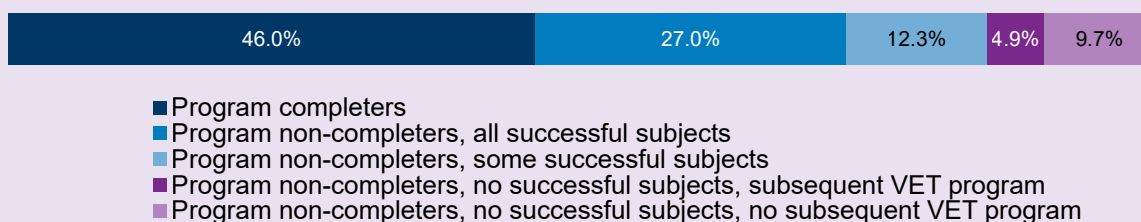
The analysis also demonstrates a complex relationship between qualification completion, compliance and funding source. (See the technical paper for more details.)

Overall, the VET system plays an important role in the skills maintenance of individuals in meeting the rules and regulations of their industries. When examining qualification-completion rates, the inclusion of this compliance activity, however, alters the picture and leads to more non-completions being recorded. This provides further impetus for looking beyond program-completion rates as a measure of success in VET.

WHAT COULD BE EXPLORED NEXT?

Future research could enable a fuller understanding of student success in the VET sector

This research has enabled a better understanding of both how students use the VET system and their training success beyond program completion. Further research could broaden this understanding by:

- *Exploring student intentions for enrolling in VET programs:* having the capacity to link training intentions to enrolments and outcomes data would greatly enhance our understanding of the VET student journey; the different ways in which the VET system is used; and how success can be more accurately measured for different student groups. This would be particularly informative for the group of non-completers who complete some, but not all, of their subject enrolments to better understand how 'success' might be defined for that group.

- *Linking the current dataset to others would enable a more thorough exploration of the student journey:* for example, linking to National Student Outcomes Survey data would enable understanding of a broader range of student outcomes, those not captured in enrolment data, especially as more recent data become available, given that the National Student Outcomes Survey has included part-completers since 2021. Linking to the Higher Education Statistics Collection would allow better exploration of the movement between and within the two sectors.

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